



# BEYOND LEGISLATION

## MAKING RTI WORK AGAINST CORRUPTION IN EAST AFRICA

**POLICY BRIEF**  
APRIL 2026



# Right to Information and the Fight Against Corruption in East Africa:

## Trends and Challenges in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda

This research has been conducted as part of Transparency International's I1-country project on Stopping Impunity for Corruption through Enhanced Accountability (SICEA) implemented in four regions of the African continent (Central, East, Southern, and West Africa). The East Africa report is a joint publication of three Transparency International Chapters in East Africa, with TI-Uganda as the regional Hub. The National Chapters in Kenya (Transparency International Kenya), Rwanda, (Transparency International Rwanda,) and Uganda, (Transparency International Uganda) contributed material for this work. Transparency International would like to thank Dr. Japheth Biegon, Ms. Hlengiwe Dube and Dr. Liliane Mouan

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# Introduction

## Introduction: The Right to Information and Corruption in East Africa

**C**orruption continues to undermine democratic governance, development and human rights across East Africa.<sup>1</sup> Procurement fraud, opaque budgeting and elite capture persist despite the existence of formal accountability frameworks. In this context, the Right to Information (RTI) is a critical anti-corruption tool. It enables citizens, journalists and civil society organisations to scrutinise public decision-making, expose abuses of power and strengthen oversight.

This policy brief draws on research conducted to assess the state of implementation of the right to freedom of information in Africa relating to anti-corruption as provided for in relevant international and regional treaties and instruments. The Brief draws on the East African research which focused on Kenya,

Rwanda, and Uganda during 2024–2025, and draws from both primary and secondary data sources. The research shows that the RTI is recognised in the legal frameworks of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, though with important differences in scope and strength. Kenya provides the strongest constitutional protection, extending access to information to both public and private bodies where information is required to exercise rights. Uganda’s framework is more limited, focusing primarily on public bodies and lacking a public interest override. Rwanda’s Constitution is less explicit, but its statutory framework is comparatively progressive, covering private actors performing public-interest functions and including a public interest override.<sup>2</sup>

In principle, RTI laws in all three countries broadly align with regional and international standards. In

1 JEPA (2025) The Cost of Corruption: Navigating Risk and Opportunity in East Africa’s Business Landscape — JEPA

2 GoR (2013) Rwanda Law No. 04/2013 Relating to Access to Information [https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RGB/Publications/LAWS\\_AND\\_REGULATIONS/LAW\\_ACCESS\\_TO\\_INFORMATION-08-02-2013.pdf](https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/LAWS_AND_REGULATIONS/LAW_ACCESS_TO_INFORMATION-08-02-2013.pdf)

practice, implementation remains inconsistent. Strong legal provisions do not reliably translate into timely or meaningful access to information. Oversight arrangements vary significantly, with Kenya having the most developed enforcement framework. Overall, RTI remains more firmly established in law than in everyday governance across the region.

### Barriers to effective implementation

Several structural and institutional barriers continue to limit the effectiveness of RTI in East Africa. Weak enforcement and broad exemptions allow public authorities to deny or delay access to information with limited accountability. A persistent culture of secrecy discourages disclosure and normalises non-compliance. Low public awareness and fear of reprisals reduce demand for information, particularly among journalists and civil society actors.

Shrinking civic space further constrains the use of RTI, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor record-keeping and limited digitisation slow responses and undermine proactive disclosure. Financial constraints and weak information and communications technology infrastructure affect implementation, particularly at local level. Digital divides, literacy gaps and gender inequalities exclude many people from accessing information, even where legal rights exist.

### Implications for policy and practice

Across Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the findings show that strengthening RTI requires better implementation rather than new legal recognition. Legal frameworks should be clarified to include clear harm tests, mandatory public interest overrides and enforceable disclosure obligations. Proactive publication of corruption-related information, including procurement and audit data, should be institutionalised. Oversight bodies need adequate resources, independence and authority to issue binding decisions. Public awareness and inclusive access must be strengthened to ensure that RTI benefits all citizens.

Country-specific priorities differ. Kenya should fast-track the adoption of a national RTI policy, adequately resource the Commission on Administrative Justice, enforce proactive disclosure obligations and improve records management and digitisation. Uganda should establish an independent RTI oversight body, increase public awareness of access to information rights and strengthen protection for journalists, activists and information requesters. Rwanda should expand public awareness of RTI, designate a government institution responsible for overseeing the enforcement of the Access to Information Law or give the same rights to the Office of Ombudsman and create a more enabling environment for civil society and the media to use RTI effectively.

# 1

## Policy Recommendation

## Strengthen Proactive Publication in East Africa

**B**ased on the findings of the report, the first policy recommendation urges the regional institutions such as the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union (AU) to play a more active role in encouraging and guiding Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda to strengthen proactive publication mandates as a core element of RTI implementation and anti-corruption reforms. In these countries, access to information systems continue to rely heavily on individual requests, which are often delayed, denied, or discouraged through broad exemptions and administrative barriers. This reactive approach limits the practical value of RTI and reinforces discretionary secrecy, particularly in politically sensitive and corruption-prone sectors.

Developing regional guidance on proactive disclosure would help shift transparency from a request-driven model to a routine administrative practice. The EAC Secretariat, in collaboration with the AU and with support from development partners, could convene a process to develop such guidance for East African states. Although this would not require new legislation, it would require institutional coordination, technical

drafting and modest financial support. The process should encourage member states to strengthen and expand proactive publication requirements so that they cover high-value and high-risk information, including procurement plans and contracts, audit reports, budget execution data, beneficial ownership information and reports of oversight institutions. Clear guidance on minimum disclosure categories, formats and publication timelines would promote greater consistency across countries and reduce uneven implementation.

Proactive disclosure is more reliable than case-by-case access to information requests because it does not depend on citizen awareness, legal literacy, or willingness to challenge authorities. In contexts of shrinking civic space and fear of reprisals, routine publication ensures that information enters the public domain without exposing individual requesters to risk. Evidence from the region shows that where procurement and budget data are published systematically, opportunities for corruption are reduced, and oversight by parliaments, auditors, media, civil society, private sector and others is strengthened.

Regional peer learning can support this agenda by promoting the replication of effective practices. Rwanda and Uganda's digital procurement platforms and Kenya's expanding open data and proactive disclosure obligations provide practical examples that can be adapted across the region. The EAC and AU should facilitate technical exchanges between information officers, audit institutions, and procurement authorities to share lessons on digitalisation, records management, and publication standards.

The recommendation does not require new legislation in most countries but rather political commitment to enforce existing obligations and clarify regulations. By prioritising proactive publication, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda can transform RTI from a reactive legal right into a preventative governance tool that systematically reduces corruption risks and strengthens accountability across East Africa.

Call to action for different stakeholders in strengthening proactive publication

### **1. For the AU and the EAC**

Convene a regional process to develop non-binding guidance on proactive disclosure, including minimum categories of information for publication, recommended formats and publication timelines.

Support peer exchange among member states on practical approaches to proactive disclosure, including digital publication, records management and monitoring of compliance.

### **2. For Governments**

Enforce and clarify existing proactive disclosure requirements through regulations and administrative guidance, ensuring routine publication of high-value and high-risk information, including procurement plans and contracts, audit reports, budget execution data and reports of oversight institutions.

Define minimum disclosure categories, formats and timelines for proactive publication across national and sub-national authorities, supported by clear accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

### **3. For Development partners**

Support the EAC and the AU in developing regional guidance and peer learning initiatives on proactive publication, including shared benchmarks and good practice exchange.

### **4. Civil society organisations and the media**

Track whether public institutions publish required information proactively, particularly in procurement and budgeting, and publish findings to support accountability and reform.

# 2

## Policy Recommendation

## Support Peer Learning as Drivers of RTI Implementation in East Africa

**T**o bridge the persistent gap between formal RTI commitments and implementation in East Africa, the EAC and AU should institutionalise regular peer learning mechanisms focused specifically on RTI and transparency reforms. A structured regional process would help move RTI from declaratory compliance to practical enforcement.

At the EAC level, a periodic peer learning mechanism on access to information could assess legal clarity, enforcement practice, proactive disclosure and protection of information users. Reviews should be evidence-based, drawing on data from oversight bodies, civil society and media, and should culminate in public recommendations with clear follow-up timelines. At the AU level, RTI implementation could be strengthened more systematically into reporting under the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), reinforcing

**A structured regional process would help move RTI from declaratory compliance to practical enforcement.**

continental norms and political accountability.

Beyond compliance monitoring, regional platforms should actively foster peer learning and replication of good practice. East African states face similar structural barriers including broad exemptions, weak oversight, limited digitisation and low public awareness, making horizontal learning particularly valuable. Kenya's Commission on Administrative Justice, with

its power to issue binding RTI orders, offers a practical model for strengthening enforcement that could inform reforms in Uganda and Rwanda. Similarly, Rwanda and Uganda's e-procurement and digital government platforms demonstrate how digitisation can support proactive disclosure and reduce discretion in high-risk corruption sectors.

Regional workshops, technical exchanges and practitioner networks involving oversight institutions, information officers and civil society actors would enable adaptation of these innovations to different political and administrative contexts.

**Call to action for key stakeholders in strengthening peer learning on RTI**

### **1. For AU and EAC**

The AU, through the APRM, should lead peer review on RTI implementation, while the EAC can support dialogue and technical exchange among member states

### **2. For Development partners**

Provide financial and technical support to regional peer review, practitioner exchanges and learning platforms on access to information, including support for data collection, facilitation and follow-up.

Use policy dialogue and programme design to ensure that lessons emerging from regional peer learning are translated into concrete national reforms, particularly in oversight, enforcement and proactive disclosure.

### **3. Civil society organisations**

Document and share evidence on RTI implementation, including patterns of non-compliance and good practice, to inform regional peer review and accountability processes.

**3****Policy  
Recommendation**

## Close a Key Accountability Gap between Whistleblowing and the Right to Information

**R**egional anti-corruption frameworks at the EAC and AU levels should more deliberately integrate whistle-blower protection and RTI implementation as mutually reinforcing accountability tools. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) requires State Parties to adopt measures for both public access to information (Article 10) and protection of reporting persons (Article 33), reflecting a global consensus that transparency and safe disclosure are jointly essential to preventing and detecting corruption. International best practice guidance from the World Bank, OECD or Transparency International likewise treats transparency laws and safe reporting channels as interdependent pillars of integrity systems.<sup>3</sup> Empirical research supports this integrated model. Studies of corruption detection mechanisms consistently show that insider reporting

is among the most significant sources of uncovering fraud and corruption, particularly when supported by documentary evidence.

In Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, whistleblowing and RTI are often treated as separate policy areas, resulting in fragmented legal frameworks and missed opportunities to expose and address corruption effectively. Yet in practice, insider disclosures and access to information function most effectively when they operate together.<sup>4</sup>

Linking whistle-blower protection with RTI would strengthen the ability of institutions, journalists, and civil society to verify allegations, trace public resources, and build credible corruption cases. Whistle-blowers often reveal wrongdoing but lack access to documentary evidence, while RTI provides a lawful mechanism to obtain procurement records, budget data, and audit

<sup>3</sup> G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (2015) High-Level Principles for the Effective Protection of Whistle-blowers (2019); G20, Open Data Principles

<sup>4</sup> Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), (2022) Report to the Nations on Occupational Fraud and Abuse

## **Combining insider disclosures with accessible public information reduces reliance on leaks and informal channels, strengthens due process, and increases the likelihood that corruption cases lead to sanctions rather than retaliation.**

reports that can substantiate disclosures. Integrating these tools within regional anti-corruption strategies would help move from isolated revelations to sustained accountability.

Regional institutions should encourage Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda to align whistle-blower laws with RTI frameworks by ensuring that information disclosed by whistle-blowers can trigger proactive publication or targeted disclosure through RTI mechanisms. Anti-corruption strategies should also promote coordination between agencies responsible for whistle-blower protection, RTI oversight, and anti-corruption enforcement. Clear guidance is needed to ensure that confidentiality protections for

whistle-blowers are maintained while enabling the lawful release of supporting information in the public interest.

The benefits of this integrated approach are significant. Combining insider disclosures with accessible public information reduces reliance on leaks and informal channels, strengthens due process, and increases the likelihood that corruption cases lead to sanctions rather than retaliation. It also empowers citizens and civil society to follow-up on disclosures through lawful information requests, reducing the burden placed on individual whistle-blowers.

Barriers include weak or uneven whistle-blower protection regimes, political sensitivity around high-level corruption, and institutional silos. However, regional leadership can help overcome these constraints by setting normative standards, facilitating peer learning, and embedding integration benchmarks within existing anti-corruption review mechanisms. By bringing whistleblowing and RTI together within regional strategies, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda can significantly amplify transparency, protect those who expose wrongdoing, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts across East Africa.

## Call to action for different stakeholders in integrating whistleblowing and RTI

### **1. For Governments**

Adopt and effectively implement comprehensive whistle-blower protection legislation aligned with international and regional anti-corruption standards. Review whistle-blower protection and access to information laws and policies to ensure they operate coherently, including clear guidance on how disclosures can be followed up through lawful access to information while safeguarding confidentiality.

Promote structured cooperation between bodies responsible for whistle-blower protection, RTI oversight and anti-corruption enforcement to improve follow-up on disclosures and reduce institutional silos.

### **2. For development partners**

Support the EAC and the AU in embedding whistleblowing–RTI integration benchmarks within existing anti-corruption review and reporting mechanisms.

### **3. For Civil society organisations**

Use access to information mechanisms to lawfully obtain documentary evidence that supports whistle-blower disclosures, particularly in procurement, budgeting and public service delivery. Promote reforms that align whistle-blower protection and RTI systems, drawing on regional standards and comparative experience to strengthen accountability while reducing risks for individuals who expose wrongdoing.

# 4

## Policy Recommendation

### Strengthen RTI and Anti-Corruption in East Africa through Digital Tools and Artificial Intelligence

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Regional institutions and national governments in East Africa should promote and invest in the responsible use of artificial intelligence to strengthen transparency, right to information implementation and anti-corruption enforcement. As public administration becomes increasingly digital, digital and AI tools offer new opportunities to address persistent challenges such as delays in disclosure, poor records management and the overuse of secrecy exemptions. If deployed responsibly, new tools can help transform RTI from a reactive process into a more efficient and proactive governance system.

African normative frameworks have begun to recognise these technological developments. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), in its 2019 Revised Model Law on Access to Information for Africa, incorporates provisions on electronic records, proactive digital disclosure, and the obligation of public bodies to maintain accessible information

systems.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, governments should prioritise the use of AI to automate routine transparency functions, particularly in high-risk sectors such as public procurement and budgeting. Automated publication of procurement contracts, tender data and contract variations can reduce discretion and limit opportunities for manipulation. On the opportunity side, digital tools and AI can improve contract documentation, and budget execution reports. It can assist in managing large volumes of administrative records, detecting anomalies in financial data, and supporting the redaction of personal information to facilitate timely disclosure. If properly governed, such tools can reduce administrative bottlenecks, limit discretionary decision-making, and enhance the consistency and timeliness of responses to information requests.

However, digital and AI systems also pose serious governance risks. Algorithmic decision-making may lack transparency, making it difficult to understand or

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<sup>5</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2019) Revised Model Law on Access to Information for Africa.

challenge automated disclosure or redaction outcomes. Poorly designed systems could result in systematic over-classification, excessive redaction, or embedded bias. Reliance on proprietary technologies may create new forms of opacity if procurement contracts restrict public scrutiny of how algorithms function. There is also a risk that governments could invoke AI-based risk scoring or automated classification tools to justify secrecy rather than promote openness.

At policy level, governments should therefore ensure that digital tools and AI deployment in transparency systems is anchored in principles of effective human oversight, transparency and accountability, proportionality and legality, data protection and non-discrimination safeguards.

Call to action for different stakeholders in using digital tools for RTI

### **1. For governments**

Test the use of digital and AI-assisted tools to improve records management, proactive disclosure and response times for access to information requests, particularly in high-risk sectors such as procurement and public finance, while ensuring strong safeguards for privacy and due process.

Establish the guidance and oversight mechanisms to ensure that digital and AI tools used for transparency and anti-corruption purposes are transparent, auditable and aligned with human rights principles, including non-discrimination and data protection.

### **2. Development partners**

Provide technical and financial assistance for pilot projects that use digital and AI-enabled tools to strengthen RTI implementation, including support for capacity building, ethical safeguards and independent evaluation.

### **3. Civil society organisations**

Strengthen their capacity to use digital tools to analyse procurement, budget and disclosure data, supporting evidence-based oversight and follow-up on access to information requests.

Play a watchdog role by monitoring the use of digital and AI tools in transparency and anti-corruption initiatives, advocating for safeguards that prevent exclusion, bias or misuse and ensure accountability.

## Conclusion

The four policy recommendations reflect that RTI is legally recognised in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, yet inconsistently implemented in practice. Across the three countries, the challenge is no longer primarily normative recognition, but effective enforcement, institutional coordination and meaningful public use. Strengthening RTI as an anti-corruption tool in East Africa therefore requires a shift from formal compliance to practical implementation, guided by the four mutually reinforcing policy recommendations set out in this brief.

First, strengthening proactive publication must become a regional priority. In all three countries, RTI systems still rely heavily on individual requests, which are often delayed, denied or discouraged. Moving towards systematic publication of procurement data, audit reports, budget execution information and oversight findings would reduce discretion and lower corruption risks. For Kenya, this means consolidating proactive disclosure through a national RTI policy and harmonised standards across national and county levels. For Uganda, it requires reducing over-reliance on case-by-case requests by clarifying and enforcing publication duties. For Rwanda, it involves ensuring that digital governance reforms translate into consistent public access to high-value information. Regionally, the EAC and the AU can help establish benchmarks

and minimum disclosure standards that shift RTI from a reactive entitlement to a routine administrative obligation.

Second, institutionalised peer learning at regional level offers a practical mechanism to close implementation gaps. Kenya's comparatively stronger oversight model, Rwanda's digital procurement systems and emerging reform efforts in Uganda illustrate that good practices already exist within the region. A structured EAC peer learning and review process focused on enforcement, oversight effectiveness and proactive disclosure would encourage convergence towards higher standards. Embedding RTI more systematically within AU anti-corruption review mechanisms would reinforce political accountability and sustain reform momentum. Peer exchange among information officers, oversight bodies, anti-corruption institutions and civil society can accelerate the replication of workable solutions without requiring wholesale legal reform.

Third, the review highlights the importance of closing the accountability gap between whistleblowing and RTI. In Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, these frameworks often operate in isolation, limiting their collective impact. Whistle-blower disclosures are more effective when supported by documentary evidence obtained through lawful access to information, while

RTI gains relevance when it enables verification and follow-up of corruption allegations. Aligning whistle-blower protection regimes with RTI systems, improving institutional coordination and embedding integration benchmarks within regional anti-corruption strategies would strengthen corruption detection while reducing risks for individuals who expose wrongdoing. This integrated approach transforms isolated revelations into sustainable accountability processes.

Fourth, digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) present both an opportunity and a risk for RTI implementation. Rwanda's digital platforms and Kenya's expanding e-governance infrastructure demonstrate how technology can facilitate proactive disclosure and improve records management. Uganda also stands to benefit from digitisation to address administrative bottlenecks. However, without strong safeguards, automated systems may entrench opacity through excessive redaction, opaque algorithms or over-classification. Governments must therefore anchor digital innovation in principles of transparency, human oversight, accountability, data protection and non-discrimination. When responsibly governed, digital tools can increase efficiency, consistency and timeliness in responding to information requests, particularly in high-risk sectors such as procurement and public finance.

Country-specific priorities remain distinct. Kenya should fast-track the adoption of a national RTI policy, reinforce proactive disclosure obligations and ensure adequate resourcing of the Commission on Administrative Justice. Uganda should establish an independent RTI oversight body, strengthen protections for requesters and journalists, and expand public awareness. Rwanda should designate or empower an institution with clear enforcement authority, broaden awareness of RTI rights and ensure that digital transparency reforms are matched by an enabling civic environment. Yet these national reforms are strengthened when embedded in a coherent regional framework that promotes proactive publication, peer accountability, whistle-blower integration and responsible digital innovation.

Taken together, the four policy recommendations provide a strategic pathway for transforming RTI from a formal legal guarantee into a functioning pillar of anti-corruption governance in East Africa. The legal architecture is largely in place. The next phase requires political commitment, institutional strengthening and regional cooperation to ensure that access to information becomes routine, enforceable and inclusive. If implemented coherently across Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, these reforms can significantly enhance transparency, deter corruption and strengthen democratic accountability across the region.

## Annexes

**T**his policy brief was condensed from a report that was part of Transparency International's project Stopping Impunity for Corruption through Enhanced Accountability (SICEA). It assesses the status of RTI in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda analysing trends, challenges and enforcement gaps.

This work is part of a four-part Africa study to identify and analyse the alignment between, and the domestication and actual implementation of, the identified RTI provisions in four regions of the African continent (Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western) with a particular focus on 11 specific countries in those regions. Eleven countries are covered in the four regions, and these are Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Uganda and Zambia. This report focuses on the research in East Africa.

Methodologically, the report adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines primary qualitative evidence with a structured review of secondary data to assess the state of the Right to Information (RTI) in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. Primary evidence was collected through 13 semi-structured interviews in 2024. The approach follows Transparency International's research framework and tools developed on RTI and anti-corruption, ensuring comparability across countries while allowing for

context-specific analysis (see annex).

Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with six categories of stakeholders in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda: Transparency International national chapters, national information commissions and oversight bodies, anti-corruption institutions, national human rights commissions, electoral management bodies, and civil society organisations. These 13 interviews provided first-hand insights into the use of RTI laws, the barriers encountered in practice, institutional responses, and the perspectives of groups most affected by restricted access to information.

To triangulate findings, the study reviewed secondary literature across seven clusters:

- International and regional RTI-relevant frameworks (AUCPCC, UNCAC, ACHPR, SDG 16)
- Global indices (RTI Rating, CPI, WGI)
- National legal and institutional frameworks
- Institutional reports from oversight and anti-corruption bodies
- Civil society and media analyses
- Academic research
- Donor and development partner evaluations

Comparative coding of interviews and desk review data highlighted common trends, national differences and gaps between law and practice. Trend analysis of CPI, RTI Rating and WGI indicators from 2013 to 2024 situates these findings within a regional context.

The report acknowledges limitations, including a non-representative sample and incomplete official datasets, particularly in Rwanda after 2021. The purposive sample of stakeholders is illustrative rather than statistically representative, and in some cases institutional data was incomplete or inconsistently available, such as Rwanda's post-2021 corruption conviction lists. Nevertheless, the integration of diverse primary and secondary sources ensures a robust and balanced evidence base. This combination allows the report to draw reliable conclusions about the status of RTI in East Africa and its role in advancing accountability and anti-corruption reforms.





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