

potentially skewed studies to develop positions. It would also be politically more difficult for a country to allege that the GEO data are intentionally biased in another country's favour. Moreover, objective scientific research conducted or scrutinized by a GEO and that served to underpin multilateral agreements would work against domestic pressure or temptation to use environmental concerns as protectionist tools.

Public Participation

Another element of the paradigm is more direct public participation in the multilateral policy process. A GEO could not be of the post-World War II government-to-government relations framework. One lesson from UNCED, demonstrated by the participation of environmental and other nongovernmental organizations in the Global Forum that accompanied UNCED, is that a wide array of nonstate actors take great interest in, and have much to contribute to, understanding environmental issues. Indeed, Agenda 21 identifies nine major groups of stakeholders whose participation in the decision-making process is essential. These are: women, youth, environment/development nongovernmental organizations, indigenous people, workers and their trade unions, local government, business, the scientific community and farmers.¹¹

How to formalize and institutionalize participation and accommodate views from such interest groups would be a difficult task for a GEO. Care would need to be taken to prevent special interest groups from slowing or hindering negotiations, or participating in a manner that could give rise to accusations of favouritism to particular groups or views. Representativeness would be a major concern, requiring careful further consideration. The simplest method for including stakeholders in the process might be for the establishment of an nongovernmental advisory body with broad and diverse representation. Such a group would not have a vote in the treaty-making process. While such a group would not likely present consensual opinions, it would give nongovernmental bodies a multilateral forum to raise and discuss issues. This could be particularly useful for nongovernmental organizations that have little access to national mechanisms to make their views known or to influence national or international decision-making.¹²

¹¹Each group has an individual chapter in Agenda 21, Chapters 24 to 32.

¹²Note that Article 16 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (the so-called NAFTA environmental side agreement) provides for the establishment of a Joint Public Advisory Committee.