

POLICY BRIEF

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DATA FOR BETTER ECONOMY

AUGUST 2022

This Policy Brief is the result of the discussions that took place at the *Workshop on The Open Extractive Industrial and Environmental Data for Better Economy*. The workshop aimed at: i) **discussing the growth of the extractive industry** in Cambodia; and ii) **raising awareness about how open data and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) can contribute to mitigating the implications** for local communities and indigenous peoples.

The rapid expansion of Cambodia's extractive industry entails **large investments in the country and promotes Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and infrastructure development**. Besides, if well-managed, the growing public funds obtained from this developing sector could bring **substantial social and economic progress** for Cambodians. Nonetheless, these activities also tend to have **important socio-economic and environmental implications** for local communities, who normally lack or have very limited access to open data regarding such disadvantages and inconveniences.

Considering all the information shared and discussed in the workshop, the main challenges regarding the current transparency deficiencies were identified. In response, this Policy Brief presents a set of priority strategies seeking to enhance data transparency and mitigate the impacts of the extractive industry and environmental degradation.

MAIN CHALLENGES

(1) Even though some laws, such as the Law on Environmental Protection and Management of Natural Resources, suggest that the government should disseminate the information to the public, to this day **there is not any specific law that formally indicates such obligation**. EIA reporting and monitoring remain **highly opaque processes, and corruption practices** often hinder the publication of these reports.

(2) In spite of the possibility of hosting public audiences to provide feedback on EIA reporting, most citizens - as well as journalists and CSO members - face serious barriers to **understanding the technical aspects of social and environmental measurements within the report**. Likewise, with limited access to these reports, the public is unable to take part in public participation, seek legal redress and claim what they deserve from the project's impacts.

(3) Local communities usually have **poor internet access**, which means they lack information related to mining and EIA that reflects the inconvenience these activities could cause to their land and environment. Indeed, many citizens do not even know their right to public information access.

(4) **A lot of journalists do not show interest in the Extractive Industry**. Therefore, they do not work towards disseminating key data concerning the topic. Moreover, many senior journalists work for the private sector and do not have the freedom to write articles about open data and social reformation.



PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Engage multi-sectoral stakeholders in the decision-making process, including government, private sectors, development partners, and citizens. This is where Information and communication technologies (ICT) come into play to digitize resources and ensure that citizens have enough factual information regarding the development and the available solutions.

2. Implement the Draft Law on Right to information, which would enable Cambodian citizens to more effectively obtain information from public institutions concerning the use of public funds, how decisions that affect their communities are being made, and other matters impacting their lives and wellbeing. Indeed, the Right to Information states that public organizations from local to national levels have an obligation to share all the information excluding secret information. The information should be posted on the Website and on TV.

3. Create more dialogues/events to raise awareness and engage more media to monitor and report on Extractive Industry. Such forums should be leveraged to highlight the concerns and demands from local communities and encourage journalists to address such issues.

4. Call for the dissemination of the complete EIA reports by strengthening the joint action of development partners and journalists. Relevant stakeholders should define a set of actions and strategies to demand more information-sharing from the government and private companies.

5. Raise the data and digital skills of media workers. More training programs on **data-driven journalism** would empower information professionals and equip them with the skills needed to compile, analyze and present the data in user-friendly formats. Ensuring that journalists have an adequate interpretation of the data and information would directly improve the information ecosystem in Cambodia.

6. Ensure local communities have access to the available data with no delay, in timing and user-friendly formats. Hence, to bring information closer to affected citizens, the most relevant content should be presented in **videos and infographics**, so they can understand and use it easily. Importantly, outreach can be increased by disseminating information through broadly used social media channels, such as **Facebook and YouTube**.

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