

8 RECOMMENDED PROCESSES

Each individual process recommended in the information cycle is elaborated below.

1. Prioritise the issues

Recognising that resources for information management are limited, it is vital for information professionals to work alongside other stakeholders in identifying priority areas for information development. To ensure that the interests of an appropriate range of stakeholders are represented — whether these are information specialists, policy-makers, resource users or other groups — a high degree of consultation is desirable during this process. Indeed, the very act of discussing priorities can build important ties between stakeholders as well as sensitising them to the role and value of environmental information in their daily work. Key challenges to be aware of are the scope of the issues under consideration (i.e. complex versus focused) and their lifetime (i.e. ‘burning’ versus ‘fundamental’).

Further reading: this handbook.

2. Analyse information needs

Solutions to environmental issues are usually complex and it is not always obvious how to determine what information is needed to support policy and management goals. This is particularly true when decision-makers have only a hazy idea of their requirements. However, the price for not pursuing this challenge is heavy. Without the ‘right’ information, there is a risk that stakeholders will make inappropriate decisions, with potentially damaging consequences for living resources. Information needs analysis is the process whereby needs expressed in a variety of ways — narrow, broad, technical or bureaucratic — are guided into a consistent, mutually agreed, set of information objectives. A variety of tools and methods exist to facilitate and structure the analysis process.

Further reading: Volume 2.

3. Design information products and services

In reality, many groups of decision-maker are too busy or lack the technical background to process large amounts of data or apply themselves to difficult

interpretation tasks. They need brief summaries of complex issues, presented in such a way that they can be absorbed quickly without the need for special tools or expertise. By emphasising presentation issues such as clarity, timing and method of delivery, information products render information useful and usable by its intended audience. The aim is to take account of the constraints under which users operate, and tailor information accordingly. This is why the results are called information *products* rather than information *sources*, reinforcing the idea that they provide a specific service to their users.

Further reading: Volume 3.

4. Agree roles and responsibilities

The information needed to conserve and sustainably use living resources is multi-disciplinary in nature, even when confined to a single sector such as forestry or agriculture, and may be required on a dynamic and variable set of topics. The datasets needed to generate this information may be scattered amongst many organisations and sources, making the task of integration and interpretation complex. A further challenge arises when some organisations are unable or unwilling to provide access to their data.

Information networks, which are simply assemblies of individuals, groups and organisations with common information objectives, address this challenge by focusing on cooperation. The aim is to build trust and confidence between network partners, who may include scientists, policy-makers and resource managers, leading to improved uptake of scientific information in policy and planning. The success of a network depends on its partners understanding how they are expected to contribute to the network's goals and, equally importantly, how they stand to benefit from its existence. Their roles and responsibilities for information production should be defined clearly and reviewed as necessary.

Further reading: Volume 4 [optional Volume 5].

5. Build capacity

Constraints in information management capacity can impede progress towards corporate or network objectives. Clear priorities for capacity building are needed, and the greatest challenge is deciding how and where to focus investments. The latter should, wherever possible, be based on an assessment of where existing capacities are

located and how readily these can be mobilised for specific tasks. This can be achieved by surveying the range of data, skills and facilities which are available, and the management systems which bind these together.

Typically, some information objectives will be achieved simply by improving coordination between organisations and by sharing scarce resources. Others may require direct financial support to realise. It is the role of senior managers in the organisations concerned to attempt to enable progress in both cases. The aim is to extract the greatest benefit from existing resources as a first step, but to facilitate access to additional resources as required for specific tasks.

Further reading: Volume 6.