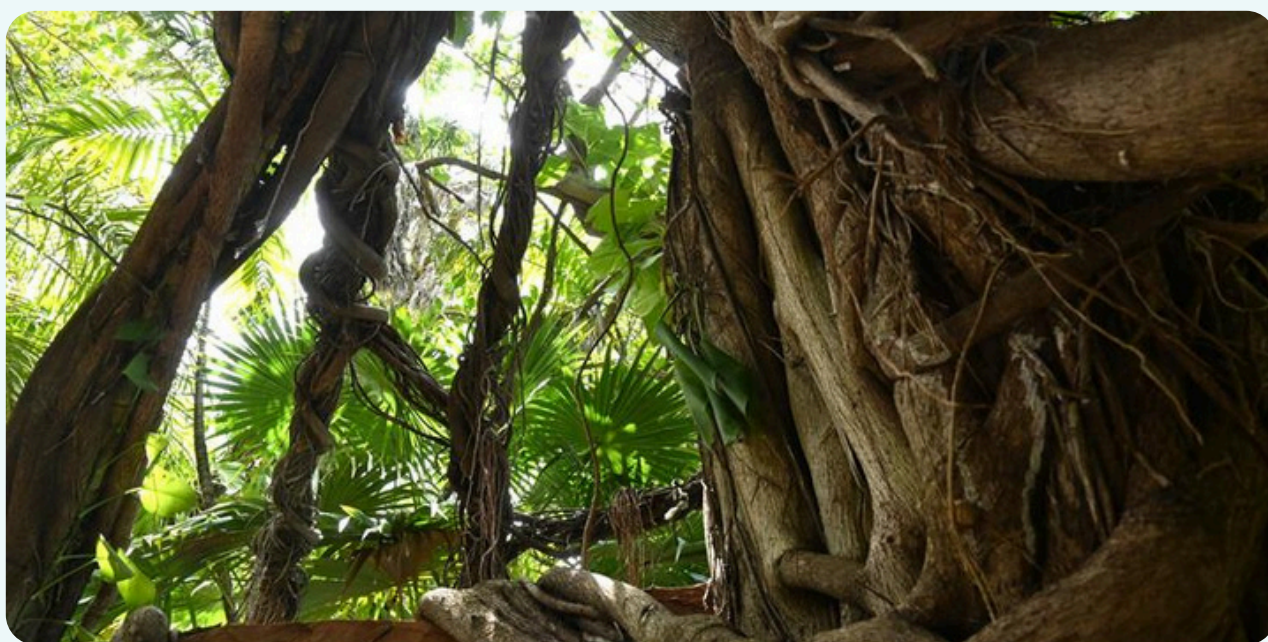




Democratising the Escazú Agreement: a blended legal empowerment guide



The Democratising the Escazú Agreement legal empowerment guide makes the rights recognised in the Escazú Agreement understandable, practical and accessible at the community level. Developed by the Defending a Living Earth Legal Clinic, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the Danish Institute for Human Rights in collaboration with the Latin American and Caribbean Alliance of Legal Clinics and other partners, the guide is delivered through WhatsApp in a conversational format rather than as a traditional printed manual.

Instead of presenting legal provisions in abstract terms, the guide situates the Escazú Agreement within diverse ecosystems and draws on real challenges faced by communities across Latin America and the Caribbean. In doing so, it connects this treaty with lived realities. The initiative forms part of the project

Defenders Leveraging Legal and Governance Tools for Just Sustainability Transformations (DEFEND-BIO) under the Biodiversa+ partnership framework.

Why is it needed?

Although the Escazú Agreement is a landmark regional treaty and the first in the world to explicitly recognise the rights of environmental human rights defenders, it remains insufficiently known in many local contexts. Legal experts and policymakers may engage with its provisions, but the communities who most need to rely on these rights often lack access to clear and usable law information.

This gap weakens the transformative potential of the Agreement. Without accessible knowledge, rights remain abstract promises rather than practical tools for defending

territories, ecosystems and livelihoods. Democratising information about the treaty is therefore essential to creating an enabling environment for the realisation of the right to a healthy environment.

The guide responds directly to this challenge by helping turn rights into reality through contextualised, practice-oriented co-learning.

For whom is this tool?

The guide is designed for environmental human rights defenders / biosphere defenders working in local communities across Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in rural or remote areas with limited access to computers and stable internet.

Hosted on WhatsApp, the guide is free, interactive, low-data and designed to be completed in less than two hour via mobile phone, making it accessible to communities with limited digital infrastructure and demanding schedules.

What is the purpose of this legal empowerment guide?

The course brings the pillars of the Escazú Agreement into focus for non-lawyers through plain language and ecosystem-based case studies. It addresses:

- The rights of environmental human rights defenders
- Access to environmental information
- Public participation in environmental decision-making
- Access to justice in environmental matters
- Right to defend human rights

It also explains key institutional innovations, including the role of representatives of the public and the Agreement's implementation and compliance mechanism, highlighting how these entry points can support defenders in practice.

From abstract concepts to law in action

The guide frames environmental defenders as agents of change and grounds legal concepts in concrete scenarios and storytelling.

Anonymised but based on real situations, case studies include struggles related to coral reefs and infrastructure projects, rainforest copper exploration, genetical modified organisms and pesticides affecting agrobiodiversity, drought and migration in semi-desert regions, and violence against forest defenders.

By linking rights to specific ecosystems and community experiences, the guide translates legal standards into practical strategies for requesting information, participating in decision-making and seeking justice. Digital learning is complemented by in-person dialogue with a community facilitator using art-based methodologies to encourage reflection and collective exchange.

How will it is being developed and what are the outcomes?

The guide is developed through a participatory, multi-phase process: drafting by RWI and the DEFEND-BIO Legal Clinic; expert review; transformation into a WhatsApp prototype; piloting and co-production with defenders; and final launch.

After using this guide, participants will better understand their environmental rights under the Escazú Agreement, feel more confident engaging in environmental processes in their communities and with public institutions, and will be better equipped to share this knowledge within their networks.

Ultimately, Democratising the Escazú Agreement seeks to close the gap between regional legal innovation and community practice—ensuring that this pioneering treaty becomes a living instrument in the hands of those defending ecosystems and biocultural diversity across Latin America and the Caribbean.

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