



# A COMMUNITY ACTION TOOLKIT:

*A Roadmap for Using Environmental  
Rights to Fight Pollution*



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are incredibly grateful to the Open Society Foundations for funding the development of this toolkit. We are pleased to acknowledge our institutional strategic partners, who provide core funding to WRI: Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

This toolkit would not be possible without the support of The Access Initiative (TAI) and other partner organizations that used and reviewed the toolkit. This includes the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), Eastern People's Network Thailand, Open Society Forum (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), Patrons of Khuvsgul Lake (PKL), Nature Environment and Health Center (NEHC), Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), International Transparency Foundation (TF), Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (Indonesian Forum for Environment, WALHI) / Friends of the Earth Indonesia, Tifa Foundation, Indonesian Center for Environmental Law (ICEL), MediaLink, Jamaica Environment Trust (JET), Windsor Research Center (WRC), Alliance Marocaine pour le Climat et le Développement Durable (Moroccan Alliance for Climate and Sustainable Development, AMCDD), Association des Enseignants des Sciences de la Vie et de la Terre (Association of Teachers of Life and Earth Sciences, AESVT), Observatoire de Protection de l'Environnement et des Monuments Historiques (Observatory for the Protection of the Environment and Historic Monuments, OPEMH), La Recherche en Action (Research in Action, REACT), Water Dynamic Organization, and Article 19. We would also like to thank our reviewers: Ratchada Arpornsilp, David Boyd, Kathleen Buckingham, Jonathan Fox, Robin King, Saad Filali Meknassi, Constance Nalegach, Uttara Narayan, Lily Odarno, Ugo Taddei, Stefanie Tye, Peter Veit, and Jesse Worker. Chen Shen provided critical support researching and developing the solid waste indicators used in this toolkit. Joseph Foti helped develop the air and water indicators.





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# EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

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Pollution is a leading cause of death and disease all over the world. But the impacts of pollution are not evenly distributed. Poor and marginalized communities bear the brunt of the environmental, health, and socioeconomic impacts, especially in middle- and low-income countries. Children are especially vulnerable.



## HIGHLIGHTS

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- Poor and marginalized communities do not have enough support or resources to address the health, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts of industrial pollution. They often lack the political clout to demand change, despite bearing the brunt of the impacts. This environmental injustice often causes extensive human rights violations.
- The right to information and public participation provide local communities and civil society with powerful tools they can use to ensure compliance and enforcement of pollution control laws and regulations and hold government and private companies accountable.
- This toolkit provides a series of eight modules, filled with important concepts, research indicators, worksheets, and templates, which can be modified to fit a country's context. These modules build the skills and knowledge needed to wage pollution accountability advocacy campaigns.
- The methodology was built from practical experience and expertise from over five years of campaigning with local community activists, environmental defenders, and civil society partners in the STRIPE project. It was led by World Resources Institute, as secretariat of The Access Initiative, and civil society experts in Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia, Jamaica, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- Evidence-based advocacy requires that community members and civil society partners work together to understand the needs of local communities and the legal standards for controlling pollution, as well as to identify which actors to target and the best forums for participation and accountability. Research into the gaps in policy and practice can provide critical evidence in campaigns.
- A well-informed and engaged community can help identify bad actors, document pollution hot spots, illuminate cumulative impacts, and provide political momentum and resources for enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. Empowered local communities can contribute deep historical knowledge and new ideas that can help reduce conflict and build productive relationships with government and private sector actors to address pollution impacts.

Contaminated air, water, and land limits the quality of life and livelihood opportunities of poor and marginalized communities, which often face multiple barriers to addressing the problem. Far removed from powerful decision-makers, they are often unaware of their rights to access information and participate in the policymaking process and lack access to strategic partnerships and advocacy skills needed to effectively engage government and private sector actors. Civil society organizations work to support these communities, but they often lack the needed tools, funding, or support to build evidence-based advocacy campaigns and analyze policy and implementation gaps to tackle such obstacles at scale.

To help ensure that those experiencing the impacts of pollution can create locally based and owned solutions, more must be done to support the ability of civil society and local communities to engage with decision-makers. Access to information, public participation, and access to justice are environmental rights fundamental to good environmental governance when properly implemented and enforced. They offer an important tool for improving the development, implementation, and enforcement of pollution control laws, norms, and guidelines. They provide essential mechanisms for achieving the right to a healthy environment and clean air and water for all people. Strategically applying these rights

can enable civil society and local community members to evaluate the environmental and social justice aspects of pollution, demand better compliance with laws and regulations, and help build a pollution accountability movement. As the space for civil society leadership (civic space) shrinks around the world, it is critical that these rights be strengthened to ensure that civil society can remain an essential sustainable development partner.

## HOW THIS TOOLKIT WAS DEVELOPED

The toolkit was developed as part of the project Strengthening the Right to Information for People and the Environment (STRIPE). STRIPE seeks to highlight the challenges faced by communities in polluted areas around the world and empower them to utilize their legal rights to obtain and use environmental and public health information and participate in formal decision-making forums to demand accountability. The project enables policy reforms and builds the capacity of civil society and local communities to use their environmental rights to advocate for their pollution concerns. Launched in 2011, STRIPE projects have been carried out in Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia, Jamaica, Morocco, and Tunisia. A team of partners in each country piloted the toolkit methods and used the elements in their pollution campaigns. Examples from their work are included throughout the document.



## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit offers civil society organizations and local community activists practical guidance on how to use their environmental rights to fight air, water, and solid waste pollution. It is designed to support civil society, local community activists, and those concerned about pollution with the knowledge and tools needed to

- conduct policy research,
- collect and use pollution information in relevant decision-making forums,
- work together to develop advocacy campaigns, and
- use an environmental rights approach to engage government and the private sector about their concerns.

The toolkit provides background information on the regulatory concepts needed to address pollution, including government-based standard setting, environmental impact assessment (EIA), monitoring, and enforcement processes used to control pollution. It also explains environmental rights concepts and why they are relevant to people concerned about pollution. The section on country experiences highlights how the toolkit modules were applied in STRIPE campaigns and provides key lessons learned that should help toolkit users adapt the modules to their own country context and pollution priorities.

## MODULE OVERVIEWS

The toolkit provides a series of eight modules, filled with important concepts, research indicators, worksheets, and templates. The modules are organized in three parts to help you create and implement a comprehensive pollution accountability advocacy campaign from start to finish. This includes modules to help set up a campaign, develop evidence to inform policy and practice, organize advocacy campaigns, and build the capacity of local community members.

### PART 1. SETTING UP A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR ADVOCACY

**MODULE 1:** Strategically analyze a pollution problem using problem tree analysis to develop clear policy or political solutions that can be easily communicated to key stakeholders. Understand the broader sociopolitical context and change strategies that should shape advocacy choices.

**MODULE 2:** Use stakeholder mapping and community needs assessment techniques to better understand and engage local community members and outline the different actors who can help or hurt the ability to take action.

**MODULE 3:** Understand and assess environmental rights as well as the legal framework used to control pollution to better identify and evaluate gaps in policy implementation and enforcement.

### PART 2. FINDING EVIDENCE THROUGH RESEARCH: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING NEEDED INFORMATION

**MODULE 4:** Evaluate the quality and accessibility of proactively disclosed air, water, and land pollution information publicly available from different government institutions without the submission of an information request.

**MODULE 5:** Develop, submit, and track information requests to collect needed information about pollution and evaluate how well your country's or state's right to information law is being implemented in practice.

**MODULE 6:** Support local community members' ability to use their right to know to collect government information about pollution, understand the pollution control regulatory process, and advocate for and organize around their concerns.

### PART 3. DEVELOPING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

**MODULE 7:** Identify, evaluate, and use formal participation mechanisms required under laws and regulations and create new informal opportunities to advocate for your concerns about pollution.

**MODULE 8:** Use the information, research, and other results from toolkit activities to develop and implement accountability advocacy campaigns.



# MODULE 1

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## Defining Your Problem for Action

### **WHAT:**

Conduct a problem tree analysis and evaluate your change strategy options. A problem tree analysis is an exercise that helps unpack the context around a specific problem and identify the causes and impacts. A change strategy review will help you understand the broader sociopolitical context and strategies that shape advocacy choices.

### **WHY:**

Given the often interdependent and overlapping challenges around pollution impacts and causes, these exercises help you strategically define a problem to better identify feasible policy or political solutions in your country context.

### **WHEN:**

A problem tree analysis and change strategy review should be done at the beginning of a pollution campaign so they can inform project and advocacy planning.

### **WHO:**

Both the analysis and the review should be developed with the participation of small group of project leaders and community representatives. They can be carried out in a single meeting or through a series of smaller workshops with the results merged into a comprehensive problem analysis.

### **HOW:**

- Convene a group of project and community participants to discuss the pollution problem.
- Use the problem tree analysis activity to unpack the economic, social, and political consequences and causes of the problems.
- Using the output of your problem tree analysis, discuss the country context factors, how they may influence your advocacy options, and the possible policy, practice, or behavior change goals you want to pursue.
- Use the output of the analysis to identify and prioritize the different specific issues that should be addressed during your project.
- Identify potential policy and political solutions (demands) that can be incorporated into the project activities, including advocacy campaigns.



# MODULE 2

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## Understanding Community Needs, Concerns, and Interests

**WHAT:** Use a stakeholder mapping exercise and a community needs assessment to understand and collect information on local community needs, pollution concerns, and interests.

**WHY:** Both exercises will help you develop a clear picture of the community where you want to work and its experiences addressing pollution impacts. A stakeholder mapping exercise will allow you to identify the key organizations and institutions relevant to your project plan and those that could make your desired outcome more or less likely. A needs assessment conducted through interviews, focus group discussion, public meetings, or a survey will help you deepen your understanding of the social, political, and economic context surrounding pollution. It will also give you a sense of local community members' level of trust and past experiences attempting to address the issue.

**WHEN:** Both the stakeholder mapping and community needs assessment should be done at the beginning of a pollution campaign after the problem tree analysis.

**WHO:** A small team of project leaders should meet to conduct the stakeholder mapping. A small team of project leaders should also work to develop and implement the community needs assessment. Ideally the same set of project leaders should conduct both the mapping and assessment to ensure continuity.

### HOW:

- Conduct a desk review to collect existing articles, studies, and other resources about your community and summarize and present your findings for other project participants.
- Identify and invite a small group of project leaders and community members to participate and hold a meeting to complete the stakeholder mapping analysis.
- Write up the results from the stakeholder mapping to share with the larger community.
- Identify and assemble a team to carry out the community needs assessment.
- Hold a series of meetings to decide how to carry out the needs assessment. This includes deciding which approach you will use, who will implement it, when and where it will take place, and the questions you will ask.
- Write up the results from the community needs assessment to share with the larger community.
- Hold a community meeting to share the results of your community mapping efforts and collect feedback.



# MODULE

## 3

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# Conducting a Legal Assessment of Environmental Rights to Address Pollution

**WHAT:** This module explains how to conduct a legal assessment of environmental rights and how these rights can be used strategically to understand how pollution is regulated.

**WHY:** Conducting a legal assessment of the regulatory environment enables an understanding of

- how existing legal rights to information, participation, and justice can enable citizens to engage in environmental decision-making;
- how you can use a substantive right to a healthy environment to support advocacy;
- what type and amount of pollution may legally be released into the environment, under what conditions; and
- the actions the public can take to seek compliance with environmental and public health standards.

**WHEN:** A legal assessment should be done at the beginning of advocacy planning.

**WHO:** A legal assessment should be conducted by lawyers or skilled legal researchers.

**HOW:**

- Identify relevant laws and regulations the government uses to control the impact of polluting industries, including provisions related to sector-specific industries and air, water, and land.
- Assemble laws and other legal documents such as your country's constitution related to environmental rights, including both substantive rights (the right to clean water and air) and procedural rights (access to information, participation, and justice).
- Using the guiding legal questions, analyze these rights and review any gaps.
- Write up the results of this assessment and share them with local stakeholders.
- Using the analysis framework, review these rights across the stages of pollution control.
- Consider the best legal strategy to use environmental rights as part of your advocacy planning.



# MODULE

# 4

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## Assessing Proactive Disclosure: Law versus Practice

### WHAT:

Evaluating the amount and quality of proactively disclosed information through indicator-based policy research or a website review.

### WHY:

Documenting the gap between the information whose public release is required and the information actually released provides important evidence that can be used to both document compliance with legal requirements and support pollution accountability campaigns in their demands that more information be provided to local communities.

### WHEN:

Research on proactive disclosure should be completed after a more comprehensive legal assessment, as outlined in Module 3. Input from the community needs assessment will also be helpful.

### WHO:

We strongly recommend that partners with legal or policy analysis expertise conduct both the legal assessment and the proactive disclosure evaluation.

### HOW:

- Decide which research method best fits with your overall project goals and objectives.
- If using an indicator-based approach,
  - assemble relevant laws and review articles or clauses that outline the proactive disclosure requirements;
  - choose the indicator spreadsheet that best matches the primary focus of your pollution concerns (air, water, or solid waste);
  - review indicators and look for public websites, gazettes, or other publicly available documents that contain the indicator information or data; and
  - record answers on an Excel spreadsheet or an online data collection and analysis template.
- If reviewing websites,
  - select key government portals, specific ministry websites, and/or company websites for review;
  - discuss the type of information you are interested in investigating and modify the website review template as needed; and
  - review websites for specific types of information and answer the indicator questions provided.
- Write up findings, share with other stakeholders, and highlight key insights.



# MODULE

# 5

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## Using Your Rights to Request Pollution Information

### **WHAT:**

Submitting information requests to public authorities as outlined by your country's right to information (RTI) law.

### **WHY:**

Submitting requests helps you collect needed information and evaluate the how well your country's RTI law provides needed information in practice. The results can be used in advocacy campaigns.

### **WHEN:**

RTI requests can be submitted during or after the proactive disclosure exercise is completed. If you complete the proactive disclosure assessment prior to making requests, you can ensure you are not asking for information already publicly available. Input from the community needs assessment will also help you identify information for requests.

### **WHO:**

Project leaders can submit their own requests. They should also work with community members to help them submit and track requests.

### **HOW:**

- Review your country's RTI legal framework to make sure you understand the requirements for submitting information requests and your rights to environmental and pollution-specific information and data.
- Work with local communities to identify the specific information they need and develop information requests. This includes identifying which public authority holds the information desired and how to submit the request.
- Submit and track information requests and responses.
- Analyze the information received and the effectiveness of the requesting process to determine how transparent or secretive the government is about pollution and its impacts.

# MODULE 6

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## Helping Local Communities Collect and Use Environmental Information

### **WHAT:**

Strategies that support local communities' ability to identify the type of regulatory documents that contain information answering their concerns, submit information requests, and use the collected information to strengthen advocacy.

### **WHY:**

Community members may not be aware they have the right to information or understand how to access government information about pollution. Further, they may need support in understanding which government agencies possess or which technical document contains the information they need to address their concern and how to review websites or submit information requests.

### **WHEN:**

Begin after you have conducted the problem tree analysis and community needs assessment to identify the information you need to collect. Multiple meetings and trainings likely will be needed throughout your work.

### **WHO:**

Project leaders should work with active local community members. It may be necessary to engage outside experts to support learning and provide specific trainings.

### **HOW:**

- Work with local men and women to articulate their concerns about pollution and the specific information they want.
- Investigate if any of this information is available proactively.
- Support the requesting process and make sure community members can submit, track, and record their information requests.
- Help local community members understand the technical information they obtain and how to apply it to their advocacy.



# MODULE

# 7

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## Strengthening Participation: Identifying and Using the Right Forums to Address Pollution

### WHAT:

Learn how to identify or create key participation forums you can use for advocacy around your pollution concerns. Evaluate in practice the quality of legally mandated participation opportunities provided.

### WHY:

Participation is the mechanism by which you express your concerns about pollution to key decision-makers and have a say in relevant policies that impact the control and mitigation of pollution. It can include a range of formal opportunities in response to legally required public participation requirements or informal activities organized by your organization or local communities.

### WHEN:

Identifying and creating participation opportunities should begin after you have conducted the legal assessment so you are familiar with formal opportunities for participation. It should also come after you have collected needed pollution information, as you will likely want to use it in key forums or highlight the information gaps that should be addressed to ensure that good policy decisions are made.

### WHO:

Project leaders should work with local community representatives. It might also be a good idea to work with a larger coalition of interested stakeholders or engage outside experts as needed.

### HOW:

- Review formal participation opportunities provided under the law using the legal assessment findings.
- Using your problem tree and community needs assessment as a reference, create a list of informal and formal opportunities that could be used to drive government action.
- Evaluate forums and mechanisms to identify gaps in information, analysis, awareness, and procedures that impact participation.
- Discuss strategies for leveraging the identified participation forums and practices.
- Identify community capacity building needs required to strengthen communities' ability to provide feedback to government and inform decision-making.

# MODULE

# 8

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## Bringing It All Together: Using Accountability and Advocacy to Tackle Pollution

### WHAT:

Creating a pollution accountability advocacy campaign using the previous module outputs.

### WHY:

Addressing pollution and local community concerns requires advocacy to hold government and polluting companies accountable for compliance with pollution control laws and policies. Each module is designed to provide specific inputs into the key steps needed to develop and implement an accountability campaign.

### WHEN:

Developing and implementing your advocacy campaign is the final step of the toolkit.

### WHO:

The campaign should involve all relevant stakeholders but be led and coordinated by a small team of project leaders from civil society and the local community. Often it is helpful for different subgroups to take responsibility for different elements of the campaign.

### HOW:

- Define your goals and choose your strategies.
- Determine whom you want to influence.
- Determine who can undermine your efforts.
- Find and create spaces for advocacy.
- Create an action plan.
- Develop messages.
- Create materials and data visualization.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABOUT WRI

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World Resources Institute is a global research organization that turns big ideas into action at the nexus of environment, economic opportunity, and human well-being.

### Our Challenge

Natural resources are at the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. But today, we are depleting Earth's resources at rates that are not sustainable, endangering economies and people's lives. People depend on clean water, fertile land, healthy forests, and a stable climate. Livable cities and clean energy are essential for a sustainable planet. We must address these urgent, global challenges this decade.

### Our Vision

We envision an equitable and prosperous planet driven by the wise management of natural resources. We aspire to create a world where the actions of government, business, and communities combine to eliminate poverty and sustain the natural environment for all people.

### Our Approach

#### COUNT IT

We start with data. We conduct independent research and draw on the latest technology to develop new insights and recommendations. Our rigorous analysis identifies risks, unveils opportunities, and informs smart strategies. We focus our efforts on influential and emerging economies where the future of sustainability will be determined.

#### CHANGE IT

We use our research to influence government policies, business strategies, and civil society action. We test projects with communities, companies, and government agencies to build a strong evidence base. Then, we work with partners to deliver change on the ground that alleviates poverty and strengthens society. We hold ourselves accountable to ensure our outcomes will be bold and enduring.

#### SCALE IT

We don't think small. Once tested, we work with partners to adopt and expand our efforts regionally and globally. We engage with decision-makers to carry out our ideas and elevate our impact. We measure success through government and business actions that improve people's lives and sustain a healthy environment.

## PHOTO CREDITS:

Cover, Zolbayar Bayasgalan; ii, iv, Laura Villadiego.

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