
TAI and DEVELOPMENT

Position Paper

on

Environmental Governance and International Development

*adopted by the participating organizations of the
TAI and Development project*

ACODE (Uganda), ECAT (Lithuania), EMLA (Hungary), IGO (Poland), LEAT (Tanzania),
PILF (Sri Lanka), REC (Latvia), SEIT (Estonia), TEI (Thailand), VACNE (Vietnam)

at the closing conference

at 29 October 2008

in Sligo, Ireland



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Introduction

The participating organizations in The Access Initiative¹ (TAI) and Development project (Reference Number: PF/07-3 EMLA, funded by the Presidency Fund) have come together at a closing conference called the “Development Day” at 29 October 2008 in Sligo, Ireland in order to discuss the findings of the project as well as to formulate a common position towards the issues raised within the implementation of the project, with special regard to the questions of good (environmental) governance, aid effectiveness, transparency and accountability. The participating organizations (list of participants attached to the Information Note on the meeting) have agreed in the following:

Common Position

- 1. The promotion of the Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration calling for access to information, participation and justice for the public in environmental matters is a fundamental prerequisite of good environmental governance.**

Explanation: TAI organizations are primarily active in globally promoting access rights (right to information, participation and justice) in environmental matters. Thus, the Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration² is the benchmark of their work. For this

¹ TAI is a global coalition promoting the concept that transparent, participatory, and accountable governance is essential to achieving sustainable development. It was established to engage civil society in an agenda for action. TAI is led by a Core Team composed of six organizations: **Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment** (Uganda), **Corporación PARTICIPA** (Chile), **Environmental Management and Law Association** (Hungary), **Iniciativa de Acceso-México** (Mexico), **Thailand Environment Institute** (Thailand), and **World Resources Institute** (United States). By joining TAI, civil society organizations “become part of an international network of like-minded groups that are committed to ensuring that citizens have a voice in the decisions that affect their environment and the quality of their lives. TAI partners build and participate in coalitions with other NGOs, set priorities for national-level policy reform, establish guidelines for creating public participation systems, and use common tools for tracking government progress”. Currently, NGO coalitions in 44 countries are involved in TAI.

² **Principle 10**

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

reason, the participant organizations of the TAI and Development project make valid statements regarding the issue of international development from a specific angle, i.e. from the one of an environmental access rights organization. TAI organizations believe that both sustainable development and good environmental governance require the meaningful implementation of environmental access rights, guaranteeing the communities and the public a chance to make their voice heard.

2. Good environmental governance in a beneficiary country undoubtedly promotes aid effectiveness.

Explanation: Participant organizations have come to a conclusion based on the project findings that a developed inclusive governance practice in a beneficiary country adds to the effectiveness of official development assistance (ODA) and international development cooperation. This is equally true for environmental governance.

3. Transparency and accountability, as parts of good governance are required from both the government and the civil society, on both sides of the development relationship i.e. in donor and beneficiary countries alike.

Explanation: Participants of the Development Day called for transparency and accountability in both the donor and beneficiary countries, and both regarding the government institutions and non-governmental organizations.

4. Donor country and beneficiary country civil society organizations (CSOs) are mutually interdependent in a setting where donor country CSOs are in a position to better articulate and forward to donors the messages relating to international development aid (ODA) effectiveness. The messages, however, are based on the indispensable in-country knowledge of beneficiary country CSOs.

Explanation: Partners have extensively realized during the Development Day and also the ensuing discussions at the TAI Global Gathering that the relationship between donor country and beneficiary country CSOs is characterized by interdependence. While the donor country CSOs lack the specific local (on-the-ground) knowledge concerning conditions in the beneficiary countries, they enjoy a relatively better access to donor institutions, partly stemming from their positions as EU Member State CSOs. On the other hand, beneficiary country CSOs may be in a less privileged situation as regards access to donor institutions, but their knowledge of the beneficiary reality is indispensable. This setting makes the structure and working method of the TAI and Development project unique.

5. No ODA and international development cooperation scheme can be effective by only providing funding to a beneficiary government bodies and not ensuring sufficient resources to the civil society of the beneficiary country in question.

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.

Explanation: Both donor and beneficiary country stakeholders agree that the age of conditionality in ODA and development cooperation decision-making as we refer to the notion (donor country government imposing restrictive criteria towards beneficiary country as a means of interference with domestic affairs) is over. Instead, good (environmental) governance is to be ensured through empowering the local CSOs in the beneficiary countries in order to perform their independent monitoring (aka watchdog) functions more effectively and thus guarantee better aid effectiveness and more scrutiny in spending ODA and foreign development aid. It also encompasses guaranteeing independence for the beneficiary country CSOs from government interference.

6. Grant schemes and application criteria of the European Union institutions for CSOs, however, are overly rigorous and prohibitively demanding and complicated.

Explanation: Participant CSOs of the Development Day have certain experience in connection with the funding opportunities for civil society organizations of the European Union. This is not in all cases positive. While TAI partner organizations feel that the purposes funded by the EU are relevant and valid, the criteria applied for applicants and the formal requirements are sometimes prohibitively rigorous and difficult, *inter alia*, the excessive formalities and the matching fund requirements. Therefore the participants agreed in calling the EU institutions to implement more applicant-friendly grant schemes in the future.

7. Many findings of the TAI and Development project call for a paradigm shift in development cooperation from a demand-driven approach to a right-based approach, however, this exceeds the boundaries of the current project.

Explanation: Participants have agreed that the current TAI and Development project is very relevant in the current circumstances and should be mainstreamed into the main TAI process. They also agreed that the results it produced are meaningful, however, represent a good start in cooperation between donor country and beneficiary country CSOs. Global South country CSOs welcomed the project and saw it as useful and hope that the project will continue with more concrete objectives in aiding Global South countries to implement the access rights as well as promoting the process of learning from each other. Many comments during the Development Day have called for a fundamental paradigm shift in international development cooperation, as one participant characterized it, a move from demand-based to right-based approach (development is not the satisfaction of demands by the donor countries (top-down) but implementing the right of beneficiary countries for development (bottom-up)). Nevertheless, the detailed preparation of this shift clearly exceeds the mandate of this current project.

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