

Freedom of Information: Nine Vanguard Government Agencies



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This guide is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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

Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“...access to information is indispensable to genuine democracy and good governance and... no limitation shall be placed on the public right to be informed about the government and its functionaries.”

Preamble, 2010 Liberian Freedom of Information Act





Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism	7
Center for National Documents and Records Agency	9
National Social Security and Welfare Corporation	11
Ministry of Finance	13
Ministry of Education	15
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	17
Ministry of Internal Affairs	19
Ministry of Public Works	21
Bong County	23



Introduction

Liberia's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, signed into law on September 16, 2010, provides all persons the right of access to public information. The right of access to information is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, as well as the Constitution of Liberia. Freedom of Information laws or regulations have been passed in over 90 countries around the world, with an even greater number enjoying a Constitutional right to information. Liberia is the first country in West Africa to establish a comprehensive right to information law.

In order for citizens to enjoy their right of access to information, government must assure full and effective implementation and enforcement of the law. Given the resources necessary for implementation, the Government of Liberia first focused its efforts on select ministries and agencies, including: the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism; the Center for National Documentation and Records Agency; the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; the Ministry of Education; that Ministry of Finance; the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation; the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and Bong County. These agencies have served as the vanguard in implementation; with important lessons learned on the necessary efforts to put the Freedom of Information law into practice.

With technical support from the Carter Center, these nine agencies have appointed information officers, designated space for these officers, set up reading rooms, developed FOI implementation plans, identified documents and records in their possession, drafted and adopted procedures manuals for receiving and responding to requests for information and proactively publishing information, as well as raised awareness about freedom of information among agency staff and their constituents.

The following pages provide an overview of each of these nine ministries and agencies, the types of information they hold, their website addresses, and contact information for each Information Officer. As the value of freedom of information ultimately rests in use of the law, you are encouraged to "Ask me, it's your right!"



Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs & Tourism



The Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism (MICAT) was created by an Act of Legislature in 1965 and later reorganized under Decrees 46 and 47 of the People's Redemption Council. MICAT is comprised of five main programs including Technical Services, Information Services, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, Administration/Management and Foreign Mission. Each program has additional bureaus or divisions that coordinate the day-to-day operations of MICAT. The Ministry's core responsibilities are to develop and disseminate factual information about Liberia at home and abroad, to serve as a link between the Government of Liberia and the media and public, and to protect and promote Liberian culture. Additionally, MICAT is responsible for coordinating outreach on Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and disseminating information to citizens concerning resources available through the program. In cooperation with UNMIL radio, MICAT has maintained "Lift Liberia," a radio show that serves as a resource for comprehensive information on rural and urban development programs. And, following the passage of the 2010 Freedom of Information Act, MICAT has been tasked with coordinating and overseeing implementation of the law.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Press releases
- Marketing materials for the Government of Liberia
- Public policy initiatives
- Personnel and payroll records
- Details of publicly funded initiatives
- Contracts granted by MICAT
- Plans/correspondence regarding future initiatives

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Boikai Sirleaf

Phone:

0777403673

Website:

www.micatliberia.com

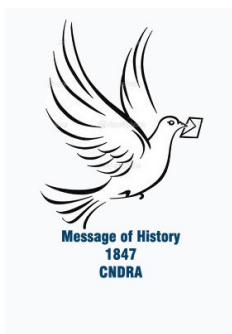


Center for National Documents and Records Agency

The Center for National Documents and Records Agency (CNDRA) in 1977. The Agency oversees the acquisition, maintenance, and dissemination of all documents and records related to functions of the Government of Liberia. It is sometimes referred to as the “nerve center” of Liberian national history. CNDRA specifically is charged with modernizing the Liberian records system and creating a sustainable national archive as part of the Liberian Land Policy and Institutional Support Project (LPIS). The Agency also is responsible for the establishment of libraries, land registries, and marriage registries in every county and territory within the Republic of Liberia. Given Liberia’s long history of civil war, CNDRA is focused on repairing a broken government system by securing and conserving all land deeds and land records at one location under the supervision of trained staff, as well as developing and implementing a records management system at the national and local levels.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Plans and reports regarding modernization of record keeping systems
- Land deeds
- Birth and death certificates
- Marriage certificates
- Licenses and contracts conferred by the Government of Liberia
- Archived legislative initiatives and proceedings



Ask me:

Information Officer:

George Williams

Phone:

0777403675

Website:

www.cndra.gov.lr



National Social Security and Welfare Corporation



The National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP) was created in 1975 to administrate Liberia's social security system and oversee the payment of benefits to employed persons and their dependents in Liberia. Benefits are paid out in the case of injury, invalidity, old-age, or death under the Employment Injury, National Pension, and Welfare Schemes. More specifically, the Agency's duties include registering all employees, issuing individual social security numbers, maintaining and updating personal and financial records on members, and processing and paying benefits for members when due. NASSCORP routinely attends international conferences regarding the implementation of processes that support the proper oversight of the Liberian Social Security system.

Examples of information held by the Agency include:

- Open and prior claims
- Details of social security contributions
- Benefits schemes
- Allocation of benefits
- Processes involved in the management of the social security system
- Statistics related to social security and welfare benefits
- Initiatives related to improving NASSCORP

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Davis Q. Beekah

Phone:

0777403674

Website:

www.nasscorp.org.lr



A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

CONTRIBUTE YOUR SHARE TO NATIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.

PAY YOUR TAXES

LET US ALL COMMIT

TO BUILDING

A BETTER

LIBERIA

Ministry of Finance



The Ministry of Finance (MOF) is charged with managing, directing, and coordinating the financial affairs of the Liberian government. MOF responsibilities include overseeing economic policy; the central government budget; banking; security and insurance; and international economic affairs. The Ministry also collects revenue; engages in loan arrangement, disburses Government funds, and service the National Debt. The Ministry also reports the financial activities and position of the Government to the President and the Legislature, maintains the central accounting records, ensures the protection of the assets of the Government, requires all Government agencies to engage in accounts reporting and documentation, formulates fiscal policy for financial planning, and disburses government funds in accordance with legislative appropriations.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Revenue collection
- Disbursement of funds
- National financial policies
- Central accounting records
- Concessions granted to private companies
- Investments of the Government of Liberia
- Details of audits conducted on the Government of Liberia
- Status of the national debt
- National financial performance statistics

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Del-Francis Wreh

Phone:

0777403681

Website:

www.mof.gov.lr



Ministry of Education



The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for determining the policies and direction of the education system in Liberia. Its overall goal is to provide relevant and quality education to all citizens of Liberia. As such, it oversees the national curriculum and the management of educational facilities, especially in rural areas. More specifically, the MOE administrates primary and secondary education, educational facilities, curriculum, standardized examinations, technical and vocational education and training, and provides training for secondary school teachers. The Ministry focuses on increasing literacy and implementing initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty in Liberia. Because the Liberian education system was mostly destroyed during the 14-year civil war, the Ministry faces many challenges as it endeavors to educate youth in rural and urban areas. Thus, much of MOE's resources currently are devoted to rebuilding schools and integrated youth programs that promote literacy.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Aggregated National University Entrance Exam scores and statistics
- Funding allocations to public education institutions
- National truancy and literacy policies and initiatives
- Availability of educational training programs
- Official national curriculum
- Scholarship opportunities
- Reports regarding budgetary and performance concerns of public education institutions

Ask me:

Information Officers:

J. Maxime Bleetahn
Magnus Mabande

Phone:

0777403676

Website:

www.moe.gov.lr



Ministry of Health and Social Welfare



The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) provides oversight of all health and social welfare programs provided by the Government. Specific responsibilities of the Ministry include the development, implementation, and maintenance of public health institutions, preventative programs aimed at protecting the public from addiction and infectious disease, national food safety standards, medicines and medical devices, and financial security measures designed to promote social welfare. MHSW also licenses and supervises all medical practitioners and facilities; supervises the collection of data relating to births, deaths, and burials; and regulates sanitary aspects of all businesses and activities that can impact public health. Additionally, the Ministry ensures the distribution of relief and welfare funds granted by the government to the needy and underprivileged, organizes and participates in programs for the promotion of child welfare and the prevention of juvenile delinquency, and oversees the care of juvenile delinquents and homeless children to the extent provided by the law. MHSW also offers assistance in the management of charitable organizations that provide benefits to the public. Future projects are expected to focus on better extending the health and social welfare infrastructure to rural Liberia.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- National healthcare and social welfare statistics and research findings
- Funding allocations to social welfare services
- Locations of healthcare facilities
- Ongoing or prior public health initiatives
- Health education and training curriculum
- Current standards of food and water safety

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Rev. John Sumo

Phone:

0777403677

Website:

www.mohsw.gov.lr



Ministry of Internal Affairs



The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies related to defense, security, and law and order. This includes, but is not limited to, the preventative actions of law enforcement, internal administrative affairs, the administration of immigration functions, and directives of the Liberian Army and Naval forces. The MIA is most specifically tasked with the oversight of the Liberian government's Decentralization Plan. Under the 2013-2017 plan, the MIA facilitates the creation of sectorial agencies that will serve to distribute social services to Liberians on a more local level. Furthermore, the Ministry of Internal Affairs also administers the National Identification Registry, which aims to register all Liberians and provide citizens with identification cards.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Details of sectorial agencies and their mandates
- Development plans for the National Identification Registry
- Locations of local government services
- Distribution of funds to local agencies
- Organization of agencies
- Migration statistics
- Work permits
- Court decisions related to public safety

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Emmanuel Wheinyue

Phone:

0777403678

Website:

www.mia.gov.lr



Ministry of Public Works



Although originally named the Department of Public Works when it was founded in 1928, the modern Ministry of Public Works (MPW) came into being in 1972. MPW is committed to ensuring that Liberia is connected through improved roads and overall infrastructure. To achieve this goal, the Ministry oversees all construction projects undertaken by the Liberian government, which entails surveying, designing, drafting, constructing, and supervising. Further, MPW is charged with maintaining the country's roads, bridges, airports, seaports, public buildings, and other infrastructure. The Ministry also develops policies and guidelines, and regulates zoning laws and construction contracts.

Examples of information held by the Ministry include:

- Contracts granted
- Current and proposed projects
- Distribution of public funds
- Construction projects awarded
- Zoning laws
- Management of roads, bridges, and public buildings
- Projects related to water supplies, sewage, and electricity

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Jesefu Keita

Phone:

0777403680

Website:

www.mpwliberia.com



Bong County



Founded in 1964, Bong County is one of the 15 counties that comprise the first-level administrative division of Liberia. Located in the central part of country, Bong is the third largest county in Liberia. Its capital resides in Gbarnga, and the Kpelleh Tribe is the major tribe in the County. Residents are represented by six representatives and two senator in the national legislature. Bong's many natural resources, including cocoa, coffee, rubber, palms, and rice, have helped with the County's development. Currently, the local government is tasked with the implementation of infrastructure projects that aim to improve access to clean water, electricity, health and social welfare services, and education for all Bong County residents.

Examples of information held by the County include:

- County social welfare services
- Locations of service providers
- Demographic statistics
- Legislative initiatives undertaken by County officials
- Funds allocated by the county
- Plans for country development

Ask me:

Information Officer:

Leon T. Harris

Phone:

0777403679

THE
CARTER CENTER



The Carter Center is currently working in Liberia to support government and civil society efforts to establish greater transparency and improve peoples rights through freedom of information

For additional information, contact :

Alphonsus Zeon, Project Coordinator
Carter Center Field Office
Monrovia, Liberia
Phone:231-886-522-916
Email: alphonsus.zeon@cartercenterliberia.org

Laura Neuman, Manager
Global Access to Information Initiative
The Carter Center
One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307
Phone: +1- 404-420-5146 Fax: +1-404-420-5196
Email: lneuman@emory.edu
www.cartercenter.org/accesstoinformation.html