

ENVIRONMENTAL COUNTRY REPORTS:

A Proposal for U.S. Global Environmental Monitoring

David Callahan
Chris DeVito

The United States should monitor the environmental records of countries worldwide and produce annual reports on each country. Such reports would be highly valuable to U.S. policymakers, but also to advocates, journalists, and ordinary citizens.

Rationale and Goals

- » *The United States must do more to monitor and report on compliance with multilateral environmental agreements.* If the United States signs a new global climate change agreement, lawmakers, the media, and the public will seek accurate and accessible information about how well specific countries are living up to their treaty commitments. Meanwhile, far better information is needed on how countries are complying with a host of existing multilateral environmental agreements that the U.S. is party to, many of which are routinely violated.
- » *Better information is needed to enforce linkages between countries' environmental records and their preferential access to U.S. markets.* Recent free trade agreements include environmental standards and, in addition, new proposals are pending in Congress to more tightly link access to U.S. markets to countries' environmental records. However, the U.S. now has limited capacity for monitoring compliance with either existing or proposed linkages between trade and environmental performance.
- » *A new monitoring and reporting capacity would facilitate new linkages between U.S. foreign policy and environmental performance.* As the United States places greater priority on stemming the global ecological crisis, it is likely to insist on more linkages between U.S. development aid, as well as diplomatic and security ties, and countries' environmental records. In turn, monitoring and enforcing such linkages will require a much larger effort to collect and analyze information about the environmental records of a wide range of countries.
- » *Policymakers need better tools to identify emerging environmental problems and threats, and to work with countries to make measurable progress in addressing such issues.* Because environmental problems will exacerbate existing causes of violent conflict and insecurity in coming decades, tracking these problems, and understanding their likely impact, has become an important task for U.S. policymakers.
- » *Corporations, NGOs, and the media, both in the U.S. and abroad, need new authoritative source of information about countries' environmental records.* Authoritative U.S. reporting on countries' environmental records would become a crucial resource for corporations, NGOs, and the media. Such reports would help spotlight areas of concern and could be used to push various actors to change behavior.

Policy Recommendations

Significant capacity and expertise for global environmental monitoring already exists within different U.S government agencies, including the State Department, the United States Agency for International Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Energy. However, new capacity is critically needed in some areas, such as within the State Department, where the Foreign Service has limited expertise on environmental issues. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- » The State Department should take the lead role in coordinating and bolstering U.S. capacity for environmental monitoring and producing annual country reports. The Department's global network of embassies makes it well suited to play a frontline role in monitoring efforts. However, new investments will be needed to train more Foreign Services officers in this area.
- » A high level of interagency cooperation will be needed to share information, as well as tackle technical questions related to gathering and evaluating specific kinds of information.
- » Drawing upon existing monitoring by international institutions, global and local NGOs, and academic institutions will be essential to any successful U.S. effort.
- » A successful environmental monitoring effort will also require the U.S. to develop a parsimonious set of core environmental standards that can be used to evaluate countries' records.
- » Environmental country reports should be written to be accessible and targeted at multiple audiences.
- » The publication of environmental country reports by the United States would not reduce the need for other international monitoring efforts. The United States should push the U.N. Environmental Programme to undertake annual reports on countries worldwide and, in collaboration with key allies, help provide the financial and technical resources to undertake this reporting.