

How African States can ensure access to information and the right to a healthy environment

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Access to Environmental Information in Africa

Why the ACHPR Resolution 657 (2026) on access to information and the right to a healthy environment matters

In March 2026, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted the landmark **Resolution 657 (2026) on access to information and the right to a healthy environment**. The resolution highlights the importance of access to information (ATI) — a right provided in Article 9 of the African Charter — as an enabler for the realisation of Article 24 on the right to a satisfactory environment favourable to development.

● What Makes this Resolution Important?

It is the first dedicated ACHPR resolution focused on access to climate and environmental information. The resolution is significant because it:

- **Recognises access to climate and environmental information** as a cornerstone of environmental protection, sustainable development, and meaningful public participation.
- **Links access to environmental information to the effective enjoyment of existing human rights**, including the right to freedom of expression.
- **Provides practical guidance to States** on improving transparency, proactive disclosure and access to environmental information.
- **Recognises the essential role of climate and environmental journalists** in informing the public and promoting accountability, and calls for measures to ensure they can safely access environmental information.
- **Extends transparency expectations to the private sector**, particularly businesses operating in high-impact sectors such as mining, energy, agribusiness, and infrastructure, by emphasising environmental and human rights due diligence.

● Why Should Policymakers Care About Access To Environmental Information?

Access to environmental information helps States achieve their development priorities and commitments under [Agenda 2063](#) and the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

Many of the objectives under **Agenda 2063's Aspiration 1** — including sustainable natural resource management, climate resilience, agricultural transformation, food security, biodiversity conservation and inclusive economic growth — depend on timely and reliable access to information.

Access to information also advances **Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063**, which aims to ensure that African citizens actively participate in decision-making on social, economic, political, and environmental issues.

These aspirations are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Access to environmental information is a practical tool that helps States advance both agendas by:

- **Driving sustainable economic growth and attracting responsible investment:** Transparency and access to environmental information strengthen investor confidence, improve governance in sectors such as mining, energy, agriculture, forestry, and infrastructure, and support sustainable trade and long-term economic growth. **(SDGs 1, 8 and 9)**
- **Strengthening climate resilience, disaster preparedness and food security:** Timely access to climate and environmental information supports early warning systems, disaster risk reduction, and informed decision-making on land use, water management, and agricultural production, helping to protect lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems while strengthening resilience to climate change. **(SDGs 2, 3, 11, 13 and 15)**
- **Improving environmental governance and the sustainable management of natural resources:** Access to environmental information enables governments, businesses, and communities to monitor compliance with environmental laws, strengthen oversight of forests, water resources, biodiversity, and extractive industries, and to reduce corruption and illegal exploitation. **(SDGs 6, 14, 15 and 16)**
- **Enabling meaningful public participation and reducing environmental conflict:** Open access to environmental information enables communities to participate effectively in environmental decision-making, strengthens

trust in public institutions, and helps prevent disputes over land, natural resources, and environmental impacts. (SDGs 11 and 16)

- **Supporting transparent, accountable and evidence-based decision-making:** Access to environmental information enables informed policymaking, strengthens public oversight, improves accountability, and supports the effective implementation of environmental, climate, and sustainable development commitments. (SDGs 13 and 16)

● The Role of Journalism in Ensuring Public Access to Environmental Information

- **Informing the public:** Producing accurate, verified, and balanced reporting that enables informed public debate and decision-making on climate and environmental issues.
- **Bridging information gaps:** Explaining government policies, communicating community concerns, and amplifying local and Indigenous knowledge to ensure diverse perspectives inform environmental decision-making.
- **Supporting preparedness and resilience:** Disseminating timely information on environmental risks, disasters, and adaptation measures, which enable communities to prepare for and respond to environmental and climate-related threats.
- **Promoting accountability:** Exposing illegal natural resource exploitation, pollution, corruption, and failures in environmental governance, and holding governments and businesses to account.
- **Countering misinformation and disinformation:** Verifying claims, debunking false or misleading narratives, and providing trusted information during climate and environmental crises.

The Value Of Protecting Journalism → A UNESCO Study

- Countries with declining press freedom experience slower economic growth.
- Every \$1 invested in investigative journalism can generate more than \$100 in public value.
- Disinformation costs societies an estimated US\$350-500 billion every year.
- Greater access to free media is linked to fewer human rights violations.
- News coverage can mobilise life-saving humanitarian assistance.

● How to Promote Access to Environmental Information

→ A. Identifying the Common Challenges to Accessing Environmental Information

Despite progress in access to information frameworks across Africa, climate and environmental journalists and communities continue to encounter common barriers when seeking environmental information. These include:

- **Weak implementation of access to information laws**, resulting in delays, non-response, and inconsistent disclosure of environmental information.
- **Limited proactive disclosure of environmental information**, including environmental impact assessments, licences, permits, pollution monitoring data, compliance reports, and other information needed throughout the lifecycle of environmental projects.
- **Information that is difficult to access or use**, including records that are fragmented across institutions, published in inaccessible formats or technical language, or unavailable in local languages.
- **Legal and administrative barriers**, including fragmented legal frameworks, lengthy information request procedures, and unnecessary restrictions on accreditation or access to environmentally significant sites.
- **Threats and reprisals against those seeking and reporting environmental information**, including intimidation, harassment, and other actions that undermine public interest environmental reporting.

→ B. Implementing Key Recommendations of ACHPR Resolution 657 (2026) for Africa

The ACHPR resolution calls on States to:

- **Ensure unimpeded access to environmental information**

Facilitate unimpeded access to information for journalists, human rights defenders, and communities affected by climate and environmental issues, including through proactive disclosure, the removal of undue administrative and practical barriers, and the promotion of linguistic diversity and accessible formats, particularly for local and Indigenous communities.

- **Strengthen and implement access to information laws**

Adopt, review, and effectively implement national access to information legislation in line with the Model Law on Access to Information in Africa and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, including by ensuring that information relating to the environment and climate change is proactively disclosed.

- **Protect journalists and environmental defenders**

Prevent, investigate, and remedy harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest or detention, and other reprisals against journalists and environmental human rights defenders seeking, receiving, or imparting information on environmental harm, climate impacts, and the exploitation of natural resources, and ensure accountability for such violations.

- **Prevent abusive litigation that restricts public participation**

Take legislative, administrative, and judicial measures to deter and address vexatious, harassing, or abusive litigation that unduly restricts public participation in environmental matters, including by providing procedural safeguards, timely legal aid, and effective remedies for victims.

- **Promote transparency and accountability in the private sector**

Ensure that business enterprises, particularly those operating in the extractive, energy, agribusiness, and infrastructure sectors, conduct human rights and environmental due diligence, including by promoting transparency, meaningful public participation, and access to relevant environmental and climate-related information.

→ C. Turning the Resolution into Action: Five Practical Measures for States

- **Strengthen proactive disclosure and records management:** Proactively publish environmental impact assessments, audits, pollution monitoring data, licensing decisions, and monitoring reports. Designate information officers within relevant agencies to coordinate disclosure and ensure timely responses to information requests.
- **Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks:** Review and align national laws with ACHPR Resolution 657 (2026), the Model Law on Access to Information for Africa, and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa. Train public officials on access to environmental information obligations and ensure that institutions responsible for implementing ATI laws are adequately resourced.
- **Remove barriers to environmental reporting:** Eliminate unnecessary administrative barriers to accessing environmental information, establish transparent accreditation and site-access procedures for journalists reporting from protected areas and other environmentally significant sites, and promote regular engagement between environmental authorities and the media to ensure timely responses to information requests.
- **Promote transparency and accountability in the private sector:** Require businesses, particularly those operating in high-impact sectors, to disclose relevant environmental and social information and engage meaningfully with affected communities throughout the lifecycle of environmental projects.
- **Protect public interest reporting and participation:** Investigate attacks, intimidation, and other reprisals against journalists and environmental human rights defenders, hold perpetrators accountable, and adopt legal safeguards, including measures against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), to prevent abusive litigation that undermines public participation in environmental matters.

Key Resources

Key regional and international standards

- [ACHPR Resolution 657 \(2026\) on Access to Information and the Right to a Healthy Environment](#)
- [Model Law on Access to Information for Africa \(2013\)](#)
- [ACHPR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa \(2019\)](#)
- [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development \(1992\)](#)

Climate governance and policy

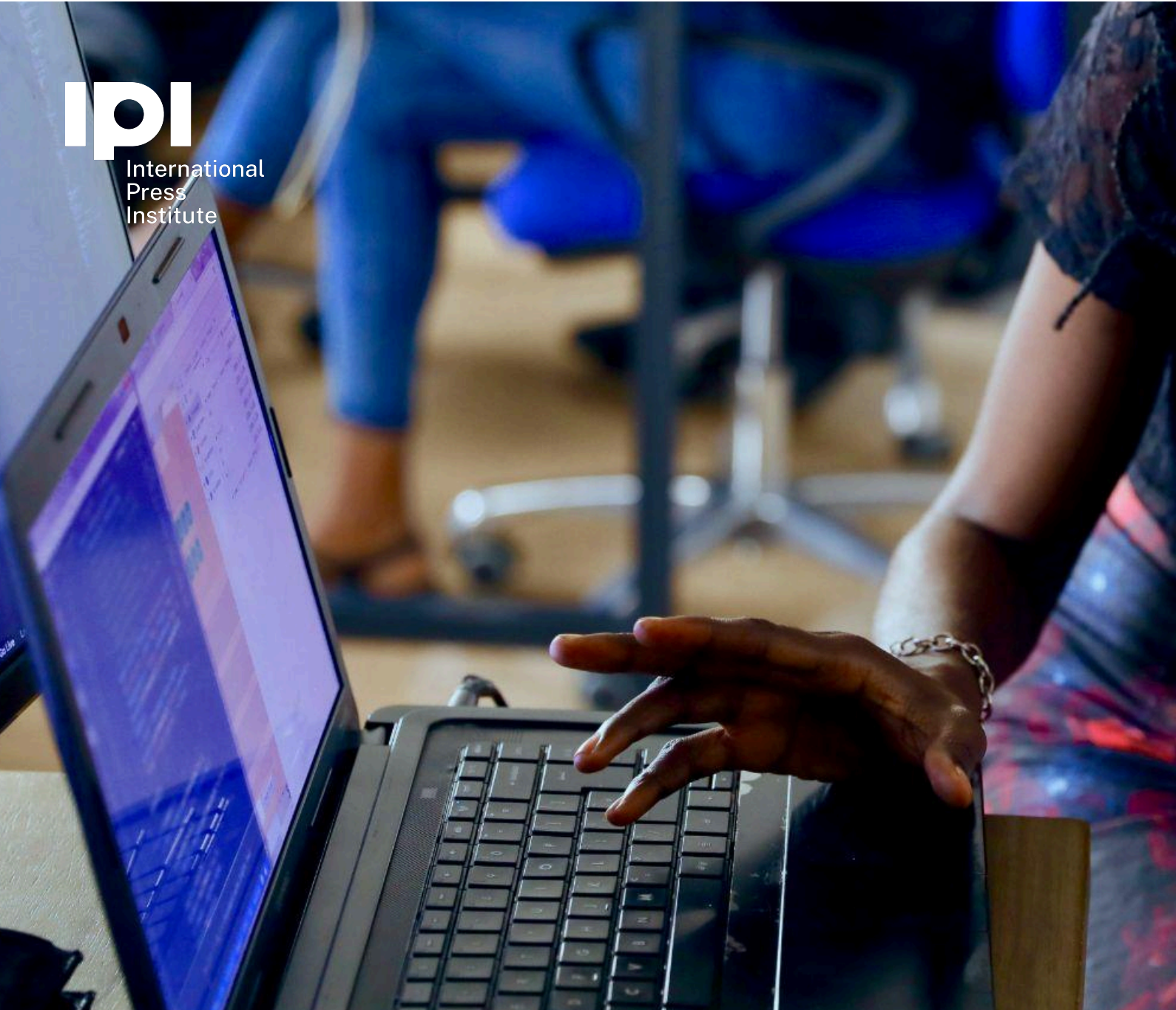
- [African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan \(2022–2032\)](#)
- [African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want](#)
- [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change \(2025\)](#)

Practical tools and guidance

- [Methodology for Assessing the Quality of Implementation of Right to Information Laws](#)
- [Global Right to Information Rating](#)
- [M20 Policy Brief 3: Information Integrity on Climate Change Must Be an Integral Pillar of the G20 Agenda](#)



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