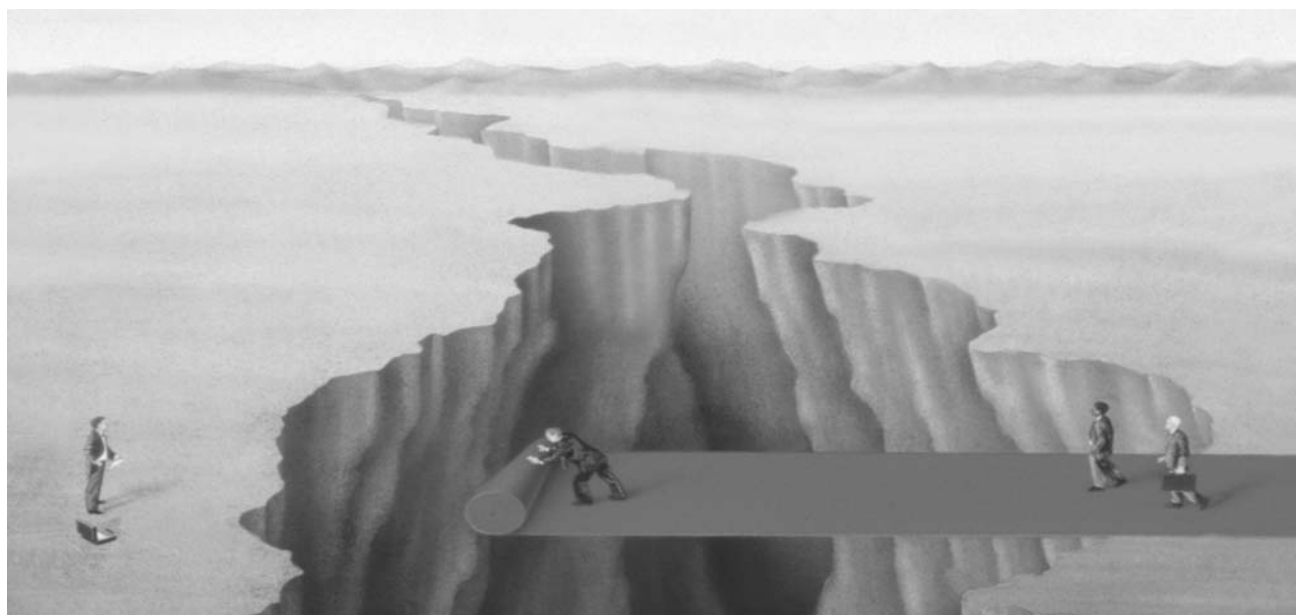


Executive Summary

CLOSING THE GAP

INFORMATION, PARTICIPATION, AND JUSTICE
IN DECISION-MAKING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



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Based on the findings of The Access Initiative

Ten years ago, 178 governments committed to an idea with profound implications for sustainable development: Every person should have access to information about the environment, opportunities to participate in decision-making processes affecting the environment, and access to redress and remedy. Articulated in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration that emerged from the 1992 Earth Summit (see Box 1), these three “access principles” represent fundamental global norms of equitable and environmentally sound decision-making.

Access to environmental information enables citizens to make informed personal choices and encourages improved environmental performance by industry and government. For example, citizens need to know whether water is safe to drink, and public knowledge of contamination creates pressure for pollution control.

Informed and meaningful public participation is a mechanism to integrate citizens’ concerns and knowledge into public policy decisions that affect the environment. Decisions that incorporate public input generally result in outcomes that are more effective and environmentally sustainable than those that do not.

Access to redress and remedy—or access to justice—gives individuals and public interest groups the opportunity to protect their rights to information and participation and to contest decisions that do not take their interests into account.

The international community increasingly stresses the importance of governance principles—such as transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability—as keys to sustainable development in the political declarations of the United Nations and regional fora. Meanwhile, accumulating evidence suggests that public participation

This executive summary was written by Frances Seymour, Director of the Institutions and Governance Program at World Resources Institute, based on the data and analysis presented in *Closing the Gap: Information, Participation, and Justice in Decision-making for the Environment* by Petkova et al.

BOX 1

PRINCIPLE 10 OF THE RIO DECLARATION

Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

in decision-making can improve the quality as well as the acceptance of resulting decisions and is a tool for poverty reduction.

Closing the Gap: Information, Participation, and Justice in Decision-making for the Environment reports on the early findings of an innovative approach to measuring progress in implementing Principle 10 at the national level. In 2001–2002, research teams in nine countries—Chile, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, and the United States—employed a common methodological framework on a pilot basis to assess the performance of their governments in meeting the Rio commitment. Their work was conducted under the auspices of The Access Initiative, a global coalition of civil society groups seeking to promote public access to information, participation, and justice in decision-making affecting the environment (see Box 2).

The research efforts in the nine countries shared two objectives. The first was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific national systems of public participation in environmental decision-making. To what extent have governments integrated the access principles into law and implemented them in practice? Reports

The Access Initiative (TAI) is a global coalition of civil society groups collaborating to promote national-level implementation of commitments to access to information, participation, and justice. Launched in November 2000, The Access Initiative has since grown to include 25 civil society organizations in nine countries on five continents.

The goals of The Access Initiative are:

- *To strengthen the capacity of public interest groups to track progress toward and build a global constituency for national-level implementation of a set of common participation and access standards.*
- *To raise the awareness and commitment of governments toward building national access and public participation systems to implement Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and public participation provisions of Agenda 21.*

The Access Initiative's strategy is to:

- *Establish common guidelines for national-level access to information, public participation, and justice in decision-making affecting the environment.*
- *Develop and promote the use of a toolkit and common methodology to quantify and assess the performance of government institutions.*
- *Build capacity of civil society groups to engage government agencies in using national assessments to*

examine their performance and develop national action plans.

- *Build The Access Initiative community at three levels: in-country coalitions, a global Access Initiative network, and a broad international constituency.*

The Access Initiative has completed an initial assessment of public access to environmental decision-making in nine countries around the world. These pilot tests—conducted in Chile, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, and the United States—detail the progress these countries have made in implementing Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. The Access Initiative's findings reveal accomplishments and weaknesses of national-level efforts, as well as common patterns and variations among countries. They also reveal the common elements of a public participation system relevant to countries with diverse cultural and political traditions, development levels, and other variables.

The Access Initiative website features additional information about the project as well as summaries of the national assessments, the toolkit of indicators for groups interested in assessing the performance of their own governments, and information on how to get involved (<http://www.accessinitiative.org>).

prepared in each of the nine pilot countries provide a basis for dialogue and action to improve national-level implementation. Moreover, because of the diversity of geography, economies, and cultural and political traditions encompassed by these countries, collectively the reports provide a snapshot of global progress.

The second shared objective of the pilot assessments was to test the methodology and evaluate the usefulness of the assessment tool itself. Could a common framework be used to assess government performance in diverse national contexts? Are national systems of public participation sufficiently similar to benefit from common tools to measure progress?

THE APPROACH

The approach used to generate the findings in *Closing the Gap* is unique. It goes beyond previous attempts to measure progress in the development of legal frameworks for information, participation, and justice to provide an assessment of the *practice* as well as the law of implementing the access principles. It combines original data produced at the national level and a specific focus on environmental governance with independent assessment and application to multiple countries. Most important, it addresses the primary objective of catalyzing and evaluating progress in individual countries rather than facilitating cross-country rankings.

BOX 3**SOME COMMON
ELEMENTS OF
NATIONAL PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION
SYSTEMS****Access to Environmental Information
requires:**

- Constitutional guarantees and special laws and provisions for freedom of information and access to environmental information.
- Provisions defining environmental information in the public domain and mechanisms for disclosure. Information in the public domain should include information about environmental quality and impacts on health, factors that influence it, information about legislation and policy, and advice about how to get information.
- Requirements for reporting and public disclosure of environmental performance and compliance by industrial facilities.
- Organizational infrastructure and capacity to respond to requests and to actively disseminate information.

**Participation in Environmental Decision-
making requires:**

- Mechanisms for public input into national sectoral policies, strategies, and plans.
- Mechanisms for public input into sub-national (regional, state or local) decision-making, especially land-use planning.
- Mechanisms for public input into project-level decisions.

**A Comprehensive National System for Access
to Justice requires:**

- Constitutional guarantees for access to justice.
- Broad and inclusive interpretation of standing.
- Impartial administrative, judicial, and alternative venues for resolution of conflicts and remedy.
- Affordable and timely legal services.
- Active education by government on the participation and environmental rights of the public and how the public can use the legal system to protect those rights.

The methodological framework was designed to capture progress in implementing key elements of each of the three access principles, as well as overall enabling conditions for effective national systems of public participation in nine countries. It builds upon articulations of those elements in international and regional instruments, including Agenda 21, the Inter-American Strategy on Public Participation, and the Convention on Access to Information, Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention). Box 3, derived from these and other sources, lists common elements of national systems of public participation.

Application of the methodology produces indicators of performance both in law and in practice. For example, with respect to access to information, the approach generates indicators of the adequacy of legal guarantees such as “right-to-know” legislation, as well as the adequacy of government responses to actual requests for information. Many of the indicators are generated by analysis of particular cases. For example, national teams looked at information provided by the government during selected environmental emergencies, as well as the degree to which the public was notified and consulted in the course of various decision-making processes.

Because the methodology was somewhat tailored by national teams to their national circumstances, the results do not support overall cross-country rankings. For example, national teams were encouraged to choose cases from economically important sectors in their countries; thus, some selected cases related to the forestry sector, while others focused on power generation projects. In addition, weaknesses in initial application of the methodology prohibit certain comparisons across countries; for instance, criteria for case selection were not always consistently applied.

Nonetheless, it is possible to identify areas of relative strength and weakness across the three

principles, as well as patterns emerging across the nine countries. These findings are further buttressed by a comparative review of findings from studies conducted in regions and countries other than the nine countries represented in this pilot assessment.

THE FINDINGS

Can diverse national systems of public participation be assessed within a common framework? Our findings:

Yes. Teams from nine countries representing different legal traditions, cultural and political conditions, income levels, development paths, and economic dependency on natural resources were able to apply the methodological framework developed for this study to assess national performance in implementing the access principles. Only relatively minor modifications were required to capture the unique national contexts in these countries. The initial response from governments as diverse as Chile, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda has been to welcome the findings of these assessments as a useful tool to identify accomplishments and gaps, and to prioritize action to improve performance.

This experience suggests that the methodological framework is sufficiently robust to be applicable in diverse national contexts and thus holds promise as a globally applicable tool to evaluate progress in national implementation of the three access principles. While individual countries approach the process from different starting points and with different priorities for short-term improvement, a common framework can identify strengths and weaknesses and support progress toward common long-term objectives.

What is the status of implementation of Principle 10 around the world? Our findings:

While significant progress has been made, much remains to be done. Most countries have put in place the basic elements of a legal framework to

support public access to environmental information, and all have taken key steps toward meaningful information disclosure and public participation. However, no country scored strong on all elements of the system, and specific gaps in law and practice were identified in every country studied. Although the nine pilot countries are not fully representative of the global community of nations, comparative reviews of policy and practice in other countries and regions support our findings.

Implementation is uneven across the three access principles. In most of the pilot countries, governments perform best in law and in practice in providing access to information; they perform less well in facilitating participation and least well in providing access to justice. The interdependence of the three principles makes this finding highly significant. Each access principle is essential to overall system effectiveness; weakness in the implementation of any one principle can compromise the entire system of public participation.

Legal frameworks supportive of the access principles are rapidly evolving. Indeed, **Mexico** passed a Freedom of Information Act while this report was in preparation. Development of legislation to make facility-level information on pollutant emissions available to the public is progressing steadily in many countries and regions. Although the evolution of national systems has tended predominantly toward increasing levels of access, restrictions on public access to information in the **United States** in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks indicate that such progress is not irreversible.

Improvements in practice lag behind improvements in law. In most of the pilot countries, the institutional infrastructure necessary to implement the access principles often is insufficient. For example, among the nine pilot countries, only **Thailand** and **Uganda** provide an explicit constitutional right to public participation in decision-making; even so, laws and regulations concerning environmental impact assessment lack provi-

sions guaranteeing public notice and comment. In other cases, such as **Indonesia** and **Hungary**, a persistent “culture of secrecy” pervades the bureaucracy, undermining information disclosure policies.

What are the patterns of strength and weakness in each of the three principles? Our findings:

While the nine national assessments revealed significant variation in performance in some areas, they also illuminated some remarkable commonalities, considering the diversity of national contexts. These are summarized for each principle in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Access to Information

Access to information is strong in high-profile emergencies that threaten public health. For example, the quality and accessibility of information provided to the public after a volcano eruption in **Mexico**, cyanide pollution of a river in **Hungary**, and cholera outbreaks in **South Africa** and **Uganda** were highly rated. An exception was the lack of timely and adequate information about the catastrophic flooding in **Indonesia’s** capital, Jakarta, in early 2002.

Pilot countries perform well in providing reports on the state of the environment. Most of the pilot country governments have produced such reports regularly over the past decade, providing citizens with nontechnical data on various environmental trends, including maps and charts to make the information accessible to the nonexpert. Such reports generally are disseminated widely and are available at little or no cost to the public. However, the **United States** stopped producing meaningful federal-level reports in 1997, and **Indonesia** has produced only one in the past decade (in 1998) in response to Agenda 21 reporting requirements.

Access to information about air and water quality is mixed. Integrated air quality monitoring systems are in place in many urban centers,

such as Bangkok, **Thailand**, and Santiago, **Chile**, and several governments make this information publicly available on a daily basis through the popular press and/or on the Internet. However, the usefulness of this information is often compromised because of insufficient detail. Hindered by a lack of integrated information systems, governments in the pilot countries scored weaker in providing access to information on water quality. For instance, in **Hungary**, requests for information on surface water quality submitted to 12 environmental inspectorates and for information on drinking water quality submitted to 19 public health offices met with widely differing response rates, procedures, and costs. Better scores were received in **South Africa**, where RandWater makes available via its website a regularly updated map highlighting areas with unsafe drinking water in regions where Rand Water is a supplier. Indeed, only in **South Africa** and the **United States** is information on water quality actively disseminated.

Access to information about private industrial facilities is particularly weak. Accidents that occur behind factory gates are often concealed from the public. For example, in cases from **Chile** and **India**, the public was denied timely, adequate information about industrial fires. An exception was found in **Hungary**, where local authorities took steps to provide the public with prompt, accurate information about a gas well explosion and fire and the immediate risks to the surrounding community. In most of the pilot countries, citizens cannot obtain information that would tell them whether companies, and especially individual facilities, comply with pollution emission standards. And in many countries, facility-level reporting on emissions is not required. Only the **United States** has a comprehensive, fully operational, facility-level Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR)—the so-called Toxics Release Inventory—although **Mexico** and **Hungary** are taking steps in this direction.

FIGURE 1 ACCESS TO INFORMATION SCORECARD			
Type	Quality	Accessibility	Overall
Legal guarantees and provisions for access to information	Strong		
Emergencies: large and visible emergencies with extensive media coverage	Strong	Strong	Strong
State of the environment reports	Strong	Strong	Strong
Monitoring information: air quality	Intermediate	Strong	Intermediate
Monitoring information: water quality	Intermediate	Weak	Weak
Industrial facility information: based on air and water compliance monitoring and PRTRs	Weak	Weak	Weak
Emergencies: accidents or fires at private facilities	Weak	Weak	Weak

Access to Participation

Participation is strongest in “environmental” sectors and weakest in “real” sectors. Government performance in facilitating public participation in decision-making varied widely in the limited number of national-level cases, depending on the type of decision. For example, development of a national forest policy in **Uganda** and the mapping of water management areas in **South Africa** were both characterized by extensive consultation with affected communities. In contrast, a “nautical tourism” planning process in **Mexico** and policy-making related to private electricity generation in **Thailand** were relatively closed to the public. In a comparative review of five cases of national energy policy development in Central and Eastern Europe, only in Slovakia—where there was a strong and vocal demand for participation by public interest groups—were decision-making processes accessible.

Participation in state and local planning decisions is mixed. Experience in a limited number of countries and cases indicates that, while most state and local authorities—such as those responsible for regional development plans in **Hungary** or municipal environmental impact assessment processes in the State of California in

the **United States**—perform well at making draft plans available to the public, they are not proactive in soliciting public input. In addition, public consultation tends to occur late in the process, when key parameters of the planning effort have already been determined. Yet evidence from the pilot assessments indicates that meaningful public participation improves the quality of the resulting decisions. For example, in an ecological zoning process in the Federal District of **Mexico**, community consultations yielded valuable suggestions that enhanced the conservation benefits and social protections of the plan.

Participation in decisions concerning specific projects, permits, and concessions is weak. For the most part, public authorities in the cases assessed failed to inform affected communities or public interest groups that they were initiating a process to grant an operating license for a factory, award a forest concession, or approve a development project. In **Thailand**, failure to involve affected communities early on in decisions concerning siting of a power plant and a wastewater treatment facility has led to protracted conflicts. Although environmental impact assessment regulations often require consultation with affected communities, in both **India** and **Indonesia**, such “consultations” have some-

FIGURE 2 ACCESS TO PARTICIPATION SCORECARD			
Type	Quality	Accessibility	Overall
Legal guarantees and provisions for participation	Intermediate		
National policy-making on environmental issues	Strong	Intermediate	Intermediate
Regional, state, or local decision-making (state or local planning efforts)	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
Specific projects with or without an EIA process	Weak	Weak	Weak
National policy-making outside the environment	Weak	Weak	Weak

times been used merely to extract local socioeconomic data rather than to seek informed opinion. The cases examined reveal few examples of public involvement in the earliest stages of project conceptualization and virtually no cases of continuing public involvement in monitoring or review after the permit, concession, or project approval is granted. An exception is the power-plant permitting process of the State of Ohio in the **United States**, which requires public notice and comment on permit renewals.

Access to Justice

Access to justice is hampered by unclear laws. In most of the nine pilot countries, the legal and regulatory framework governing access to information and participation is insufficiently comprehensive and detailed to provide an adequate legal basis for citizens to seek redress. For example, only in **South Africa** and the **United States** does the legal framework attempt to clarify which agencies are responsible for disclosing information, the types of information to be disclosed and how regularly, and the procedures to be followed for making a request. And in many of the pilot countries, including **South Africa** and the **United States**, it is not clear what information is in the public domain, leaving wide discretion to government officials to disclose or withhold information as they see fit. Limited or restrictive interpretation of legal standing, as well as a lack of legal definitions of what constitutes “the public” or “the public interest,” often constrain citizens’ ability to use

the justice system to demand access to information or participation. For example, in **Mexico**, an individual or organization must show proof of harm to gain access to the courts to enforce environmental procedural rights.

Access to justice is constrained by limited mechanisms for redress. Access to justice can be facilitated by the availability of multiple mechanisms for redress, including administrative courts and alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms, in which citizens can seek redress. A few pilot countries are experimenting with new mechanisms for redress, such as administrative courts in **Thailand** and special environmental tribunals in **India**. However, in most countries, these venues are not yet fully developed. In fewer than half the decision-making processes reviewed for public participation were administrative or judicial processes available for citizens to contest the resulting decisions.

High costs are an effective barrier to access to justice. While the costs of administrative and court fees varied across the pilot countries—and in some countries could be waived for individuals or public interest groups—expenses for legal representation were found to be prohibitive in many cases. In **Chile**, for example, the national team estimated that the cost of legal representation could exceed 50 percent of average annual income. In some countries, such as **Indonesia**, a national network of pro bono lawyers can provide assistance, but in **Hungary**, **India**, and **Uganda**, these lawyers are limited to urban areas. In **South**

FIGURE 3 ACCESS TO JUSTICE SCORECARD			
Type	Quality	Accessibility	Overall
Affordability of justice	Not assessed	Intermediate	Intermediate
Institutional infrastructure	Intermediate	Weak	Weak
Legal and regulatory framework supporting enforcement	Weak	Not assessed	Weak

Africa, administrative and court fees are prohibitively high, but a government-sponsored legal aid board finances legal help (which can be given by normal attorneys). The South African Legal Resources Centre and various university law clinics also provide free legal assistance to the poor in connection with environmental cases.

What factors appear to drive or hinder improved performance? Our findings:

The nine national assessments suggest that several factors are particularly important in spurring or hindering the development of national systems for implementing the access principles.

Lack of government capacity constrains public access. Many lapses in providing access to information, participation, and justice can be attributed to a lack of government capacity, including staff, equipment, procedures, and training. For example, officials in **Thailand** suggested seeking facility-level information directly from private companies, as it would be too time-consuming to assemble the requested reports from the disorganized files in government offices. Municipal officials in the State of California in the **United States** claimed that more proactive solicitation of public participation would place an undue burden on the limited personnel of resource-constrained city governments. Because many laws and procedures related to the access principles are relatively new, training civil servants on their importance and implementation is an important first step toward closing the gap between law and practice. Among the nine pilot countries, only **South Africa** was found to have

an extensive program of building staff capacity at all levels of selected agencies dealing with environmental information or decision-making. Training offered at selected agencies in other countries was found to be absent, incomplete, or unevenly available.

Lack of capacity in civil society also constrains performance. Mechanisms for providing access will be ineffective if citizens are unaware of environmental issues and procedures for obtaining information and providing input to decisions. Governments in most of the pilot countries are investing in the development of environmental education programs, and some are also investing in related teacher training. Performance is less impressive regarding the availability and comprehensiveness of information about agencies charged with information disclosure or decision-making. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can play a crucial role in building civil society capacity; yet several pilot countries restrict either the formation or the sources of financing available to these organizations. In **Chile, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda**, regulations require significant financial assets or impose limits on the scope of work of NGOs in the process of legal registration. In **India**, NGOs face restricted access to international sources of funding. A comparative review of enabling conditions for public interest groups in six countries in East and Southern Africa found similar restrictions on NGO activity.

Media attention and public scrutiny spur improved performance. Evidence from the nine pilot assessments attests that increased demand can result in enhanced opportunities for access.

Governments perform better in providing *access to information* when the media are watching. Performance was strongest in large-scale emergencies covered by the press, and weakest for smaller-scale incidents taking place behind factory gates. In national assessments of media coverage of environmental issues, only three of the pilot countries scored strong on the level of coverage, and only four scored strong on the quality of coverage. **Thailand** alone scored strong in both categories, in recognition of regular environment features, presentation of different points of view, and accompanying analysis. Governments anticipating or reacting to public scrutiny also performed better in providing *access to participation*. In **Mexico**, for example, public consultations were conducted for two environmentally sensitive projects that were the focus of attention from public interest groups but not for two other projects with significant potential environmental impacts that had not attracted such public scrutiny. In **Hungary**, local public interest groups successfully petitioned to be included in a panel to review a construction permit for an industrial redevelopment plan.

The international community has a key role to play. The international community can support improved national performance in implementing the access principles, both through donor assistance and by integrating the access principles into international agreements and the operations of multilateral institutions. International donor agencies have provided financial and technical assistance to several of the pilot countries to introduce pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTs), publish state of the environment reports, create environmental information systems, provide staff training, and perform other activities supportive of the access principles. In addition, donor agencies can, through the example of their own operations, either bolster or undermine norms of transparency and public participation. In **Uganda**, programs with significant donor funding tended to be more open and inclusive, while in **Thailand**, a wastewater treatment project financed by the Asian Development Bank failed to

comply with the Bank's own public participation policies. International agreements are a powerful lever for upward harmonization of the access principles and have stimulated national-level activity in most of the pilot countries. In **Hungary**, for example, participation in the Aarhus Convention has spurred the creation of new laws and institutions related to public participation, while legislation mandating a PRT was developed in response to requirements for accession to the European Union.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and conclusions summarized above suggest a number of recommendations directed to both national and international policy arenas and to actors spanning various government and nongovernmental stakeholder groups to stimulate improvements in national systems of public participation. Taken together, these recommendations constitute an agenda for accelerating the implementation of Principle 10.

1. **National governments and the international community as a whole should support independent assessment and monitoring as a first step toward improved performance.** Initial response to the findings of the nine national assessments indicates that such assessments are a powerful tool to stimulate dialogue and action to improve performance.
2. **The international community should support refinement and application of a common assessment tool to support national implementation.** To improve the quality of assessments, further investment is needed in the refinement of a common methodological framework, guidelines for its application, and a global mechanism for sharing best practices across countries.
3. **Efforts to improve national systems should include attention to all three principles.** Balanced investment across all three principles is required if national systems of public participation are to function effectively.

4. **Where the legal framework for access is in place, efforts should focus on closing the gap between law and practice.** To this end, investments in government capacity to implement elements of the national participation system as well as developing public capacity to use that system should be high priorities for governments and donor agencies.
5. **Public interest groups and the media, two engines driving demand for access, should be encouraged to play their roles vigorously and responsibly.** Governments must relax onerous registration requirements for nongovernmental organizations and reform regulations that constrain the financing of public interest advocates. Media outlets should improve the level and quality of their coverage of environmental issues.
6. **The international community should support national efforts through donor assistance and incorporation of access norms into international institutions and agreements.** International donor agencies can promote access both by supporting the development of access systems as a funding priority and by revising their policies and practices to ensure greater access to information, participation, and justice in their own operations.

Clearly, implementation of these recommendations requires action from a variety of stakeholders operating in both national and international policy arenas. It further requires collaboration among those stakeholders, working together toward common objectives. *Closing the Gap* offers the following recommendations for specific institutional actors.

Government agencies should:

- Support independent assessment and monitoring, and collaborate with other stakeholders to identify gaps and set priorities for improvement
- Balance efforts to improve law and practice across all three principles
- Once a legal framework is in place, focus on closing gaps between law and practice through development of institutional infrastructure and staff capacity

- Invest in improving the capacity of the public to access the public participation system
- Create favorable enabling conditions for public interest groups and the media

Civil society organizations should:

- Undertake independent assessment and regular monitoring using common frameworks and methods
- Collaborate with government and other stakeholders to identify gaps and set priorities for improvement
- Stimulate and channel public demand for access to information, participation, and justice
- Build their own capacity and that of affected communities and the general public to access the public participation system

Media outlets should:

- Investigate and call attention to lapses in performance by governments in providing access to information, participation, and justice
- Provide high-quality coverage of environmental issues and a forum for diverse views on environmental decisions

Donor agencies should:

- Support continuous improvement of a common assessment methodology and mechanisms for international exchange of best practice
- Provide financial, institutional, and political support for development of national public participation systems
- Support capacity building on both the supply and demand sides
- Model best practices of information disclosure, participation, and accountability in their own operations

International institutions and agreements should:

- Incorporate provisions to stimulate the upward harmonization of implementation of the access principles in participating countries
- Model best practices of information disclosure, participation, and accountability in their own deliberations.

THE NATIONAL TEAMS

The co-authors of *Closing the Gap* took the lead in compiling the results and doing the analysis, but all acknowledge the invaluable efforts of the teams that researched and produced the national reports. The co-authors take sole responsibility for the interpretation of the source material.

TAI researchers who contributed to the national assessments came from the following organizations:

CHILE: Corporación Participa, Centro de Investigación y Planificación del Medio Ambiente (CIPMA) – Recursos e Investigación para el Desarrollo Sostenible (RIDES), Fundación Terram

HUNGARY: Environmental Management and Law Association, Hungarian Environmental Partnership (OKOTARS), Miskolc Institute for Sustainable Development

INDIA: Participatory Research in Asia

INDONESIA: Indonesian Center for Environmental Law

MEXICO: Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, A.C., Comunicación y Educación Ambiental, S.C., Cultura Ecológica, A.C., Presencia Ciudadana Mexicana A.C.

SOUTH AFRICA: Environmental Law and Management Clinic of Technikon Pretoria, Environmental Justice Networking Forum

THAILAND: Thailand Environment Institute, King Prajadhipok's Institute, NGO-Coordinating Committee on Development

UGANDA: Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), Agricultural Cooperative Development International, the Uganda Wildlife Society

THE HOW-TO GUIDE

On January 1, 2003, go to www.accessinitiative.org to download a guide you can use to assess your own government's implementation of its commitments to Principle 10. The guide will walk you through the process of assembling a coalition, launching a study, selecting cases, using various research methods, finalizing data, and facilitating peer review for quality assurance. Based on experiences in nine pilot countries, the guide provides the necessary tools for any group to carry out its own research and to work with other stakeholders in translating such research into policy reform.

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