



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

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Response to IPPR ‘Access Denied’ Report

This is in response to the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) report titled ‘Access denied’ in which IPPR among other things stated that out of the 20 ministries approached with an information request, just 5 responded with the requested or similar information.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia is disappointed with the content of this report as it is misleading and devoid of any truth. The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) as the main custodian of government information management conducted O/M/As Public Relations Officers (PROs) to clarify the allegations by IPPR and the result was in contradiction with the alleged Access denied report.

Allow me to refresh your mind with the so-called findings of the IPPR report.

The report stated that 80% of all organisations and institutions contacted did not respond or could not provide the information requested. It went further to state that nearly 60% of targets simply did not respond to information requests in any meaningful way. The report further claimed that roughly 85% of Public Enterprises approached for information were unresponsive while out of the 14 regions, just one, Erongo, allegedly responded with the information requested, and in a reasonable time.

As a Minister mandated to ensure that the citizens have unfettered access to Government information, I was shocked by the findings of the report, as I was at the forefront of introducing mechanism in place that will make information easily accessible to the public.

It is very important to note that the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of ICT, last year developed a Communication Plan, with the aim of aligning the functions of the Public Relations to their core functions of information dissemination in accordance to the Harambee Prosperity Plan.

In addition, the Ministry of ICT developed a Social Media Use Policy for all Government PROs to have access to and deploy relevant social media tools responsibly across the public service.

The two documents were approved by Cabinet and endorsed by Parliament last year.

As part of the implementation process, workshops were held with all Offices, Ministries and Agencies (O/M/As), Regional Councils and Local Authorities in all 14 regions.

In addition to the finalized documents the Ministry also drafted the National Information Policy and Access to Information Bill. These two documents are expected to be tabled in Parliament this year. All these policies and legal documents aim to make information easily accessible to the public.

It was therefore shocking to hear that despite all these efforts, many Government institutions are still not making information accessible to the public as it was alleged by the IPPR in the report titled ***Access Denied, Access to Information in Namibia***. This therefore prompted me to act swiftly by tasking Officials within the ICT Ministry to carry out a fact finding exercise to ascertain the findings from the IPPR report.

However, upon this enquiry by the Ministry as to who the IPPR contacted to obtain information on government programmes and activities, IPPR came short of providing a list of names of those officials they have contacted. This made it difficult for the Ministry of ICT to follow up and enquire from O/M/As, as to why public information was withheld.

Public Relations Officers who are the access points of all O/M/As and who were contacted by the Ministry in this regard indicated that they did not receive the queries from the IPPR research team. IPPR indicated that most O/M/As were reached through the Permanent Secretaries Offices, which made it exceptionally hard for the Ministry to identify the person who have received such queries.

In addition 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. Therefore, I would like to urge IPPR or any other institutions to refrain from misleading the public with unfounded allegations.

Regrettably, IPPR could not contact the officials handling public information, for all we know they might have contacted any official who happen to answer their query at that particular time. We feel that this was done deliberately to suit their malicious agenda.

The table below summarizes the O/M/As allegedly contacted by IPPR, the data requested/questions asked by IPPR, IPPR alleged outcome and the Ministry of ICT findings.

Table: Summary of O/M/As contacted by MICT and responses provided

Ministries contacted by IPPR	Data Requested/Question Asked by IPPR	IPPR alleged outcome	MICT research findings
Safety and Security	Distribution of crime offenders by types of offence between January 2014 to March 2016	Information withheld	Information is accessible to the public However the Information may be withheld if the requester cannot clearly state the purpose of requesting the

			information and also the intended use of the information.
Gender Equality & Child Welfare	Data on the number of prosecuted, pending and dismissed incidences of GBV between 2010 and 2016	Information not held	Ministry didn't receive the information request, nonetheless this data is accessible from the Namibian Police or Ministry of Safety and Security.
Home Affairs	Data on the number and nationality of work permits granted between 2011 and 2016	Information withheld	Ministry didn't receive the information request. Information is available can be accessed on the website and is reflected in the Ministry's Annual Reports
Justice	Progress report on case management in the Magistrate, High and Supreme Courts	Information not held	The Ministry was indeed contacted and referred the IPPR to the right office (Office of the Judiciary) which they failed to contact. The Information is contained in the Annual Report and is accessible to the public from the Office of the Judiciary.
Land Reform	Data on the proportion of foreign-owned land vis-a-vis	No response	Information is held

	overall available commercial farmland		Ministry responded to IPRR saying that the information was not ready at the time of request to avoid miss informing the public.
Mines and Energy	Breakdown of number of rural and urban households accessing the solar energy subsidy loan for the procurement of solar energy technologies per region	No response	Information is held IPPR request was never received but the information is available upon request.
Urban and Rural Development	Data on houses constructed and handed over to beneficiaries per region between 2007 and 2016	No response	Information is held Ministry didn't receive the information request Information is in public domain, and is available as it was even announced in the National Assembly by the Minister through the Ministerial Statement.
Agriculture, Water and Forestry	The number of beneficiaries of Agriculture Extension Services, broken down by type of service and per region	No response	Ministry didn't receive the information request. Information is available on the annual report, and the

	from April 2013 to March 2016		annual report is accessible on the ministry's website.
Defence	The number of military personnel dispatched to African Union and United Nations missions from 2011 to 2016, broken down by mission and length of service	Information withheld	Ministry didn't receive the information request Information is held. Ministry indicated that the information requested could not have been withheld mainly because the information is not confidential, it is public information.
Environment and Tourism	The number of game rangers and game patrols from April 2015 to March 2017	Information withheld	Information withheld due to security constraints, it jeopardize what the ministry is aiming to protect.
Health and Social Services	The most prevalent types of case dealt with broken down per region from April 2015 to March 2017	No response	Ministry didn't receive the information request And The Information is available in Annual Reports and on the Ministry's Website.

Industrialization, Trade and SME Development	Breakdown of company registrations, deregistrations and dormancy rates per region from April 2015 to March 2017	No response	Information is available but not held by the Ministry The Ministry responded by referring the client to BIPA as the Ministry doesn't have the requested information. IPPR failed to contact BIPA.
International Relations and Cooperation	Number and titles of bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties processed as from April 2015 to April 2017 respectively	Information not held	Information is held Ministry didn't receive the information request The information requested is available at the Ministry and is easily accessible upon request
Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare	The number of street committees, number of people in street committee in each Constituency. The number of food parcels distributed per constituency since 2016	No response	Information is available IPPR request was send to the wrong office, hence the delay on responding. But the information is available at the Ministry and it is accessible by anyone or upon request.
Sport, Youth and National	Number of sports development activities broken	No response	Information is available

Service	down per region and per sport code from April 2015 to March 2017		<p>There was a delay in compilation of the information for response.</p> <p>The Information is available in Annual Reports and Budget books</p>
National Council	Annual reports for the years 2015 and 2016 and the performance management policy	No response	<p>Request for information was not received by the Office.</p> <p>The office do not have information regarding the performance management policy. The National Council could not publish the 2015/16 Annual Report due to financial constraints.</p> <p>National Council does not have a separate Performance Management Policy, we are using the one that the whole Public Service is using.</p>
Auditor General	Annual reports for the years 2015 and 2016 and the performance management policy	No response	<p>Information is held.</p> <p>Request for information was sent to an incorrect email address.</p>

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As can be seen from the Ministry of ICT findings, it shows that 80% of the information requested is in public domain and easily accessible; whilst most are available on O/M/As websites. Therefore, it is disheartening for a reputable research institution such as IPPR to misinform the public in such a manner. We need to strive to not always opt for malicious, vexatious and irresponsible publications to portray the country in a bad light. One wonders what the motive was to carry out research with no clear purpose and with no raw data supporting the research findings.

Furthermore we have PROs in Government that are entrusted with the responsibility of making information available to the public. These officials seemingly were not approached during the research and this made it difficult for the Ministry of ICT to do follow ups and see where Government can improve in terms of transparency and service delivery. It is therefore, highly advisable for any institution and member of the public to contact Public Relations Officers as they are the access points to all Government Institutions.

I would like to emphasize that efforts were made by Government through various O/M/As to make information accessible to the public on various platforms such as newspapers, radio and television, websites, as well as social media platforms. The classic example is the Capital Projects that were budgeted for under the Regional Councils in this financial year's budget. Such information was extensively published in the New Era newspaper between April and June 2017, right after the Budget was passed, and this has been the trend for the past three financial years. This is to ensure that the public is informed on how Government utilizes tax-payers' money. (Budget books are also available on the Ministry of Finance's website for the public to access.)

I would like to urge Government officials entrusted with the responsibility of making information accessible to the public to continue providing public access to information or else they make themselves guilty of withholding vital public information.

As his Excellency the President has said and I quote “No Namibian should feel left out” and therefore public servants, Government officials are the servants of the people and they should provide relevant information to the citizenry so that in return the citizens can make informed decisions on their livelihoods.