


Atlanta Declaration for the Advancement of Women's Right of Access to Information

 **Inform
Women,
Transform
Lives.**

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THE
CARTER CENTER



We, the 100 participants from almost 30 countries, representing governments, multi-stakeholder initiatives, information commissions and independent oversight bodies, gender, transparency, accountability, and access-to-information civil society organizations, international institutions, donor agencies and foundations, private sector companies, media, scholars, and practitioners, gathered in Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 14–15, 2018, under the auspices of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and The Carter Center. The conference met in plenary, where we heard leading voices from the gender, human rights, transparency, and access-to-information communities, and we had in-depth discussions as we engaged in five working groups.¹

Based on these proceedings, we hereby adopt the following Declaration and Recommendations to advance women’s right of access to information.

Preamble

Recognizing that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights provide for a right for all persons to “seek, receive and impart information,” and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights establishes a similar right to “receive and impart information”;

Emphasizing that the right of access to information is foundational for citizen participation, good governance, public administration efficiency, accountability, efforts to combat corruption, media and investigative journalism, human development, social inclusion, and the realization of other socio-economic and civil-political rights;

Acknowledging that although there have been great advances in the right of access to information over the past two decades, significant challenges remain to realize that a meaningful right to information is exercised by all people, particularly women and marginalized populations;

Noting that women are often excluded from the flow of information, both essential and strategic information, and are unable to exercise the fundamental right of access to information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men, thus limiting their ability to enjoy the benefits that the right of access to information may provide;

Observing that while the right of access to information is instrumental in ensuring physical, economic, and political autonomy for women, its realization is dependent on the reduction or elimination of structural obstacles, negative attitudes and perceptions of women, and violence that women face;

Stressing that the ability of governments to provide meaningful information and women’s ability to access meaningful information is critical for the implementation

¹ Working groups included 1) International conventions and instruments: opportunities for integrating access to information for women; 2) Intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations: promoting transparency and access to information for women; 3) National laws and institutional framework: possibilities for inclusion, revision, and reform; 4) National enabling environment: considering cultural influences and leveraging partnerships; and 5) Opportunities for demonstrative values and engaging new frontiers: research, data and ICTs.

and achievement of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals as well as the development and fulfillment of open government principles of transparency, accountability, and participation;

Appreciating that this conference created a unique space for persons dedicated to the promotion of human rights, women's economic empowerment and equality, good governance, transparency, accountability, and the right of access to information to share ideas and to commit to working together to advance women's equitable right of access to information;

Conclude that:

- The right of women to access information is essential to their economic empowerment, participation in public life, and the promotion and protection of their human rights. Yet, women from all walks of life and regions of the world continue to be denied access to critical public information they need to transform their own lives.
- Women need a wide scope of transformative information that can further their equality.
- Women's right to a full scope of public information should be made explicit in existing human rights instruments, such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and in the strategic planning and work of intergovernmental agencies and platforms.
- The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity to demonstrate the value of access to information for women, and correspondingly, without information reaching women, the goals will not be achieved.
- The Open Government Partnership (OGP), a voluntary compact among 75 countries, offers an opening to advance women's engagement and the right of access to information. The OGP should strive for increased women's participation in the co-creation, implementation, and validation of national commitments. National Action Plans should include commitments that are gender-transformative.
- Although CEDAW calls for all public policy to be reviewed through a gendered lens, the existing access to information laws have not been developed with gender sensitivity nor reviewed to ensure that the statutory provisions and its implementation do not adversely impact women. In some cases, rather than amend freedom of information laws, implementation solutions to address barriers would be more effective in supporting women's right of access to information.
- Public bodies must develop and disseminate information that is relevant to women and to ensure that official data is disaggregated by sex.
- Structural and cultural obstacles—such as women's double burden of paid and non-paid work and family care, fear, and violence against women—undermine women's ability to exercise fully the right of access to information.
- Women's ability to exercise their right of access to information is a critical but insufficient step to transforming their lives. An enabling environment that supports women's use of that information, leading to action, also is necessary.

- The internet and communication technologies have become indispensable tools for realizing human rights, combating inequality, and accelerating development and human progress, but access and connectivity for women remain limited. Women can be excluded from the potential benefits of digital and online spaces by lack of digital literacy and different forms of systematic discrimination and gender-based violence. Focus should be placed on making the internet more amenable and safe for women, increasing women's connectivity, and including telecoms and internet service providers in efforts to reach women. The internet should be considered a complement to other efforts to ensure women's meaningful right of access to information.
- Schools offer an opportunity to increase awareness of women's right to information and to build capacity to exercise their right. Urgent attention is needed to develop and adopt age-appropriate curriculum with an emphasis on enhancing girls' and women's confidence, leadership, and engagement of the right to information.
- Resources will be critical to support efforts to advance women's right of access to information, including training at the national level for government/public servants and for civil society; research; and pilot projects.

Recommendations

The following actions can and must be taken now to correct the inequities facing women in the exercise of the right to information and the advancement of women worldwide:

1. Create a coalition to articulate strategies and coordinate efforts to elevate access to information as a transformational right to advance gender equality, economic empowerment, and the promotion and protection of women's rights. The coalition, led by a high-level advisory council, should include government leaders and public officials, groups from the women's movement, the right-to-information and open-government advocates, human rights activists, regional networks, national human rights commissions, information commissioners, youth-led movements, media, telecommunication companies, the private sector, and others.
2. Make the right of access to information for women explicit within international and regional human rights instruments and mechanisms, including by:
 - a. Drafting a specific General Recommendation on Women's Right to Information by the CEDAW Committee
 - b. Developing or amending and promoting regional declarations and protocols for women's right of access to information
 - c. Compiling country and shadow reports on women's right of access to information as part of periodic reporting to human rights bodies
 - d. Preparing annual and special reports on women's right of access to information by U.N. and regional special rapporteurs, working groups, and independent experts

3. Engage United Nations agencies, including U.N. Women, regional bodies, and existing platforms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Open Government Partnership, to ensure that women can access critical information to allow for meaningful participation in their processes and to focus on outcomes and commitments that empower women.
4. Ensure that access-to-information legal frameworks are gender-sensitive and implemented in ways that support women's ability to fully exercise the right, including by:
 - a. Drafting or reviewing legal frameworks through a gender-sensitive lens
 - b. Developing, identifying, and proactively disclosing information and data sets meaningful for women
 - c. Placing information in spaces accessible to all women and through modes and means (language, formats, presentation, simplified language) that allow women, particularly marginalized women, to access and use the information
 - d. Employing solutions to overcome structural obstacles that hinder women's exercise of the right
 - e. Disaggregating information related to requesters by sex
 - f. Engaging oversight bodies to promote women's right of access to information and report on progress
5. Change the dominant culture within institutions to make them gender-responsive and within society to promote women's right of access to information, including by:
 - a. Engaging elected, appointed, community, traditional, and religious leaders to be vocal champions of women's right to information
 - b. Training government officials to be gender-sensitive and responsive
 - c. Decentralizing information, using media, libraries, community members, and other accessible mediums
 - d. Making people aware of women's right to information
 - e. Developing curriculum and using centers of education to teach about women's right of access to information and to enhance women's and girls' confidence in requesting information
6. Commission research and culturally rooted pilot projects on women's information needs, structural obstacles that hinder access, the role that information plays in women's increased political participation and leadership, best use of information and communication technologies to reach women with meaningful information, and the levers of change.
7. Mitigate risks and backlash faced by women who exercise the right of access to information.
8. Mobilize resources to support programmatic initiatives to secure women's right of access to information.

The Carter Center

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