



### **Community Declaration on Access to Information**

We, the participants in the **Community Discussion Platform on Access to Information** held at Community Radio Station, Base 106.2 FM, in Windhoek, Namibia, on 15 October 2013,

**Recalling** Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948, which guarantees that: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”;

**Considering** Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights which states: “Every individual shall have the right to receive information”; and that “every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law”;

**Reaffirming** Article 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights at its 32<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Session held in October 2002, which provides that “Public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has a right to access this information, subject only to clearly defined rules established by law”;

**Noting** the African Model Law on Access to Information for Africa and the African Platform on Access to Information Declaration;

**Acknowledging** the Windhoek Declaration of 1991, which promotes an Independent and Pluralistic African Press and has stated explicitly the Right of Freedom of expression and information for every individual;

**Expressing** our sincere appreciation for the support provided by the Namibia National Commission for UNESCO, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Namibia Chapter;

***Hereby Declare that:***

1. Transparency regarding public administration and issues of national concern is pivotal, whether it concerns positive or negative information, can help us identify areas within the public sphere, where we as citizens, can be actively involved and make a positive difference.
2. The media needs access to information in order for them to improve their role as informers, educators, agenda-setters and watchdogs.
3. Access to information is a human right. The absence of a law on access to information means that information is censored. The denial of information can be in the interest of national security, but it can also be used to keep the public in darkness. When people are informed they are likely to make better decisions. Denying citizens access to information is similar to having an apartheid mentality and policies.
4. Government has to ensure universal access to information. Platforms where people can access information need to be created. Particular attention needs to be given to rural Namibians with regard to the availability of information in local languages.
5. Citizens need timely and relevant information. Rural citizens usually receive news publications much later than urban dwellers. This further excludes them from a discourse on issues of national concern.
6. Communities should have access to constructive information about Namibia that can contribute to nation-building and personal development.
7. In as much as citizens have the right to access information and freedom of expression, they also need to be responsible. Individuals should not

plagiarize the work of others and should respect a person's right to privacy and dignity.

8. Once an access to information law is passed, extra emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that rural citizens understand the law and how it affects them.
9. The media needs to be ethical and professional in their conduct. They must ensure objectivity and not allow external forces to influence content.
10. Media and information literacy initiatives need to be implemented nationwide. This would allow citizens to understand the role of media, as well as other sources of information. They would be able to critically evaluate content and consequently make informed choices and think critically about issues that affect them.
11. The ACTION Coalition should be supported in its call for access to information to be a priority on the policy and legislative agenda, and for the repeal of apartheid laws such as the Protection of Information Act of 1982.
12. All stakeholders, government, civil society and the media, need to ensure the effective implementation of an access to information law that includes the principles outlined in the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI) Declaration, as well as regional and international best practice on access to information.

**Supported by:**

