

Access To Information Law in Zambia



Why ATI act should be Implemented

Information is power, Informed citizens can make informed decisions, for instance, when going to the polls. Only when citizens know how they are governed, can they hold their governments accountable for their decisions and actions.

The right to information does not necessarily translate into access of information. Thus, The media, civil society organizations and activists play a crucial role in informing the public about issues of interest, but they rely on the ability to seek and receive verified information from reliable private and public sources.

The unavailability of information may hinder the institutions/individuals mandated or working to keep the public informed about the management of national resources, from carrying out their work efficiently and effectively.

commitment and implementation by national governments, must be consistently reassessed to ensure implementation of legal provisions and these provisions must be adjusted continuously to meet the needs and aspirations of the people they seek to serve.



Zambia can be In the champions league of countries with effective access to information laws

About 129 countries in the world and more than 20 countries in Africa have enacted the ATI law (Joan Barat, 2022) and it is imperative that Zambia, too, champions the free and equal access to information by its citizens.

The right to seek, access and receive information is a fundamental human right guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and Article 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. It is also recognized in many of the constitutions of Southern African Countries.



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Misconceptions

There are some misconceptions around the ATI Law despite the great benefits it provides to a country's citizens. Let us consider some of them.

Some misconceptions around ATI include:

- Information seekers will invade privacy and gain unauthorized access to personal information.
- Citizens may unlawfully question the government on both legal and illegal actions that may not be to the standards of the constitution or any jurisdictions.
- Citizens may access secret information and files not meant for public consumption.
- Citizens may expose corrupt practices and mismanagement of public resources by public service workers.

Benefits of the ATI Law

Fight corruption

You cannot question what you don't know. Greater access to information increases the transparency of policy making and governance.

Access other social and economic rights

You need information to exercise other crucial rights such as the right to vote, the right to a clean and healthy environment and the right to make informed choices.

Participate in democracy

More informed citizens are able to participate more effectively in their nation's democratic processes.

Access to national identity documents

ATI will also allow citizens to easily renew or replace national identity documents online even when they are stranded in a foreign country.

Access education and build their capacity

An informed population can better its situation by converting information into knowledge. To do this, citizens need information literacy skills so they can distinguish between information and disinformation; public and private information; and what is ethical and unethical.

Correct misinformation

When citizens are aware of what information the government holds about them, they can also seek correction of that information if they consider it to be misleading or inconsistent.

In conclusion, considering the importance and benefits attributed to ATI above, it is therefore crucial for this Law to be enacted for the benefits of Zambian citizens.