
Preface

This study emerges from the Global Environmental Assessment Project (GEA). The project was launched by William C. Clark, Nancy Dickson, Jill Jäger, Sheila Jasanoff, Robert O. Keohane, and James J. McCarthy in 1995 as an international, interdisciplinary effort directed at understanding the role of organized efforts to bring scientific information to bear in shaping social responses to large-scale environmental change. The focus of the project was the growing number of such efforts—ranging from the periodic reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to the Global Biodiversity Assessment to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment—that have been conducted in support of international policymaking over the last quarter century. Its central concern was to understand the impacts of environmental assessments on large-scale interactions between nature and society, and how changes in the conduct of those assessments could alter their impacts. The project attempted to advance a common understanding of what it might mean to say that one effort to mobilize scientific information is more “effective” than another. It tried to view such issues from the perspectives of the scientific experts involved in producing assessments, the decision makers at multiple scales who use those assessments, and the societies affected by the assessments. It attempted to embed its research approaches and interpretation of findings in contemporary theoretical frameworks of science studies, policy studies, and international relations. At the same time, the project tried to ensure that its efforts were consistently informed by pragmatic policy considerations and perspectives through a series of workshops that engaged practitioners, users, and scholars of assessments in an off-the-record dialogue that let them compare insights and experiences.

Over the course of the study, the GEA project engaged more than fifty senior scholars, postdoctoral fellows, and students drawn from the natural, social, and policy sciences in an intensive program of training and research. Its series of workshops with assessment practitioners and managers engaged another fifty individuals. The project produced more than forty working papers, many of which have appeared in the peer-reviewed literature. Three synthesis volumes have emerged from the GEA project. *Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance* (MIT Press, 2004), edited by Sheila Jasanoff and Marybeth Long Martello, has been written for scholars concerned about the tensions between political power, governance, and the globally and locally referenced knowledge that is mobilized or marginalized in environmental assessment practice. *Assessments of Regional and Global Environmental Risks: Designing Processes for the Effective Use of Science in Decisionmaking* (Resources for the Future 2005), edited by Alexander E. Farrell and Jill Jäger, is directed toward assessment practitioners and summarizes findings on how the practices of global and regional environmental assessment can be reformed to improve their utility to decision makers. Finally, the present volume, *Global Environmental Assessments: Information and Influence*, is addressed to the community of scholars and institutional designers seeking to understand the interactions of information and institutions in structuring international affairs. A website for the project, at <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/gea/>, provides detailed information on its participants, publications, and activities.

Global Environmental Assessments: Information and Influence focuses on what we have learned through our work in the Global Environmental Assessment Project about how institutions that generate, organize, and disseminate scientific knowledge can bring that knowledge to bear on the wide range of global and regional environmental issues currently facing the world. In producing the volume, we have drawn on work from virtually all participants in the project, as well as relevant scholarship of others. The individual contributions that make up the body of the book reflect a subset of GEA case studies we selected as providing particularly rich illumination of institutional issues. The contributors assembled at a workshop to plan this volume in January 2001.

At the workshop, we explored common themes, findings, and synergies from the individual case studies, critiqued a preliminary draft of chapter 1, and defined focal questions for the chapters published here. We hope that the result will be of interest not only to students of global environmental politics and policy, but also to the growing community of scholars seeking to understand the changing role in world affairs of institutions that produce or broker information.

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