

Malawi public institutions secretive - MISA Malawi

 By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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Research by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has revealed that secrecy still prevails in government and public institutions in Malawi. The Ministry of Agriculture emerged the most open and accessible government department.

MISA Malawi information officer Augustine Mulomole announced at an event held in Lilongwe on Tuesday, 28 September 2010, that the Golden Padlock Award, given to a public institution which is most secretive with information, goes to the Road Traffic Department.

Chirwa defends Road Traffic Department

There was drama at Cross Roads Cresta Hotel when Road Traffic Department (RTD) director James Chirwa dashed off from the event in protest before returning minutes later to defend his institution.

"You cannot use criteria imported from other countries to determine our stand on access to information because this is unjustified," he protested, "I am surprised we are being given a lock, meaning; we were very open and accessible and now you want us to stop."

Mulomole described the research which adopted the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection as having used criteria which was very correct and suitable.

Websites assessed

Websites for the selected government and public institutions were assessed to find out which among them had the most useful, relevant information and well or poorly organised websites. Letters were sent requesting information from the selected institutions seeking specific information to check if they are open with information.

Three key public institutions namely the Office of the Administrator General, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Road Traffic Department had no websites.

"There is simply no justifiable reason for the Road Traffic Department to operate without a website with the vast amount of resources that it wallows in," observed the report.

Limited info available

In Malawi, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Electricity Supply Cooperation of Malawi, the Immigration Department, ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health, Information and Civic Education, the Offices of the Administrator General and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions as well as the Road Traffic Department were researched.

While seven out the ten institutions surveyed had websites and most contained current and updated information, none contained any information on budgets and expenditure, while most of them contained no information on employment and procurement procedures.

The research concluded that the Road Traffic Department makes it close to impossible for members of the public to access information.

The report is titled *'Right to Know' - Government secrecy in an information age, A report on open and secretive public institutions in Southern Africa* covered several Southern African countries.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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