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MEASURING, MAPPING, & STRENGTHENING RIGHTS: **THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY INDEX**

The Environmental Democracy Index (EDI) is the first-ever publicly available, online platform that tracks countries' progress in enacting national laws to promote transparency, access to justice and citizen engagement in environmental decision making.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL

DEMOCRACY? | Environmental democracy is rooted in the idea that meaningful public participation is critical to ensure that land and natural resource decisions adequately and equitably address citizens' interests.

At its core, environmental democracy involves three mutually reinforcing rights:

1. the right to freely access information on environmental quality and problems
2. the right to participate meaningfully in decision-making
3. the right to seek enforcement of environmental laws or compensation for harm.

Protecting these rights, especially for the most marginalized and vulnerable, is the first step to promoting equity and fairness in sustainable development. Without essential rights, information exchange between governments and the public is stifled and decisions that harm communities and the environment cannot be challenged or remedied. Establishing a strong legal foundation is the starting point for recognizing, protecting and enforcing environmental democracy.

WHAT IS EDI? | The Environmental Democracy Index (EDI) is the first-ever publicly available, online platform that tracks countries' progress in enacting national laws to promote transparency, access to justice and citizen engagement in environmental decision making.

EDI was developed by The Access Initiative (TAI) and World Resources Institute (WRI) in collaboration with partners around the world. The index evaluates 70 countries, across 75 legal indicators, based on objective and internationally recognized standards established by the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Bali Guidelines. EDI also includes a supplemental set of 24 limited practice indicators that provide insight on a country's performance in implementation. The national laws and practices were assessed and scored by more than 140 lawyers around the world. Country assessments were conducted in 2014 and will be updated every two years. EDI launched in its beta version in May, 2015. The scores became final in September 2015 following a 90 day feedback period which resulted in a few score changes.



**ENVIRONMENTAL
DEMOCRACY INDEX**

HOW IS EDI UNIQUE? | EDI is a unique online platform that aims to raise awareness, engage audiences and strengthen environmental laws and public engagement. It includes:

- **IN-DEPTH COUNTRY INFORMATION.** The platform provides in-depth information and scoring for 70 countries, including a summary of strengths and areas for improvement, and contextual information to help users better understand the economic and demographic situation of a country.
- **COUNTRY COMPARISONS.** EDI allows users to compare countries' performances at multiple levels and download data on environmental democracy measures.
- **RANKINGS.** Countries around the world are ranked on their national laws according to their progress in legislating environmental democracy.
- **GOVERNMENT FEEDBACK.** To promote a collaborative dialogue around environmental democracy, each country page provides a space for the government to respond to their country's scores. All countries in the index will be given the opportunity to respond to their individual assessment. Feedback is expected until July 15 and scores will be final as of August 30, 2015.
- **PUBLIC AND CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT.** EDI is a powerful tool that will increase transparency around environmental laws. The country assessments involved extensive consultation and input from civil society. The platform creates a free, public space for sharing information and dialogue.

WHAT CAN USERS DO WITH THIS INFORMATION? |

This new, dynamic online platform enhances the capacity of governments and civil society to establish, enforce, monitor and protect people's rights to create a more equitable and sustainable world for all people.

- **GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS** can make better policy decisions and improve laws by drawing on clear examples of good practice from around the world.
- **CIVIL SOCIETY** can benchmark progress of their national government in promoting environmental democracy and can hold their leaders accountable.
- **ACADEMICS** can use the freely downloadable results to support their research and analysis.
- **INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS** can use the results to help inform assessment of national environmental governance.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED? |

EDI provides an assessment of the content of laws for 70 countries, measured against the 2010 UNEP Bali Guidelines, an internationally-recognized set of guidelines on legislating for environmental democracy.

However, the index does not provide a comprehensive measurement of implementation of the law, nor does it assess laws at the subnational level.

Countries with a federal (or decentralized) legal system may have enacted legislation at the subnational level that would enhance or undermine environmental democracy rights.

EDI also does not measure the degree to which civil society can function free of harassment or persecution, the pervasiveness of corruption, or the extent to which human rights are respected, upheld or enjoyed in a country.

KEY FINDINGS

1

The top ten countries on the legal index are: Lithuania, Latvia, United States (t), South Africa (t), United Kingdom, Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia, Panama and Colombia.

2

Countries that are part of the legally binding Aarhus Convention have stronger laws and better legal protection for environmental democracy rights.

3

Wealth is important, but not the only factor; several lower income countries are also leading the way.

4

Countries that have good laws tend to have good practices.

5

Many countries do not have strong protections to ensure that access to information is affordable and timely.

6

Laws on public participation lag behind; 79 percent of EDI countries have fair or poor public participation provisions.

7

Encouragingly, 73 percent of EDI countries are willing to hear environmental cases in court.

8

Nearly half of the EDI countries do not provide ambient air quality data online for their capital cities.

9

The best performing country in practice is the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Brazil, Japan, Lithuania, Ireland, Chile, Israel and Australia.

COUNTRY SELECTION

The countries in the inaugural EDI include those from North America and the Caribbean, South and Central America, Europe, Africa and Asia that are part of The Access Initiative network. It also includes countries that have joined the Open Government Partnership. Finally, there are a few countries included from Africa, Asia and the South Pacific that are not part of either network.

SPOTLIGHT ON EDI INDICATORS

EDI includes 75 legal indicators and 24 limited practice indicators developed to measure the degree to which countries are implementing the UNEP Bali Guidelines. Legal indicators measure the strength of the law while practice indicators provide insight on a country's performance in implementation. This type of information can help mobilize advocacy and help policymakers prioritize reforms.

Example of a legal indicator for access to justice:

“To what extent does the law recognize broad legal standing in proceedings concerned with environmental matters?”

Example of a practice indicator on access to information: *“Are real time air quality data for the capital city of your country made available online by the government?”*

CONTACT

To find out more about how you can participate in or support EDI, visit www.environmentaldemocracyindex.org or contact The Access Initiative, access@wri.org.

Cover photo by Simone D. McCourtie, World Bank.

PARTNERSHIPS

EDI is part of the Eye on Earth Access for All (A4A) Special Initiative, developed by the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative. The goal of A4A is to promote and encourage further implementation of environmental democracy by engaging global stakeholders and advocates that strive to fill the data and information gaps in its implementation. EDI was also made possible by the funding and support of Irish Aid and institutional funding from the Agency for Development Cooperation of Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

ABOUT TAI

The Access Initiative (TAI) is a global network that promotes access to information, participation and justice in environmental decision-making.

To find out more, visit www.accessinitiative.org

ABOUT WRI

World Resources Institute (WRI) is a global research organization spanning more than 50 countries, with offices in the US, China, India, Brazil, Europe, and Indonesia. Our more than 450 experts and staff work closely with leaders to turn big ideas into action to sustain our natural resources—the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being.



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