



# Promoting Women's Rights through Access to Information and ICT

## Training Report



**Your right to know**

Every citizen has the right to access information held by public bodies and they have to respond.

Browse **373 requests** to **103 agencies**

**November, 2016**

**Kampala, Uganda**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

On November 11, 2016 a training on Promoting Women's Rights through Access to Information and ICT was held at Casa Miltu Hotel, Ntinda, Kampala (Uganda). It was attended by 11 women's organisations with a national footprint which work on different thematic areas including disability rights, media, economic empowerment, and political participation.

The right of access to information is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Uganda, the right to access information is enshrined in Article 41 of the national constitution; and Uganda was among the first African countries to enact a right to information law - the Access to Information Act, 2005.

However, the law remains largely unimplemented despite the passing of its regulations in 2011. Uganda is also a signatory to international and regional human rights instruments that protect women's rights, and has a gender-sensitive national constitution. Although the country has registered some progress, there remain several impediments to the attainment of gender equality and women empowerment and access to information is one of them.

Therefore, the purpose of the training workshop was to equip women's rights organizations in Uganda with knowledge and skills on the Right to Information (RTI) and the role that ICT can play in facilitating access to information and freedom of expression to advance gender equality and women's rights.

## **1.2 Opening/ Welcome Remarks**

Dr. Wakabi Wairagala, Executive Director at the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), welcomed participants to the training and thanked them for attending. He gave a brief history of CIPESA and the various programs run by the organisation, including the ICT4 Democracy in East Africa network, Online Freedoms initiative, Open Data and the Right to Information project, and Internet Governance work. He underscored the importance of access to information in advancing women's rights and mentioned that this is the first training of this kind that CIPESA has delivered specifically aimed at women's rights organisations.

## **1.3 Participants' Expectations**

To ensure a responsive training session, participants were asked to indicate their expectations at the onset of the training. A common theme that emerged from the expectations was the need to better use the law to realise greater access to information. Other expectations included:

- To obtain information on RTI and how to access gender aggregated statistics.
- To learn skills in ICT for human rights.

- To learn how RTI impacts on women.
- To learn how rural women can access information better.
- To learn about the right to information in Uganda.
- To learn more on how to use ICT to promote women's rights.
- To learn how women councilors can promote the RTI.
- To learn how women with disability can better access information.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the training**

The following were the objectives of the training;

1. To increase participants' understanding of the right to access information and other relevant laws and regulations.
2. To enhance the capacity of women's rights organizations to advocate for the right of access to information.
3. To explore the role of ICT in facilitating access to information pertinent to women's rights and livelihoods

To achieve the above objectives the training covered the following topics:

- Introduction to Freedom of Information and RTI
- RTI Legal and regulatory frameworks in Uganda
- Women and RTI, challenges and opportunities
- The Role of ICT in facilitating RTI
- How to request for information on the Ask Your Government (AYG) portal.

#### **1.5 Highlights of the Presentations**

Participants were introduced to the right to information, the underlying principles, its importance and the kind of public information citizens can access. Edrine Wanyama, a lawyer with the Human Rights Network (Uganda), provided an in-depth analysis of the legal and regulatory framework on the right to information with a specific focus on the Access to Information Act, its provisions, limitations and practical examples of how citizens and organisations have used it to access public information and demanded for accountability.

During the presentation, there was increased focus on the limitations of the Act which contradict the two limitations as specified in the Uganda 1995 Constitution, i.e. a) information affecting right to privacy and, b) security and sovereignty of the State. Examples of these limitations were expounded to other areas in addition to RTI, including Health Service Commission Act.

Further, the method of making an information request was discussed with participants taken through the steps of making a traditional information request from a public office. Discussion on what to do after making a request explored the methods of tracking a request. It was noted that an information officer has 21 days within which to respond to an information request. A non-response from an information officer can be seen as a “refusal” particularly if there was no notice provided to the requester of a denial of information. The requester may respond to the refusal by applying to the chief magistrate’s court and if the Chief Magistrate does not serve the purpose of application, the ordinary appeal process can be applied.

The information request fee of UGX 20,000 (US\$5.7) stirred discussion among participants who noted that this was not affordable for many women in the country. It also posed a challenge for people with disabilities for whom some of the information would remain inaccessible as it did not meet their access needs (e.g. audio and braille formats).

Participants were also taken through the importance of RTI in promoting women’s rights through discussions and exercises on the challenges and opportunities during a session led by Loyce Kyogabirwe, an independent consultant on women’s rights in Uganda. It was explained that RTI empowers women to make effective and informed decisions about their lives, enables them to demand for good governance and improved service delivery, which women cannot actualise without information.

Participants shared challenges faced by women when it comes to exercising the right to information. These included illiteracy, ignorance of existing information, lack of self-esteem, poverty, gender discrimination, among others. In order to overcome these challenges, several solutions were suggested like sensitisation and awareness rising on the importance of RTI, training and capacity building on how and where to access information, creating partnerships with organisations who have expertise and experience in the utilisation of RTI law.

Lastly, participants discussed the role of ICT in facilitating access to information and were equipped with practical skills on how to request for information from the AskYourGov ([www.askyourgov.ug](http://www.askyourgov.ug)) portal, an online platform that supports the government in making public information easily accessible to the public. Participants browsed through the information requests on the website.. Following a series of group discussions on information needs specific to women, participants listed the types of information they would be interested in accessing through the portal and the agency that would be the correct one to contact. Some of the requests were registered on the portal.

1. How much money is released to gender offices at national and local levels?
2. What criteria and percentage of women are benefiting from the Women's Fund? How much has been disbursed?
3. What is the progress on the implementation of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2010?
4. What is the number of People With Disabilities (PWDs) employed in government agencies?
5. How much money has been budgeted for women empowerment programs? And how much is returned unspent annually to the ministry of finance?
6. What mobility appliances and special grants have been given to people with disabilities by government agencies?
7. Is cancer screening for women free in Uganda? How and where can it be accessed?
8. What is the percentage of land owned by women?
9. Why does free WIFI start from 6pm? Women are not able to use because of their gender roles.
10. What is the government's plan for street children?
11. How many government scholarships are given to boys and girls joining public universities?
12. How much money was disbursed to local governments in the financial year 2015/16 and how much was returned to the Ministry of Finance?
13. How has the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) benefited women?
14. What are the compensation procedures for families affected by oil and gas exploration? (The compensation appears to have benefitted more men than women)
15. When will government re-open Makerere University?
16. Are medical interns at public universities paid?

## 1.6 Learning Outcomes

- The training was well received by the participants who recognised that every citizen has a right to access information in the hands of the state including all information and records of government ministries, departments, local governments, statutory corporations and bodies, commissions and other government organs and agencies.

*"I have never given a thought that you can ask the government [for almost] any information you want, but now I now know" - NAWOU*

Participants learnt the procedures for requesting for information as provided for in the Access to Information Act

*"The training re-awakened in me the responsibility to seek information that I need and also help others know the procedures of accessing information in the hands of government." - WDN-Uganda*

*“I was able to understand the Access to Information Act and how to use it to ask for information.” - YWCA*

*“I learnt how to follow the legal procedures of accessing public information.” - UMWA*

- The training helped participants to appreciate the role of ICT in facilitating the right to access information. They explored different ways of using ICT tools such as radios, mobile phones and the internet, particularly [www.askyourgov.org](http://www.askyourgov.org), to access information.

### **1.7 Participants’ Evaluation of the Training**

Participants appreciated the content of the training, the length, structure and delivery. All agreed that the training was useful, easy to understand and apply and effectively delivered. There was an equal split between participants who strongly agreed and those who simply agreed on the usefulness of the training.

Half of the participants indicated that they had received an “excellent” understanding of the concepts covered during the training, while another 50% indicated that they had obtained “good” understanding.

Participants found the sessions on the legal and regulatory framework on the right to information in Uganda and the Ask Your Gov portal very interesting because they were unaware of that particular law and the platform. Only one participant had previously utilised the portal.

Participants promised to use the knowledge and skills acquired to:

- Engage in advocacy on access to information.
- Engage the government on key processes and information they need.
- Fundraise and implement projects on RTI and women’s rights.
- Make use of ICT to access information they require.
- Always ask the government for information on issues affecting their communities.
- Sensitise and encourage women to access information using different channels such as radio, TV, seminars, etc.

### **1.8 Suggestions for Future Engagements**

Participants indicated that there is need for:

- More training for women at local level on RTI and ICT.
- Continuous information sharing, partnership and networking.
- Engaging the government to establish ICT support centres for women.

## 1.9 Appendices

### Appendix I: Training Program



## Training Workshop on RTI, Women's' Rights and ICT-enabled Access to Information

Venue: Casa Miltu, Ntinda | Date: November 11, 2016

### Agenda

Time	Activity	Responsible
8:00 - 8:30	Arrival and registration	Alice Aparo (CIPESA)
8:30 - 9:00	Introductions and Exceptions	Juliet Nanfuka (CIPESA)
9:00-9:15	Opening Remarks	Dr. Wakabi Wairagala (CIPESA)
9:15 - 9:30	Overview of Training	Loyce Kyogabirwe
9:30 - 10:30	Introduction to Freedom of Information and RTI	Edrine Wanyama
10:30 - 11:45	Health Break	
11:45 - 12:15	RTI legal and regulatory frameworks in Uganda	Edrine Wanyama
12: 15 - 01:00	Women and the Right of Access to Information: Challenges and Opportunities	Loyce Kyogabirwe
01:00 - 2:00	Lunch	
02:00 - 02:30	Role of ICT in facilitating FOI and RTI	Juliet Nanfuka (CIPESA)
2:30 - 4:45	How to request for Information on the AYG portal	Juliet Nanfuka (CIPESA)
4:45 - 5:00	Feedback, way forward and close of training	Loyce Kyogabirwe

**Appendix II: Participants List**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organization</b>
1	Wanyama Edrine	M	HURINET-U
2	Bambeera James	M	YWCA-Uganda
3	Loyce Mugisa	F	NAWOU
4	Loyce Kyogabirwe	F	
5	Mbabazi N. Violet	F	Alliance for Women in Development
6	Nalwoga Gorretti	F	UMWA
7	Amito J N	F	ISIS-WICCE
8	Margaret Sentamu	F	UMWA
9	Olule Julie	F	FIDA-UG
10	Connie Oloru	F	WDN-U
11	Nambalirwa Moreen	F	National Union of Women with Disabilities
12	Nyasuna Patricia	F	WOUGNET
13	Busingye Sarah	F	WEGCDA
14	Nuliat Nambaziira	F	EASSI

