

In case you missed it — Agency to seek climate justice: access to information, participation and justice

2 September 2026

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) resumed its *Towards climate justice in the Caribbean* webinar series with a discussion on how access to information and participation in decision-making can help Caribbean people exercise agency and seek climate justice.

The webinar opened the third and final phase of the 10-part series. Following earlier sessions focused on the foundations of climate justice and the lived experiences of climate injustice, this phase shifts the emphasis towards agency and action—how people can move from understanding climate injustice to taking action to address it.

Using oil and gas exploration in Belize and Jamaica as practical case studies, the session explored two closely connected procedural rights: the right to access environmental information and the right to participate in environmental decision-making.

1. Setting the stage: From understanding climate injustice to taking action

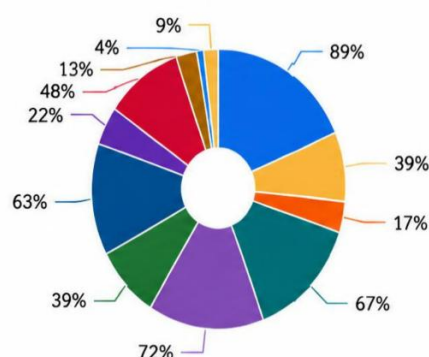
Opening the session, CANARI Executive Director Nicole Leotaud situated these rights within the Escazú Agreement—the *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

Nicole explained that the Agreement identifies three procedural rights through which people can seek to realise the right to a healthy environment: access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice. The webinar focused on the first two, with access to justice to be explored separately later in the series. She also highlighted the Escazú Agreement's specific protection of environmental human rights defenders.

A poll at the beginning of the webinar showed that participants were already exercising agency in many different ways. These included participating in workshops, meetings and conferences; volunteering in advocacy campaigns; signing petitions; conducting research; writing letters; using social media; protesting; and submitting requests for information. The exercise reinforced one of the central questions for this phase of the series: what can people do, individually and collectively, to seek climate justice?

1. What types of action have you taken on climate justice (tick all that apply): (Multiple choice)

46/46 (100%) answered · 0 skipped



Options	Responses ↑
Attended a workshop, meeting, conference on laws, policies, plans, bills, etc.	41/46 (89%)
Submitted written input on laws, policies, plans, bills, etc.	18/46 (39%)
Written a letter to the Editor	6/46 (17%)
Posted content on social media	31/46 (67%)
Commented or 'liked' a post on social media	33/46 (72%)
Volunteered on advocacy campaign	29/46 (63%)
Signed a petition	20/46 (43%)
Participated in a virtual protest	18/46 (39%)
Conducted research to seek information about an issue	22/46 (48%)
Submitted a Freedom of Information request	6/46 (13%)
Participated in litigation	2/46 (4%)
Other	4/46 (9%)

2. Access to information and participation in practice

Before turning specifically to oil and gas exploration, the discussion examined how people currently access environmental information and participate in decision-making in Belize and Jamaica.

Jacinta Usher, Campaign and Policy Director at Oceana Belize, and Kourtne Dixon, an attorney-at-law and Legal Officer at the Jamaica Environment Trust (JET), described how interventions spearheaded by their organisations sought to facilitate participation inside broader systems marked by exclusion and inequity.

Kourtne explained that, in Jamaica, public consultation commonly takes place through environmental impact assessment processes where these are required. Some policies and legislation may also be opened to public consultation. She noted, however, that there is no overarching enforceable law or policy governing public participation, and consultation can therefore vary depending on the issue.

She also highlighted the importance of access to information legislation. Environmental information may exist but simply requesting it by telephone or email does not guarantee access. Jamaica's Access to Information Act therefore provides an important mechanism, yet members of the public may not know about the legislation or how it can be used. If people do not know that the mechanism exists, she said, they cannot use it.

Jacinta described a similar tension in Belize. The country has a relatively well-developed legal framework for public consultation where an environmental impact assessment is required. However, not every project goes through that process. Even where consultation does occur, she noted, it may not be clear how public concerns are weighed or reflected in the eventual decision.

Accessibility is another challenge. Environmental impact assessments can run into hundreds of pages and contain highly technical information. Jacinta stressed that people need enough time and accessible information before consultations if they are to understand the issues and participate in an informed way.

This is one area where civil society organisations are playing an important role. Oceana works to break down technical information so that Belizeans can understand and use it, while JET shares its reviews and submissions publicly so that people who may not be able to work through lengthy technical documents can still understand the issues identified and undertake their own advocacy. Oceana is also updating an existing *Guide to Public Participation* to include information on relevant legislation, Freedom of Information procedures, offices and institutions, and plans to make it available as a digital tool.

The discussion pointed to an important distinction between information being available and information being genuinely accessible and usable.

3. Belize: Building public participation around offshore oil

Jacinta then shared Belize's experience of public mobilisation around offshore oil exploration, a story spanning more than a decade.

She explained that Belize is highly dependent on its marine resources, including for tourism, fisheries and coastal protection. Around one in four Belizeans depends on tourism, while approximately 60% of the population lives on the coast, in coastal communities or on islands. Against this backdrop, offshore oil became not simply a question of potential economic gain but one of what the country might be willing to risk.

The issue came sharply into public view in 2010 when a map was leaked showing that approximately 95% of the country had been parcelled out to oil companies without prior consultation or an

environmental impact assessment. At the same time, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico, providing a stark example of the potential risks associated with offshore oil.

Oceana and other organisations began educating the public and collecting signatures to trigger a national referendum. When the number of disqualified signatures prevented the official referendum from proceeding, organisers went ahead with a People's Referendum in 2012. Almost 30,000 Belizeans participated, with 96% voting against offshore oil. Legal action was also pursued, with the court finding the petroleum contracts unlawful, null and void because due process had not been followed.

Public advocacy continued through community engagement, events, scientific information, petitions, social media and participation in consultations. In 2017, the Government implemented a moratorium on offshore oil exploration and drilling.

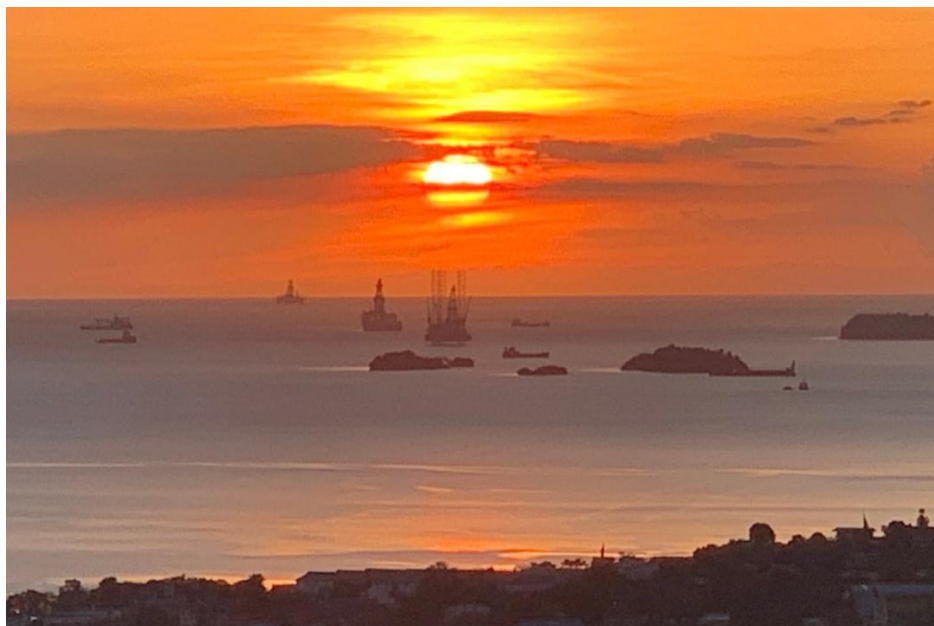
But advocates wanted to ensure that any future decision to change that moratorium would itself involve the public.

A new signature drive secured approximately 22,000 signatures calling for Belizeans to have a right to be consulted before the moratorium could be changed. In 2022, the Referendum Act was amended so that a national referendum must be held before a future parliament can alter or lift the moratorium.

For Jacinta, the central principle throughout has been informed decision-making. Oceana's position, she explained, has been that Belizeans should have as much information as possible and an opportunity to decide for themselves on an issue of national importance.

That approach is captured in the campaign message #AskBelizeFirst—a call for Belizeans to be consulted before decisions are made about offshore oil.

Reflecting on the case, Nicole described it as an example of participatory environmental governance and “environmental democracy”: people engaging on an issue they considered important, alongside a government response that translated public action into policy measures.



Oil platforms, Trinidad. Credit: Nicole Leotaud

4. Jamaica: Getting the information needed to understand the full picture

Jamaica's case is at a different stage.

Kourtnie explained that oil exploration in Jamaica is not new. Interest has existed for decades, and offshore drilling took place in the past, while renewed exploration activity has included seismic surveys in the Walton-Morant Basin. United Oil and Gas subsequently acquired an exploration licence and has continued efforts to attract investor interest.

JET has been raising questions about the possible implications of moving from exploration towards exploitation. The 2024 oil spill in Tobago, Kourtnie explained, prompted the organisation to ask whether Jamaica has adequate systems and frameworks to manage the environmental, economic and livelihood impacts if an oil spill were to occur.

At the same time, much of the public discussion has focused on the potential economic benefits of discovering oil, including foreign exchange and revenue.

JET's response has been to ask: "At what cost?"

Kourtnie stressed that JET was not arguing that there could be no revenue from oil. Rather, the organisation was calling for the full range of factors to be considered, including how revenue would benefit different parts of society and the potential risks and costs that Jamaica would be taking on.

Information is therefore central to JET's work.

Kourtnie explained that JET had submitted an Access to Information request seeking the findings of recent survey work as well as information on the production sharing agreement signed by the Government. The aim is to better understand what has been found and what any petroleum development could mean for Jamaica before developing the organisation's wider public education and advocacy campaign.

She also raised concerns about how information and consultation have been handled. Consultation on recent survey activity took place shortly before the activity began, while fishers and environmental NGOs were consulted separately. Kourtnie questioned whether this allowed different stakeholder groups to fully understand one another's concerns and the responses they had received. JET also encountered difficulties accessing information about a grievance mechanism connected to the activity and said details of the production sharing agreement had not been made available to them.

JET is considering a wider educational campaign, working with other organisations and communities to make information accessible to people across Jamaica. Kourtnie noted that many people have only a limited understanding of oil and gas as an industry, making public education an important part of enabling informed participation.

The organisation is also using visual information to communicate potential environmental implications. A map presented during the webinar placed the Walton-Morant block alongside ecologically sensitive areas, protected areas and coral reefs. Kourtnie argued that environmental risks need to form part of any cost-benefit analysis, alongside potential effects on fisheries, tourism, agriculture and livelihoods. She also pointed to Jamaica's constitutional right to enjoy a healthy and productive environment free from the threat of injury and degradation of its ecological heritage.

Nicole drew the discussion back to the webinar's central theme: people need access to the information required to understand the full picture and to form and express their own views about decisions that affect them.

She was also explicit that the webinar itself was not seeking to decide whether Belize, Jamaica or any other country should pursue oil and gas. Instead, the focus was on whether people can exercise their

rights to access information and participate in decisions that may increase climate risks, harm or injustice.

5. Broadening the conversation: What does meaningful agency require?

The participant discussion brought experiences from elsewhere in the Caribbean into conversation with the Belize and Jamaica cases. Rather than reaching a single position on oil and gas development, participants explored what people and organisations need if they are to participate meaningfully in complex environmental decisions.

Several themes emerged:

- **Public education matters.** Participants repeatedly highlighted the need to translate technical language and complex issues into information that ordinary people can understand and connect to their own lives.
- **Independent evidence can strengthen advocacy.** Scientific research, official records and other sources of evidence can help civil society organisations ground their questions and public education in information rather than assertion.
- **People need to see the full range of possible costs and benefits.** Participants called for conversations that consider both economic possibilities and environmental, social and livelihood risks rather than reducing complex development choices to one dimension.
- **Environmental issues intersect with other rights and inequalities.** The discussion highlighted connections between environmental rights and issues including women's rights and the experiences of persons with disabilities.
- **Civil society needs allies and solidarity.** Participants stressed the importance of organisations learning from each other, building coalitions and sharing approaches across countries.
- **People asking difficult questions must be able to do so safely.** Concerns were raised about the pressure, ridicule and intimidation environmental advocates may experience when speaking out.

Nicole connected this last point directly to the rights being discussed. Freedom to access information and participate in decision-making also requires the freedom to express an opinion. She urged participants to remain alert to threats, intimidation, harassment and ridicule directed at environmental defenders.

Experiences shared during the wider discussion also illustrated that questions about oil and gas development are being debated elsewhere in the Caribbean, including Guyana. Participants spoke about efforts to obtain information, translate technical issues for communities, organise protests and use legal avenues to challenge environmental decisions.

6. Lessons for taking action

Asked to offer one major recommendation for others seeking to exercise their rights to information and participation, Jacinta returned to the narratives that often shape environmental debates.

One challenge, she said, is the framing of “environment versus development”, in which those raising concerns about offshore oil can be portrayed as anti-development. Her response was to connect environmental decisions to the everyday realities of people.

For Belizeans, she argued, offshore oil is also a “bread and butter” issue. It is connected to sustainable development, families, education and livelihoods. Oceana's grassroots work therefore

involves meeting Belizeans where they are, communicating in their language and helping them understand how a large and complex issue may affect their own lives.

That process also means encouraging people to ask basic questions about justice and development: Who will benefit? Who will suffer? Where is the public interest?

Jacinta reflected on the experience of communities being among the last to receive information but potentially the first to bear the consequences of decisions.

For Kourtnie, information itself is a tool.

She explained that JET intends to begin with information contained in government documents and official records and use it to inform the public. The organisation wants to simplify that information so that it is accessible to everyone, including children, and then use that stronger base of public understanding to support advocacy.

Both experiences pointed to a similar lesson: access to information becomes most powerful when people can understand it, connect it to their own lives and use it to act.

7. Key takeaways

Bringing the discussion together, Nicole stressed that the development choices Caribbean countries face are complex. Exercising procedural rights is therefore about ensuring that people can understand those choices and participate in deciding how their countries respond.

Key lessons from the webinar included:

- **Access to information and participation work together as a sequence.**
- **Civil society organisations must often build the infrastructure for these rights to function.**
- **Participation can take multiple, escalating forms, each building public agency differently.**
- **Recognising information fragmentation as a deliberate pattern allows advocates to counteract it strategically.**
- **How information is framed determines whether participation rights can practically be exercised.**

Nicole particularly highlighted the importance of connecting awareness to action. The Belize petitions demonstrated how people could move beyond simply knowing about an issue to having a way to engage with it. Closing that gap, she suggested, is an important part of pursuing climate justice.

8. Continuing collective action for climate justice

The webinar closed by returning to the importance of collective action and solidarity.

Participants were invited to connect through the Caribbean Climate Justice Alliance, a non-state, non-governmental alliance focused on learning, sharing, amplifying the voices of vulnerable and frontline groups and undertaking collective advocacy and action. Nicole noted that speaking out can be harder when organisations and individuals act alone, making regional solidarity particularly valuable.

The remaining webinars in the final phase of *Towards climate justice in the Caribbean* will continue exploring practical approaches to seeking climate justice, including advocacy, litigation, and partnerships and coalitions.

Together, the Belize and Jamaica cases showed that agency depends not only on having rights, but on being able to use them: finding and understanding information, asking questions, participating in decisions, organising collectively and having practical avenues through which public voices can influence the choices shaping Caribbean futures.



Deepwater oil spill, Gulf of Mexico. Credit: Kris Krug