

Advancing the Right of Access to Information for Women

Recognizing that all persons should have the same opportunity and ability to exercise their right of access to information, and that important gender-based inequities exist, The Carter Center has developed programming to reduce information asymmetries. The Center will:

- ◆ Work with local partners and key stakeholders in pilot countries to raise awareness regarding women's unequal access to information
- ◆ Support reviews of ATI legislation and policies through a gendered lens
- ◆ Increase engagement of thematically relevant civil society organizations, particularly those focused on women's economic empowerment
- ◆ Encourage key ministries and agencies to implement right to information instruments with gender sensitivity
- ◆ Work with international and regional organizations to raise awareness about gendered information asymmetries and the importance of explicitly including the right to information in the global women's agendas



“Everyone has the right to...seek, receive and impart information...”

(Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Since 1999, the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Initiative has worked to promote the right of access to information. In partnership with government and civil society, the Center supports national efforts to advance the right in key countries in Latin America, Africa, and China. Additionally, the Center collaborates closely with international and regional bodies, serves as a resource on the right of access to information, and has been instrumental in bringing awareness to the need for full and effective implementation of legislation on access to information through its Implementation Assessment Tool.

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Women



Exercising their right of access to information

What Is ATI?

The right of **access to information (ATI)**, also referred to as freedom of information, is a fundamental human right now enjoyed by over 4 billion people in 90 countries around the world. ATI allows the general public to access information held by governments, and often, by private entities that perform public duties or receive public funds. ATI is critical to the exercise of other rights, the reduction of poverty, and meaningful participation and voice. Access to information helps citizens to better understand government policies and decisions taken in their name, engage in setting government priorities, and serves to increase trust and confidence between government and its citizens.

While ATI is for everyone, failure to engage in gender-sensitive policy making, entrenched cultural traditions, and longstanding obstacles have made it difficult for women to exercise their right of access to information.



Why Is ATI Important for Women?

Women are the least likely to demand and receive access to information, yet are perhaps the most in need of this powerful tool. Women often face the double burden of income generation and caring for their families. Increasingly they are the key decision makers as the number of female-headed households has risen due to civil conflicts and men finding work far from home. Women represent an estimated 70 percent of the world's impoverished and two thirds of the world's illiterate as economic and educational opportunities for women remain limited. Further, women are more susceptible to and affected by corruption. With genuine access to information, women can take advantage of opportunities to transform their lives, families, and communities. In particular, access to information:

- ◆ Allows women to make more effective decisions, for example with relation to education, crop production, land ownership, and health care
- ◆ Enables women to know and exercise their full range of rights
- ◆ Helps women to participate more fully in public life
- ◆ Is critical for holding government and service providers accountable and reducing corruption
- ◆ Bridges gender gaps and helps to shift power
- ◆ Is economically empowering for women

A lack of access to information disproportionately affects the poor, women, and other vulnerable and marginalized people, and as such the right should be guaranteed to all sectors of society.

What Challenges Do Women Face?

Despite the value of access to information, women face many challenges in exercising this right. The “Seven Cs,” or impediments include:

- ◆ Confidence
- ◆ Culture
- ◆ Child care
- ◆ Cash
- ◆ Capacity
- ◆ Control
- ◆ Consciousness

Examples of how ATI has helped women

In India, women are actively pushing for greater access to information. For example, women in a small, rural village filed more than 100 requests for information to force the administration to start working on the supply of **clean water**.



Following a request for information regarding **pension rights** for widows, a poor Indian mother of five children started receiving her overdue payments on a monthly basis.

In other countries, ATI requests have helped expose unequal salary rates among male and female employees. The main public service broadcaster in the UK was pressured into implementing measures to ensure **equal pay for equal work** after receiving a request regarding salary structures.

