

MEDIA RELEASE

IPPR RESPONSE TO MINISTER OF ICT'S STATEMENT ON 'ACCESS DENIED'

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has a mission to deliver, independent, analytical, critical and constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia.

In light of the above, we welcome constructive appraisals and criticism of any of our publications and research findings in the hope that this will lead to high-quality, informed debates about policy proposals and options.

Last year the IPPR sought to make an assessment of the state of access to information in Namibia. The principal means of doing this was by making a range of information requests to over 100 government bodies, public enterprises, private companies, and civil society organisations. The results of the research can be found in the *Access Denied: Access to Information in Namibia* report available as a download here: <http://ippr.org.na/publication/access-denied/>

The issue of Access to Information was deemed appropriate because of the strong importance government attaches to making information available to the public, as expressed in the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP) and NDP5. For example, the HPP commits to providing the "means for access to public information/data and the enact(ing of) freedom of information laws by year two of Harambee" (2017/18).

Complementing the HPP is NDP5, which in its executive summary states: "Good governance, responsive institutions and an engaged citizenry are the bedrock of democracy and sustainable development."

The research report and its findings provide an opportunity for

government and other sectors of Namibian society to identify weak points and best practices in the release of information and therefore move towards the NDP5 aim of "universal access to information".

In the light of the above, it is disappointing that the Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Hon. Tjekero Tweya, chose to issue a blanket condemnation of the *Access Denied* report by claiming it was "devoid of any truth" and that the IPPR has a "malicious agenda".

The IPPR's researchers hand delivered information requests to 20 ministries. All the requests were addressed to the relevant permanent secretaries. It is difficult to accept the ICT Minister's argument that the information requests should not have been sent to the Permanent Secretaries but rather to the Public Relations Officers in each Ministry and that this somehow resulted in the high number of non-responses. It is concerning if the offices of Permanent Secretaries are not capable of passing on information requests to the ministry PROs or other relevant officials. Follow-up phone calls and emails were also made to the Permanent Secretaries' offices.

In addition, the IPPR chose to address the information requests to Permanent Secretaries because in the past we have been told by Ministry PROs and other officials that requests for information should be sent first to the Permanent Secretaries' offices. Our colleagues in the media have also confirmed that this is often the response from PROs and other government officials.

The Minister also claimed that IPPR "came short of providing a list of names of those officials they have contacted" to the Ministry after the launch of the report on December 5 last year. Again the Minister claimed "the IPPR research team promised to provide MICT with the names of the so-called public servants whom they contacted, but could not submit such list."

It has to be pointed out that after the report was launched, the MICT contacted the IPPR for further information on the officials who had been approached for information on December 7. It was made clear at the launch and then to the MICT that the approaches had been made to Permanent Secretaries. The IPPR sent a table listing officials who had been contacted during follow-up calls and emails to MICT on Wednesday December 13. The MICT official who had been requesting

the information responded via email later on December 13 by saying 'Thanks a million'. There was no further response from the Ministry saying that the information provided was inadequate in any way.

The Minister also stated that 80 percent of the information requested is "in the public domain and easily accessible" with most being available on government websites. The IPPR's researchers had checked official websites to see if the requested information was already available on line. It would be helpful if the MICT could list the URLs where all this information is available.

It should also be pointed out that the requests made by the IPPR were carefully chosen to be non-controversial so that there was no question of responses being denied on grounds of 'security'.

It is important to note that this report showed high levels of non-responsiveness from the private sector and even civil society and was not simply aimed at exposing problems in government when it comes to access to information.

There is no point in denying that ATI is problematic across different sectors of Namibian society. Improving access to information is something we can all work on together - in the spirit of Harambee - to ensure the public have the information they need.

Mr. Graham Hopwood
IPPR Executive Director

February 7 2018

Addendum: IPPR Comments on 'Table: Summary of O/M/As contacted by MICT and responses provided' issued by MICT on February 6 2018

The Minister's statement contains a table titled 'Table: Summary of O/M/As contacted by MICT and responses provided'

Here follows the IPPR's response to the table:

1. Safety and Security - This response confirms IPPR's 'Information withheld' finding
2. Gender Equality & Child Welfare - This response confirms IPPR's 'Information not held' finding
3. Home Affairs - The Minister claimed that the request was not received and that the requested information is available on the Ministry's website. The request was made through the PS's office. We cannot locate this information on the Ministry's website.
4. Justice - This confirms IPPR's 'Information not held' finding
5. Land Reform - No response. A response was received long after request was made and after completion of the report.
6. Mines & Energy - Request was delivered to the PS's office but there was no response
7. Urban & Rural Development - Request was delivered to the PS's office but there was no response
8. MAWF - No Response. The Minister claims the information is in the Ministry's annual reports. We have perused annual reports and the information as requested does not appear.
9. Defence - Information withheld, but the Minister claims it is in the public domain. We cannot locate this information on the Ministry's website.
10. Environment & Tourism - This confirms IPPR's 'Information withheld' finding

11. Health & Social Services - Request was delivered to the PS's office but there was no response

12. Industrialisation, Trade & SME Development - No Response. However, they did respond with a referral (to BIPA) initially, but did not respond to a follow-up question. We acknowledge that the Minister may count this as a response but in the methodology used this was a non-response as the follow-up question was ignored

13. International Relations & Cooperation - This confirms IPPR's 'Information not held' finding. Ministry responded that no list was available, but was in the process of compiling one. The Minister claims no info request was received, our records show at least two people in the ministry were party to the correspondence.

14. Poverty Eradication & Social Welfare - No response. The request was sent to the PS. The PRO afterwards confirmed having received it from the PS but still did not respond.

15. Sport, Youth and National Service - No response confirmed. The Minister said the information had been compiled for a response, but IPPR still hasn't received the compiled info.

16. National Council - No response. Request was submitted to NC Secretary our records show.

17. Auditor General - No response. Request was submitted to the AG. The Minister claims the request was sent to the wrong email address, but our records show that it was sent to the correct address, which is the same address listed in the Government Information Bulletin of 2017 containing contact numbers and email addresses. The request had already been hand delivered to the office.