



International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) 2020

Theme: In times of crisis, access to information saves lives, builds trust and brings hope!

The 2020 theme has an uplifting and emphatic ring to it as we mark International Day for Universal Access to Information 2020 against the backdrop of a world mired in crises.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has come to expose and boldly underscore for us again both the fragilities and strengths of humanity.

Amid it all we are seeing political, economic and social crises unfolding along with the health crisis.

Worsening the universal hardship, mis- and disinformation continue to exacerbate these crises precisely when clear, credible information and communication are required to calm anxieties, engender trust, reduce animosities and limit polarisations, which have all beset the world in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe and exposed the weaknesses in national and global response systems to such devastating events.

In Namibia, government health authorities have done relatively well to keep the nation informed to date in the context of COVID-19, but information and trust gaps remain while the disease rages and further weakens a society already frail from the battering of a myriad of deep-rooted socio-economic ills.

Namibia is a nation in the grip of a crushing poverty pandemic; in the midst of a gender-based violence pandemic; in the throes of a child abuse and neglect pandemic; severely afflicted by a corruption and mis-governance pandemic; and so forth.

And while all of these local crises have been unfolding and entrenching over the decades and years, Namibians have been promised much in the way of interventions or solutions only for them to not arrive, or underperform or fail to deliver as promised. At the same time, we are also continually promised more governance transparency and responsiveness, but this too remains a challenge to achieve.

To illustrate, for years now we have been promised an access to information law, but it continues to elude us as another year draws to a close.

It is precisely at a time like this that access to information is most needed as a reassuring mechanism to help us understand and cope with what is happening to and around us.

And this is why the 2020 theme is so apt for the times we live in now, for access to information DOES save lives, and it DOES build trust, and it DOES bring hope.

ACTION NAMIBIA COALITION | AIDS and Rights Alliance for southern Africa (ARASA) | Citizens for an Accountable and Transparent Society (CATS) | MyDigitalBridge Foundation | Editors' Forum of Namibia (EFN) | Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) | Internet Society Namibia (ISOC) | Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) | Namibia Diverse Women's Association (NDWA) | Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) | Namibia Media Trust (NMT) | Sister Namibia

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Campaigning for a comprehensive legal framework in Namibia that guarantees citizens the right of access to information in all its dimensions

Given this, the question for all of us, but especially for those with political and decision-making power, in these 'new normal' times becomes: When meaningful access to information remains out of reach, how do we save lives, build trust and bring hope?

On this day, we call on the Namibian government:

- To pass and implement the Access to Information Bill as a matter of urgency;
- For Namibian government departments and agencies to formalise the adoption of a culture of openness and accountability towards the Namibian people;
- To give effective life and force to all transparency-inducing laws and policies, such as the Public Procurement Act of 2015 and its regulations;
- Namibia should join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative - the global standard for good governance of oil, gas and mineral resources - or at least adopt key aspects of the EITI including:
 - Creating a public register of beneficial owners involved in the extractive industries, inclusive of fisheries;
 - Disclose official contracts and licences that govern the extraction of resources;
- Create processes for public participation in the formulation of the national budget and also in monitoring and evaluating its execution;
- To introduce a mandatory and public system for the president and ministers to declare their assets on an annual basis;
- To reject the inclination to shield or withhold information from the media; and
- To proactively and honestly engage and communicate on the problems afflicting Namibia.

Issued on behalf of the ACTION Coalition by:

Frederico Links
Chairperson

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