**Survey on Access to Information in Development**

*by Jocelyn Medallo - IAP*

In August 2015, the Early Warning System team set out to better understand how communities and organizations monitor development projects and how we, as a community, can better collaborate to ensure that development is rights-respecting and community-led.

Through a survey that we disseminated in English, Spanish and French, both online and in-person meetings, we asked questions targeted at understanding four main issues: (1) how communities and the organizations that support them monitor or become aware of development projects; (2) the institutions that groups prioritize; (3) the gaps in information, capacity and expertise that may hinder monitoring of harmful development projects; and (4) how the Early Warning System can better increase coordination to do this work globally.

**We received 131 responses from 44 countries, with the majority of responses from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa regions.** The responses came from civil society groups who monitor development finance, transparency watchdogs, regional and local groups working on extractives, toxics, women’s groups, and environmentalists and human rights activists. While this was not a representative sample of all organizations monitoring developing finance, we went to great lengths to be inclusive through networks and known allies around the world. We will continue to reach out to organizations beyond this initial survey result.

Some of the results are startling.

**The vast majority (79%) of learn about proposed development projects from partner organizations or civil society groups.** Groups also rely on the media (63%) and email alerts (58%) to learn about development projects.

**Over 77 % of respondents reported that they monitor the World Bank.** Other banks that groups monitor include: the International Finance Corporation (40%), the African Development Bank (30%), Inter-American Development Bank (30%), the Asian Development Bank (25%), and the emerging Green Climate Fund (24%). Nearly 20 percent of respondents are monitoring national development banks and private/commercial banks.

**Most importantly, the survey identified critical gaps in information and capacity that is needed by community groups and the organizations that support them.** Despite development banks’ strides to increase access to information about their projects, critical information is often not available and/or inaccessible. This results in a stark disconnect, which hampers the ability of groups to monitor development projects, meaningfully participate in critical points in decision-making, and ultimately, to seek recourse for any harms caused by bank projects.

* 48% reported that they could not access project documents in the languages most relevant to their work.
* 52% reported that they do not have access to information on consultations and opportunities to engage.
* 50% reported that they do not have access to information on accountability mechanisms.

Groups also reported that they often do not have access to the following information:

* 60% do not have access to background information on borrowers or bank clients
* 55% do not have access to community-led initiatives
* 50% lack the technical expertise to understand environmental and social assessments
* 48% do not have access to information on decision-makers
* 40% do not have access to advocacy tools

**With increased capacity and resources, 60 percent of respondents stated that they would like to continue to monitor the World Bank, which underscores that there is room to improve monitoring World Bank projects.** In addition:

* 40% would monitor the Green Climate Fund
* 37% would monitor the International Finance Corporation
* 33% would monitor the China Export-Import Bank

**Even in its nascence, the information provided by the Early Warning System is already being used to bridge some these gaps.** According to the survey, civil society groups are using the Early Warning System alerts to:

* Share project information with members of their coalitions and to raise the issues with other relevant national alliances/networks
* Mobilize affected communities “to demand proper and accountable project management”
* “Campaign against projects at a national level”
* “To carry out community sensitization meetings and consultations with decision makers”
* “Update internal databases for monitoring, documentation, research and advocacy, as well as archives for future references”
* “Integrate information into a list of ‘watch projects’”
* Inform media outreach and advocacy strategies

At the same time, the Early Warning System alerts can be improved. Some suggestions to improve the Early Warning System include:

Providing information, not only be email alerts, but by social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

* Others asked to incorporate text messaging. According to one respondent (translated and paraphrased): “*Given the limited or no internet access in many areas in sub-Saharan Africa, it would also desirable and convenient to use the information system by SMS, if only to announce that the presence of a early warning message in an e-mail*.”
* Disseminating a biweekly or monthly newsletter with a list of projects with a summary of impacts, instead of or in addition to project specific alerts.
* Others asked for a more comprehensive list of harmful projects, in addition to or in place of comprehensive project analyses.
* Timely updates on project activity and monitoring, after the initial alert
* Providing an option to request that a project be added to the database.

**Perhaps one of the most exciting results of the survey is that over 94 percent of respondents expressed interests in collaborating with the Early Warning System. Specifically:**

* 79 % would like to distribute Early Warning System email alerts with their networks
* 60 % would like to drafting short analysis of projects, in collaboration with the Early Warning System team
* 60 % would like to coordinate outreach and advocacy with local communities
* 57 % would like to contributing their expertise to understanding proposed projects
* 57 % would like to share community-led tactics with other communities
* 33% would like to contribute expertise in technology and media to support advocacy<

There is still much we have do to in order to level the playing field and to shift the development model that favors pushing money out the door at the expense of communities and the environment. But, together, with your feedback and partnership, it is our hope that the Early Warning System can play an integral part. See the infographic below.

