



Theme: ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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Freeway

Accessing Information

Access to information has exploded all over the world, and we in Zambia have been greatly affected by it. Just think how the use of mobile phones has multiplied since the year 2000, to the great benefit of ordinary people, who formerly had little or no access to telephones. Yet access to information is not universal. We can speak to one another over great distances and exchange information by computer around the world. But, despite these amazing technical achievements, it is still often difficult to obtain information from certain sources, especially from governments and from other 'public' bodies. Hence Zambia's Access to Information Bill, about which we carry an article.

However, the immense range of information to be found in the press, on radio and from other public media has some necessary restrictions, especially with regard to matters of national security and personal privacy. Individual citizens have the right to privacy with regard to matters of a purely

personal nature, which do not affect society as a whole. These, of course, ought to be kept confidential to the persons concerned. Such matters include medical and educational records, pension entitlements, and many more.

Yet access to information of a personal nature, which individuals need from time to time in order to obtain requirements like pensions, licences, and services linked to health or education can sometimes be difficult to obtain. Resulting delays can waste valuable time and cause much frustration. So this is an area which deserves urgent attention.

A Public Institution Disappoints - The Editor

- *The Editor*

Publicity for poor performance is often useful, so we begin by reporting two recent examples where failure to provide information resulted in poor performance by an important public institution. Members of the public rarely complain about their bad experiences for fear of unwelcome consequences. So we cannot release actual

names. Instead we shall call our informants 'Annie' and 'Onnie'.

Annie wanted to obtain her first driving licence. So she went to the local office of the Road Transport & Safety Agency (RTSA). There she found that the officials responsible for testing applicants were not available, as they were abroad for training. But no one could tell her when they would return. Nor was there any waiting list on which to record her name. So Annie had to make several trips to find out if the testing staff were back, and then to join a large crowd of applicants, until she was finally tested and had her licence issued.

Onnie's experience was no better. He needed to replace his expired driving licence. At the RTSA office there was no notice to say where to apply or what documents were required. Nor was there an orderly queue in the reception area, just a crowd pushing to get attention. After obtaining and completing an application form Onnie was sent to a lady photographer. She fiddled around for a bit before telling him to take his form to the Manager. The Manager, another lady, set Onnie back to the photographer. The latter then took a photo and sent Onnie back to the Manager. All this without a word of explanation.

Now it was time to pay the licence fee. This meant going to a large office with numbered counters. There was nothing to show which counter Onnie should use, but No. 1 was marked 'Cashier'. So he joined that queue and waited for some 15 minutes. On reaching the counter he was told to go to No. 3. He protested that he had already waited for a while, so the cashier at No. 1 kindly accepted his money. A few minutes later the cashier handed him the licence. Onnie went out with it happily. But on inspecting the document he found it was marked 'Temporary Driving Licence'. So back he went to protest that he had applied for a permanent licence, not a temporary one. He was then told that full driving licences were only issued in Lusaka, which would take another month or so. Onnie recalled that the

application had a space for a cell number, which he had completed. But past experience with public offices told him that no one would call him, so he must keep on returning, despite the cost in time and travel, in order to check.

Experiences like those of Annie and Onnie are, of course, typical in Zambia. It is rare for governmental offices to take any trouble to give members of the public ready access to information. Requests for information tend to receive little attention, as most government officials regard themselves as masters, not servants.

The article in this issue by Uche Mbanefo, an African who lives in the U.S., describes the totally different situation in his adopted country. When will Zambia adopt such enlightened policies?

Note: The Editor told RTSA Head Office about the experiences of Annie and Onnie. He added that, instead of publishing a negative report, ZIPPA would gladly publish an article from RTSA about its plans to provide adequate information to customers. No fewer than three senior officials offered, one after the other, to write such an article. Alas, despite reminders, and although publication of the journal was held back to wait for it, no article was received.

An International Perspective

by Uche Mbanefo

Knowledge is power. This saying is true in all countries and cultures. So access to information means access to power.

Furthermore, accurate information is needed to make the right decisions, as well as to comply with the countless laws, rules, and regulations, which govern life in every modern society.

This article is based on my experience over many years as an American citizen, and it describes the ease with which the ordinary

person in the United States can access official information of concern to him or to her.

Highly developed countries tend to disseminate information more freely and more widely than poorer countries. Poverty, however, is not the sole, or even the primary, reason for the poor access to information in most poor countries. Attitudes of civil servants and corporate employees have a lot to do with it.

In the US, and in most developed countries, the consumer, whether of public or of private goods and services, is king. The civil servant or the corporate executive sees himself, or herself, as a true "servant", and the citizen or consumer as the "boss". But in poorer countries the reverse is often true. Most civil servants and business executives see themselves as the bosses, and the public as supplicants.

The correlation between national poverty and national corruption derives, in large measure, from restricted access to information, which creates opportunities for rent-seeking, corruption and nepotism for those public servants who are privileged to possess and control information.

In the USA, where I now live, every government department which deals with the public maintains a carefully designed internet web site publicizing its activities and inviting public feed-back on the quality of service it provides. Each government web site typically provides, not only an e-mail contact address, but also a phone number accessible free of charge to members of the public.

Most forms for such items as income tax returns, applications for passports and driver's licenses

- * Are available on line, and can often be completed and submitted on line without printing;

- * Come with many pages of detailed instructions written in plain English;

- * Start with general instructions about why

the form is needed, who should complete it, and any changes from the previous year, followed with line by line instructions dealing with each item on the form;

- * Include information on when, where, and how to file the form; an estimate of how long it should take to complete; the law or government regulation authorizing the collection of the information required by the form; and an invitation to the public to call or write to the department with any suggestions on how to improve the form, together with information on how long it took to complete it.

To further facilitate public access to information and public services, many essential government services, for example those dealing with education, health, police, etc., have been devolved to the state and local authorities. For those powers retained by the central government (e.g. issuing passports), the federal government has set up local offices to bring its services nearer to the people.

For example, an American can obtain a United States passport without setting foot in Washington DC, the federal capital. It is also possible to incorporate a non-profit company with only one visit to Baltimore in my state of Maryland.

Both federal and state governments have local tax offices, where one can pick up tax forms, ask questions, and, if one's income is below a certain level, get free help in completing income tax returns. All tax returns are filed, either on line, or by paper mail. Tax is paid mostly by a mailed cheque. I have never been to an office to file a tax return or pay my tax. Similarly, all tax refunds are mailed to the taxpayer.

Thanks to competition and an open economy, private sector corporations make even greater efforts than the government to get information about their goods and services to the public. In addition to numerous internet web sites, businesses send out tons of paper mail and

advertisements every day.

Almost every business of any size maintains a customer service department open, in some cases, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It provides information, answers questions, and solves most problems raised by customers.

Competition is one of the surest means of ensuring good access to information. For example, thirty years ago Zambia had only two daily newspapers, the Times of Zambia and the Daily Mail, both government owned. Most members of the public perceived these papers as handling government or political news with kid gloves, if at all. In the late 1980s a new daily, The Post, came on the scene. At first, few people took it seriously. However, it started to publish the kinds of information, especially political news, which could not be found in the Times or the Mail. It pulled no punches. It quickly became Zambia's most popular daily. People want information, which is neither censored, nor shows undue deference to the powers that be.

Access to information has become accepted as one of the key measures of development and well-being. It also reflects the culture of a democratic society, which involves public accountability and respect for individual rights. By ensuring easy access to accurate and prompt information, such a culture empowers taxpayers and consumers, rather than the people hired to serve them.

Author: Uche Mbanefo worked for 26 years for the World Bank in 30 countries. He now resides in the USA and in Zambia

Towards an Access to Information Act

By Andrew Sakala

It is commonly agreed that for citizens to fully participate in the governance of a country, the state must have a legal framework that will allow citizens to enjoy

their fundamental rights without unnecessary hurdles. This means that the constitution and subsidiary legislation must enable citizens to take part in all areas of governance, and the laws must also ensure that their rights are protected and promoted.

Among the laws that are critical for enabling citizens to participate in the affairs of the country are those that provide for freedom of expression and access to information held by public authorities. Since Zambia's return to multi-party democracy twenty years ago, there has been an increasing demand by the public for laws to be enacted that will allow them to participate fully in the governance of the country. While the present constitution provides for freedom of expression, the right to access information held by public authorities is not explicitly catered for.

However, most stakeholders, including the government, media, and civil society organizations, have agreed that a law to cater for access to information - also called freedom of information - is vital to enhance Zambia's democracy. It is especially important that the media, which is vital in a democratic country, can access information, to enable it to play its roles of informing, educating, entertaining the public.

An important part of this access concerns information held by public authorities. Such access is important to enable the media to perform its role of being a watchdog on the government, so as to help promote transparency and accountability.

Ten years ago a bill then called the Freedom of Information Bill was presented to parliament by then MMD government. But it was withdrawn after second reading in order, officials said, to allow for further consultations.

One of the key reasons for the withdrawal was that government needed to take into account changed circumstances arising

from the September 11 tragedy in America, lest the new law compromise the country's national security. For it was argued by many politicians that enacting such a law would lead to the exposure of state secrets, or of other information that would endanger national security.

Another reason raised by politicians both from the ruling party and the opposition was that the media could use such a law to invade the privacy of individuals, especially public figures. Still other opponents of the law claimed that such a law was being propagated by the media at the behest of donors.

Unfortunately a whole decade went by as government repeatedly said it was still consulting, until the MMD was voted out of power last year. But the change of government did not reduce the importance of enacting a law that allows citizens to obtain information from public authorities.

Instead there is now a mounting demand that the new government should do better than their predecessors by quickly making this law.

Since late last year there have been repeated assurances of the government's commitment to enable citizens to access information. But there appears to be hesitation to move beyond verbal assurances. This is evidenced by the number of unfulfilled promises since January this year, and by the latest announcement that the bill will be taken to parliament in January 2013.

At first sight arguments for protecting national security and the public interest, and for protecting the privacy of citizens seem to provide solid ground for enacting an access to information law, or else for enacting of a law fraught with so many exemptions as to make it irrelevant.

However, we must recognize that government and all public bodies are not secret societies, so whatever they do should

be open to public scrutiny. In a democracy, those who hold public office must be prepared to conduct the business of managing national affairs openly, and the information they hold must be accessible to be public.

Apart from that, running an open government that allows access to information promotes transparency and accountability in public office, and it allows the public to participate in governance.

Access to information is also important in preventing and fighting corruption, together with other vices that can be committed if public affairs are managed in secrecy. A sizeable number of politicians, top civil servants and senior military officers have recently appeared in courts on charges of theft and corrupt practices.

Moreover, information relating to the disposal of state assets, like Zamtel, or to development agreements with new owners of mines, has often been denied to the media and to the general public. This has put media institutions in situations where they publish half truths, or even rumours, because those who hold information refuse to release the facts.

To a large extent, vices committed by public officers, and misinformation or confusion on public policy can be attributed to lack of transparency and accountability, because access to information is restricted, so public authorities are under no obligation release information on request.

The role of the media, to inform, educate and entertain, as well as being a watchdog, is adversely affected by this continued denial of information for public consumption.

However, we must emphasize that the media and other proponents of an access to information law recognise that public security must always be protected, and also that there should no intrusion in the private life of individuals. In short, access to

information cannot be open ended. There must be exceptions, so as to strike a balance between providing information to the public and protecting the public from harm arising from too much disclosure. However, officials who withhold information, citing threats to public security, should be able to prove that disclosure of such information would indeed be harmful to public security.

In short, the exemptions should not be so broad as to defeat the objectives of enacting an Access to Information law. Rather, they should be intended to safeguard public interest and to prevent malicious invasion of privacy.

To conclude, a well crafted law on Access to Information should not be viewed as a threat by the government, but as an important tool in managing public affairs in a transparent and accountable manner. Information is power, and media that have sufficient access to information can play a vital role in empowering the public. An informed public is vital for national wellbeing.

*Author: **Andrew Sakala is one of Zambia's leading journalists. He writes in a personal capacity.***

Quotation

Show us the money - Africans need more transparency to benefit from their resource wealth

Barely a month goes by without a new oil discovery in Africa. Only five of the continent's 55 countries are neither producing oil nor exploring for oil. More places are also extracting lots of lucrative minerals. A resource bonanza is in train across the continent, generating big government revenues and real benefits for Africans. Road networks are expanding, public services are improving. But most of this happens behind a veil of secrecy. Money sloshes out of public scrutiny at the insistence of officials and politicians who prefer it that way.

Even if squeaky-clean Western multinationals are involved, transparency over payments for resources is minimal. Ordinary citizens can rarely find out how much goes into government kitties. This makes it easier for insiders to line their pockets.

From 'The Economist', 1st September 2012, with permission.

Misconceptions

By Madsen Pirie

'A national minimum wage prevents the exploitation of young workers'

Many young workers make less useful employees than those with a few years experience. They may have enthusiasm and energy, but have yet to learn the habits of work, and the preferred ways of doing things. They have to be trained, and to learn, and this costs time and attention. This disadvantage is made up by the lower wages generally paid to young employees; they may not yet be worth as much as older ones, but this is compensated for because they don't cost as much.

When the state sets a minimum wage, it is legislating to have young employees paid more than the market rate. In some sectors this is not a problem, but in others employers might find it not worthwhile to employ any at the required rate. The result in the US has been that whenever Congress has raised the minimum wage, there has been an increase youth unemployment.

It's like fixing the price of anything. You can't make it worth more than it actually is, but legislation can alter the supply, in this case of jobs. The UK minimum wage recognizes this by setting a lower rate for younger employees. Low wage campaigners don't like this, but it has ameliorated the youth unemployment that a standard minimum wage would have caused. If employers have to pay young

people the same rate as more useful employees, they are less likely to hire them. However, young people have an economic advantage when they cost less; it gives them a selling point when they might otherwise have none.

The great majority of top CEOs in the US started employment in a low wage job. If those jobs had been priced out of existence by high minimum wages, many of them might never have got that vital first start. Far from preventing the exploitation of young people, minimum wages can seriously damage their prospects.

From 'Freedom 101' by Dr. Madsen Pirie, with permission from Adam Smith Research Trust 2007, info@adamsmith.org

School Choice: Milton Friedman's Legacy

by Eustace Davie

In 1955 Milton Friedman introduced school choice as a way to improve the quality of American education. His idea was simple: give parents access to their children's public education funding rather than require they attend the government schools nearest to their homes.

'Governments could require a minimum level of education which they could finance by giving parents vouchers for a specified minimum sum per child per year if spent on approved educational services,' Friedman wrote in 1955. 'Parents would then be free to spend this sum and any additional sum from their own resources on purchasing educational services from an 'approved' institution of their own choice. The educational services could be provided by private enterprises operated for profit, or by non-profit institutions of various kinds. The role of the government would be limited to assuring that the schools met certain standards such as the inclusion of minimum common content in their programmes, much as it now inspects restaurants, to

ensure that they maintain certain minimum standards.

Because of vested interests in the education area, Friedman's suggestions were ignored at the time. And as a result the cost of public education in America doubled, while academic performance stayed the same. As Friedman noted, that shouldn't come as a surprise because that's exactly what monopolies do. They offer a product of similar, if not worse, value at a higher price than normally would be allowed if they had to compete in the free market.

But those days are over. Many states are broke, preventing them from spending more money on public schools. And many parents are fed up, wondering why their kids are underperforming or unmotivated and unprepared for their college courses and their future careers.

Because of that sentiment and the cash crunch, last year a historic number of choice programmes were enacted across the US. The Wall Street Journal called 2011 'The Year of School Choice'.

Today, 18 US states and the District of Columbia provide some type of private school choice for their residents. And more states continue to come online. Already in 2012, Virginia has joined the school choice 'family'; New Hampshire's legislature has passed a school choice measure; Florida and Arizona expanded their programmes; and Louisiana dramatically increased the scope of a school voucher programme.

Of course, no state has followed Friedman's vision entirely; i.e. school choice for all families. Indiana and Louisiana are close in that both make more than half their states' student populations eligible. But Friedman's vision was not for school choice to be just another government programme. He wanted to see school choice fundamentally change the way public education operates from its current structure that supports schools to a better model that empowers parents. Both rich families and poor ones

can receive government funding when their kids use public schools. And both rich and poor should be able to receive government funding for their kids to use vouchers.

It took America more than 50 years to reach today's empowerment in education celebrated - not ridiculed. Moving forward, the late Milton Friedman's voucher idea is more important than ever, for it is the tool that advocates can use to navigate the new world for school choice which they helped to discover.

Author: Eustace Davie, Director, Free Market Foundation.

The Third Industrial Revolution

The digitisation of manufacturing will transform the way goods are made-and change the politics of jobs too.

Apr 21st 2012 | from The Economist print edition (With permission)

THE first industrial revolution began in Britain in the late 18th century, with the mechanisation of the textile industry. Tasks previously done laboriously by hand in hundreds of weavers' cottages were brought together in a single cotton mill, and the factory was born. The second industrial revolution came in the early 20th century, when Henry Ford mastered the moving assembly line and ushered in the age of mass production. The first two industrial revolutions made people richer and more urban. Now a third revolution is under way. Manufacturing is going digital. As this week's special report argues, this could change not just business, but much else besides.

A number of remarkable technologies are converging: clever software, novel materials, more dexterous robots, new processes (notably three-dimensional printing) and a whole range of web-based services. The factory of the past was based on cranking out zillions of identical products: Ford famously said that car-buyers could have any colour they liked, as long as it was

black. But the cost of producing much smaller batches of a wider variety, with each product tailored precisely to each customer's whims, is falling. The factory of the future will focus on mass customisation-and may look more like those weavers' cottages than Ford's assembly line.

Towards a third dimension

The old way of making things involved taking lots of parts and screwing or welding them together. Now a product can be designed on a computer and "printed" on a 3D printer, which creates a solid object by building up successive layers of material. The digital design can be tweaked with a few mouseclicks. The 3D printer can run unattended, and can make many things which are too complex for a traditional factory to handle. In time, these amazing machines may be able to make almost anything, anywhere-from your garage to an African village.

The applications of 3D printing are especially mind-boggling. Already, hearing aids and high-tech parts of military jets are being printed in customised shapes. The geography of supply chains will change. An engineer working in the middle of a desert who finds he lacks a certain tool no longer has to have it delivered from the nearest city. He can simply download the design and print it. The days when projects ground to a halt for want of a piece of kit, or when customers complained that they could no longer find spare parts for things they had bought, will one day seem quaint.

Other changes are nearly as momentous. New materials are lighter, stronger and more durable than the old ones. Carbon fibre is replacing steel and aluminium in products ranging from aeroplanes to mountain bikes. New techniques let engineers shape objects at a tiny scale. Nanotechnology is giving products enhanced features, such as bandages that help heal cuts, engines that run more efficiently and crockery that cleans more easily. Genetically engineered viruses are

being developed to make items such as batteries. And with the internet allowing ever more designers to collaborate on new products, the barriers to entry are falling. Ford needed heaps of capital to build his colossal River Rouge factory; his modern equivalent can start with little besides a laptop and a hunger to invent.

Like all revolutions, this one will be disruptive. Digital technology has already rocked the media and retailing industries, just as cotton mills crushed hand looms and the Model T put farriers out of work. Many people will look at the factories of the future and shudder. They will not be full of grimy machines manned by men in oily overalls. Many will be squeaky clean-and almost deserted. Some carmakers already produce twice as many vehicles per employee as they did only a decade or so ago. Most jobs will not be on the factory floor but in the offices nearby, which will be full of designers, engineers, IT specialists, logistics experts, marketing staff and other professionals. The manufacturing jobs of the future will require more skills. Many dull, repetitive tasks will become obsolete: you no longer need riveters when a product has no rivets.

The revolution will affect not only how things are made, but where. Factories used to move to low-wage countries to curb labour costs. But labour costs are growing less and less important: a \$499 first-generation iPad included only about \$33 of manufacturing labour, of which the final assembly in China accounted for just \$8. Offshore production is increasingly moving back to rich countries not because Chinese wages are rising, but because companies now want to be closer to their customers so that they can respond more quickly to changes in demand. And some products are so sophisticated that it helps to have the people who design them and the people who make them in the same place. The Boston Consulting Group reckons that in areas such as transport, computers, fabricated metals and machinery, 10-30% of the goods that America now imports from China could be made at home by 2020,

boosting American output by \$20 billion-55 billion a year.

The shock of the new

Consumers will have little difficulty adapting to the new age of better products, swiftly delivered. Governments, however, may find it harder. Their instinct is to protect industries and companies that already exist, not the upstarts that would destroy them. They shower old factories with subsidies and they bully bosses who want to move production abroad. They spend billions backing the new technologies which they, in their wisdom, think will prevail. And they cling to a romantic belief that manufacturing is superior to services, let alone finance.

None of this makes sense. The lines between manufacturing and services are blurring. Rolls-Royce no longer sells jet engines; it sells the hours that each engine is actually thrusting an aeroplane through the sky. Governments have always been lousy at picking winners, and they are likely to become more so, as legions of entrepreneurs and tinkerers swap designs on-line, turn them into products at home and market them globally from a garage. As the revolution rages, governments should stick to the basics: better schools for a skilled workforce, clear rules and a level playing field for enterprises of all kinds. Leave the rest to the revolutionaries.

Our Next Two Journals

a) Special Issue on Jobs

Mid November will have a special issue: 'How to Promote Employment'. Jobs-especially for youths - are today's burning issue. But how can we promote them? Workable ideas are scarce. This special issue will provide new, practical answers.

b) The 2013 Budget

Can ABC's Budget for 2013 really bring Development? And what is Social Justice?

You can contribute to the January - March Journal. Contact the Editor at zipmail@gmail.com



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