

SALY DELCARATATION ON WOMEN'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE

December 10, 2020

PREAMBLE

In the light of the negative impact of the widespread unfair denial of the rights of women to communicate, including their economic, social, political and civil rights across West Africa;

Aware of the many regional and international instruments that recognise the need to promote women's access to information, and their rights to communicate;

Cognisant of the crucial importance of Access To Information (ATI) as an individual human right, a cornerstone of democracy and also as a means to ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental human freedoms, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration which provides for the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers;

Reaffirming Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which states that everyone has the right to express his or her views without interference;

Having regard to Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which states that everyone has the right to information;

Considering also Sections J1 and J2 of the Beijing Declaration recommend that States should ensure women's equal access to information and communication;

Bearing in mind that Article 35 of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Gender Equality calls on States to ensure women's access to information and communication;

And that Article 9 of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Fighting Corruption states that each State Party shall adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the right of access to any information that is required to assist in the fight against corruption and related offences;

Taking into considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16.10 that clearly states that all countries commit themselves to guaranteeing public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements;

And also Article 6 of the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration that requires public administrations to make information on procedures and formalities relating to the provision of public services available to users;

Cognisant that Article 14 (2.a) and Article 4 (f) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights demand that State parties take all necessary measures to ensure women's access to adequate health services at affordable costs and reasonable distances, including information, education and communication programmes for women, particularly those living in rural areas and to establish mechanisms and accessible services to ensure information, rehabilitation and effective compensation for women victims of violence;

Recognising that Article 35 of the harmonized framework of the Supplementary Act on the Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information in the West African Space states that Member States shall put in place policies and laws relating to information and communication technologies in the area of social, cultural and economic development aimed at strengthening the capacities and skills of women and girls by ensuring their access to information, communication and technologies, irrespective of race, age, religion or social class;

We, participants from Governments, Media, Civil Society, Inter-Governmental bodies, from eleven (11) West African countries (Senegal, Cote d'ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, The Gambia, Mali, Togo, and Liberia) meeting in Saly-Senegal on December 8-10, 2020, under the aegis of Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) and its partners, adopt the following Declaration:

TO ECOWAS

- *To fast track the implementation of the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region that was adopted by the 47th Ordinary Session of the Conference of the Heads of State and Governments held in Accra, Ghana, on May 19, 2015*

TO GOVERNMENTS

- I. Set up information and documentation centres (physical and digital) to facilitate access to information for citizens, especially women;*
- II. Decentralize and Digitalize access to information that will enhance proper records and data management;*

- III. *Produce gender-specific data to enable (i) women to make informed decisions and also to better participate in governance; and (ii) capacitate the media to produce comprehensive and gender-sensitive information;*
- IV. *Amend any law(s) that limit women's access to information and to communicate;*
- V. *Encourage countries that already have access to information laws to amend their laws to specifically recognize and guarantee women's rights of access to information and to ensure that the implementation of these laws specifically give effect to women's rights of access to information;*
- VI. *Countries that do not have ATI laws are encouraged to review their laws where necessary to specifically recognize and guarantee women's rights of ATI;*
- VII. *Countries that do not have independent ATI bodies, create Independent Commissions for monitoring Access to Information and Administrative Documents;*
- VIII. *Countries that do not have ATI laws are encouraged to adopt laws incorporating women's rights of ATI.*
- IX. *Public institutions be provided with the resources they require to effectively implement the ATI laws.*

TO MEDIA AND JOURNALISM TRAINING SCHOOLS

- I. *Integrate gender modules into training schools*
- II. *Encourage the creation of national and regional networks of journalists for access to information; and encourage women journalists to be more active and committed in these networks.*

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS.

- I. *Identify, and document good practices in countries where implementation of Access to Information laws exist, especially for women's access to information, and access to information on women, that could be shared with other countries in the sub-region;*
- II. *Sensitize the media and civil society organizations on the issues of women's access to information and right to communicate, so that they can better promote women's rights of access to information and right to communicate;*

- III. *Involve the media and civil society organisations in the process of monitoring the implementation of access to information programmes and activities, especially on how women's rights to information and communication are taken into account as part of this process;*
- IV. *Advocate and lobby Parliaments to improve access and to make provisions for women to access information;*
- V. *Engage and educate the public on the provisions of ATI laws especially the gender components of the law;*
- VI. *Enlighten the public on focal persons to access information in the different Ministries, Departments and Agencies and to advocate for the appointment of focal persons in countries where such do not exist;*
- VII. *Advocate for the abolishment of Religious and cultural norms and practices in communities that have negative impact on women's rights and autonomy on information and communication.*

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