

Crafting successful access to information requests

BIC, along with other CSOs, has long been frustrated by the lack of information about how the World Bank calculates climate benefits. In September 2021, BIC formulated a request for the Bank's methodology for climate mitigation finance tracking and any other guidance. BIC's request was initially denied, but on appeal we successfully obtained 51 previously undisclosed climate finance policy and guidance documents. BIC shared the documents with relevant listservs, posted the list of documents with descriptions and links to them, and published an analysis of what the documents revealed regarding shortfalls in the Bank's climate finance accounting and guidance.

The documents include guidance notes on calculating climate co-benefits, tip sheets on opportunities to implement mitigation and adaptation in projects, and case studies detailing the process of calculating the adaptation and mitigation co-benefits of projects. They cover several sectors, including transport, education, and agriculture, and vary in terms of importance; but BIC found there is not enough guidance for sectors contributing the most to climate change. From this information, BIC has learned that in calculating its climate spending, the Bank assumes the total budget for the project is evenly distributed among all components, neglecting the reality that some components will receive significantly more funding than others. This means that climate finance is actually likely to be either over- or under-counted.

This effort resulted in two major impacts. The release of the 51 documents itself is significant because it shows that well-crafted requests for access to information, those that are both comprehensive and those that are specific, can draw out important knowledge. It also revealed to BIC the amount of information that is not voluntarily disclosed but should be, so it is an encouragement to continue using this process.

Additionally, the disclosed case studies allow BIC to examine what climate co-benefit calculations look like in practice through specific project examples, often with a sectoral focus, while the reference guides and notes provide insights into the Bank's more general procedures of climate finance. By examining these various documents together, BIC could compare the procedures and guidelines of climate finance to the reality of its calculation within Bank projects. This information demonstrated the gap between the theoretical and practical application of climate finance methodology and indicated there are systemic flaws that the Bank must address. The revelation of these flaws has allowed BIC to design specifically tailored recommendations regarding transparency around procedures and consistency of application of guidance across sectors.

Though it's not yet known if other organizations are using the analysis in their own advocacy or if the Bank's methods for calculating climate benefits have changed, what BIC has accomplished so far gives them a solid basis for further advocacy regarding practices, policies, communication, and transparency.