

The Uganda NGO RIO + 10 Coalition Position Paper on Access to Information legislation for Uganda in relation to the WSSD.

As the Uganda NGO Rio+10 Coalition¹ has been assessing Compliance with Agenda 21 and other international agreements, a number of issues have arisen which we strongly feel deserve immediate attention.

Freedom of Access to information legislation for Uganda.

The right of the public to access official records and place the process of government under scrutiny is one of the *defining characteristics of Democracy*.

Public access to government information is a fundamental tenet of self-government.

Central to this is the right to freedom of Environmental information.

This is particularly important for purposes of enhancing:

- accountability and transparency in making decisions that impact on the environment.
- and those relating to the appropriation, management and utilisation of natural resources.

We therefore call:

- For the Government to speed up the passing of the law on access to information and operationalise it.
- The timely access, provision and use of relevant and reliable data and information in all areas of socio – economic and political development.
- A clear and standardised access to information to ease the transfer of information technology
- The establishing of an enabling environment to enhance the adoption and practice of information technology.
- Mainstreaming gender in the information generation and transfer.
- For enactment of a freedom of information legislation, which *inter – alia* should secure the public right of access to environmental information as stipulated in the National Environment statute and amplified in the constitution.

Also;

Clearly **OUTLINE** the parameters for the right to freedom of information as well as the procedures for accessing the information.

IMPORTANT

The scope of the exceptions and review mechanisms in cases of denial.

Recognising that we are living in a globalizing world, this call is therefore not unique to Uganda.

For example the European Union (EU) directed on freedom of access to environmental information.

By its very nature the directive has created a right of access to environmental information in every member state of the EU, so this is possible.

On the International scene, we call for the following regarding access to environmental information:

- Access to information should be mandatory at both national and international.

¹ The Uganda NGO Rio + 10 Coalition, made up of up to 50 NGOs has as its backbone, the NGO focus groups. The Coalition has since October 2001, been carrying out assessment of Uganda's progress in implementing Agenda 21 and other commitments of the Earth Summit (1992), Rio de Janeiro – Brazil.

For Further Information please contact:

The Project Coordinator, Uganda NGO Rio + 10 Coalition c/o JEEP Box 4264 Kampala Tel: 256 41 267303

Fax: (c/o MS Uganda) 256 41 530765 Email: jeep@imul.com

- Access to advanced science and technology for information gathering, analysis and dissemination.
- Establish and strengthen the existing information networks with the local information systems.
- Access to international financial institutions that are inclined to enhance the adoption and use of information.

Further more,

As the right of access to environmental information has developed within a global context, roots are traceable to the Stockholm Conference, the right of access to environmental information has been reiterated in various international soft law instruments including the Rio declaration and its sister instrument Agenda 21.

Its therefore of paramount concern that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) should leap, way above the traditional rhetoric and secure freedom of environmental information in all states as this is of importance if we are ever to realise rational use of the worlds resources.