

WORLD RESOURCES

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UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
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THE WORLD BANK
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MAKING WISE DECISIONS FOR THE EARTH

We recognize endangered species and degraded habitats as signs of environmental failure, but we rarely acknowledge them as the results of governance failures. Corruption and patronage. Backroom deals and land grabs. Development decisions made without local information, consultation, or support. These all-too-common governance failures don't just erode our civil and economic rights, they erode our natural heritage as well.

Degraded forests and dying coral reefs often reflect a flawed environmental decision-making process. Illegal logging thrives where forest managers have little accountability. Mining decisions taken in secret often attach too little value to protecting local water supplies or crucial habitat. Plans to exploit any natural resource prepared without input or review by local inhabitants and other affected groups all too often enrich a few but dispossess the larger community and disrupt the ecosystem. Poor environmental governance—decisions taken without transparency, participation of all stakeholders, and full accountability—is a failure we can no longer live with



in an era when human decisions, not natural processes, dominate the global environment.

The importance of good governance is, of course, not restricted to environmental decisions. It goes to the heart of our social and economic progress. Good governance is now recognized as one of the most important factors in realizing a nation's development potential and reducing poverty—in part because public or private investors want the stability and transparency that good governance brings. That is essentially the conclusion endorsed by ministers when they gathered in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002. They concluded that money alone doesn't guarantee sound development with benefits shared by all. Rather, success also depends on sound institutions, prudent policies, transparent processes, open access to information, and equitable participation in decision-making—all salient features of good governance.

In this issue of *World Resources*, we focus on *environmental governance*—the processes and institutions we use to make decisions about the environment. Our four organizations endorse the Monterrey Consensus, which contains clear commitments to good governance, and challenge the international community to bring that mandate to bear on the crucial area of managing ecosystems and natural resources, both locally and globally. Our decades of experience dealing with environmental problems in rich and poor countries have shown time and again that good governance is crucial for the sustainable management of ecosystems, which are a key underpinning of sustainable economic growth and human development.

The building blocks of good environmental governance are the *access principles*, first spelled out in 1992 in the Rio Declaration—the official document of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration calls for access to information concerning the environment, the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, and effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings. But these principles are only as strong as our implementation of them.

How well have we done since Rio? Measuring governance performance and trends is difficult, but

essential if we are to make progress toward achieving our environmental and social goals. The Access Initiative, described in this report, represents a first effort to make such an assessment of environmental governance, elaborating and defining just what we mean by access to information, decision-making, and justice. The results reveal in some detail our uneven progress. To accelerate implementation, the Partnership for Principle 10 (PP10) was launched in September 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, bringing together a wide range of organizations that have committed to accept accountability for carrying out specific actions and to provide resources to enable improved access.

Our organizations are founding members of the Partnership for Principle 10, and as such we endorse this activity and commend it to others as a salient and practical response to the challenge of environmental governance. We also endorse the concept of independent assessments, such as those supported by the Access Initiative. We believe the Access methodology offers the global community a framework that should be applied widely to the vital work of identifying where our governance mechanisms and institutions are weak, as well as where we have made progress.

Of course, access alone is not enough to ensure good environmental outcomes. Indeed, one of the most apparent failures over the decade since Rio has been the inability to mainstream environmental thinking into economic and development decisions. This lack of integration translates into a failure to balance economic, social, and environmental concerns. More deeply, it reflects a reluctance to appropriately value the contribution of ecosystem goods and services to human welfare. Good environmental governance will succeed in achieving better environmental outcomes only if it is seen as an essential contributor to better and more equitable development.

In this spirit, we as organizations recommit ourselves to a focus on good environmental governance as a wedge to push forward better decisions—decisions for the Earth. In our own organizations, we will work to improve governance of the environment through our programs, policy advice, project work,

and funding practices. Our experience proves that bringing communities and individuals into the decision-making loop, and insisting on accountability of those ultimately responsible for environmental decisions, can lead to fairer and more effective management of natural resources. Now, we must carry this message to our partners around the world.

We recognize the urgency imposed by the Millennium Development Goals adopted at the United Nations Millennium Assembly in September 2000, including eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and ensuring environmental sustainability. We affirm our conviction that these human and environmental goals must be integrated, just as people and ecosystems are woven together in the web of life. We cannot alleviate poverty over the long term without managing ecosystems sustainably. Nor can we protect ecosystems from abuse without holding

those with wealth and power accountable for their actions, and recognizing the legitimate needs of the poor and dispossessed. This is the balance we must strike in all of our decisions for the Earth.

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PART

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DECISIONS FOR
THE EARTH

Chapter 1
ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE:
WHOSE VOICE? WHOSE CHOICE?

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ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
TODAY

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND
ACCESS

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AWAKENING CIVIL SOCIETY

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A WORLD OF DECISIONS:
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Chapter 9
TOWARD A BETTER BALANCE

*How we decide
and who gets to decide
often determines what we decide.*

