

# THE ACCESS INITIATIVE TOOL-KIT FOR ASSESSING THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLE 10

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

How well is your government upholding the commitment it made at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to strengthen public participation in decision-making that affects the environment? The Access Initiative (TAI) national teams answer this question by conducting assessments of national-level laws and practices regarding public access to information, participation, and justice in decision-making that affects the environment. These three "access principles" empower individuals to have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect the health of their family, the prosperity of their community, and the development and security of their country. Preliminary pilot research indicates that over the last ten years many countries have taken steps to improve policies or build institutional and organizational capacity for access to information, participation and justice in decisions affecting the environment. Most of these steps, however, address individual aspects of Principle 10 rather than building a comprehensive "access system" that includes all three principles, advancing them equally, so that no critical gaps remain.

## 2 THE ACCESS INITIATIVE TOOLKIT

To stimulate national progress on the access principles, TAI has developed an interactive toolkit of over 100 indicators that civil society organizations can use to monitor government performance in implementation of Principle 10. Twenty-five civil society organizations from nine countries pilot-tested the original methodology and helped TAI identify global standards for public participation and information. These universally applicable benchmarks help civil society coalitions identify ways that their countries can move toward compliance with global norms for access to information, participation and justice in environmental decision-making. The national-level assessments identify the gaps in the access system. TAI coalitions, through dialogues with their respective national governments, then work to close those gaps, helping to build comprehensive systems of access.

The indicator toolkit, produced on a CD-ROM called ***Assessing Access to Information, Participation, and Justice for the Environment: A Guide***, measures both law and practice. Practice is assessed through case studies selected by national civil society coalitions. The methodology specifically measures the following:

- Comprehensiveness and quality of the general legal framework for access to information, participation, and justice.
- Degree of available access to selected types of information about the environment.
- Degree of public participation in decision-making processes in selected sectors by actors in the development process at various levels.
- The accessibility of justice, both redress and remedy.
- Comprehensiveness and quality of capacity building efforts to encourage informed and meaningful public participation.

The CD-ROM includes an interactive database for recording research and a detailed "How-to" Guide that provides user-friendly instructions for all phases of the assessment, including

assembling a coalition, launching a study, selecting cases and research methods, finalizing data, and using the findings to stimulate tangible results.

### **3 CONCLUSIONS**

TAI is currently launching assessments in approximately 20 countries across Europe, Africa, and Latin America. In addition, TAI is in the early stages of adapting the indicator methodology to the energy and water sectors. Through the development of unique indicators for these sectors, civil society coalitions will be better able to work toward inclusion of the interests and concerns of the general public and particularly the poor, whose access to both the decision-making process and the resources of these sectors is most limited. These sectors are also particularly relevant to Principle 10 assessment because they are currently undergoing reform in many countries, thus creating a window of opportunity to influence the reform process, making it more transparent and inclusive.

The Access Initiative (TAI) is a global coalition of public interest groups collaborating to promote national-level implementation of commitments to access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental decision-making. TAI is led by five organizations: Corporacion Participa (Chile), Thailand Environmental Institute (Thailand), Environmental Management Law Association (Hungary), Advocates for Environment and Development (Uganda), and World Resources Institute (United States). For more information, please visit <http://www.accessinitiative.org/>.

To further implement Principle 10, The Access Initiative partners helped establish the Partnership for Principle 10 (PP10). PP10 is committed to translating access principles into action and to supporting transparent, inclusive, and accountable decision-making for sustainable development. PP10 is a new initiative developed as a "Type-II" outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. The Partnership provides a venue for governments, international organizations, and civil society groups to work together to promote better environmental governance at the national level. For more information, please visit <http://www.pp10.org/>.