WORKSHOP REPORT

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIAL AND ENVIROMENTAL DATA FOR BETTER ECONOMY

AUGUST 2022

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

The workshop on [The Open of Extractive Industrial and Environmental Data for Better Economy,](#) held on December 17th 2021 at Phnom Penh Era Hotel with a total of 46 participants, aimed at **disseminating the growth of the extractive industry** in Cambodia and **raising awareness about its implications** for local communities and indigenous peoples through open data.

Among the attendees, there were development partners, national and international organizations, local communities, indigenous people, journalists and researchers with experience in land management, economic and environmental impact assessment of the extractive industry.

The workshop was organized by Open Development Cambodia (ODC), in collaboration with the Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO), Cambodia Indigenous Women Association (CIWA) and Cambodia Indigenous People Alliance (CIPA) and other relevant local NGOs, with funding support from the (HBS).

PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

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 socioeconomic and environmental implications** for local communities, who normally lack or have very limited access to open data regarding such disadvantages and inconveniences.

Thus, the Workshop on *The open of extractive industrial and environmental data for better economy* focused on five main objectives:

1. Raise awareness about the **current state of open data on extractive industries** in Cambodia and the ongoing acceleration of new projects.

2. Discuss and **share data on the positive and negative impacts** of extractive activities for local communities and Indigenous Peoples (IPs) groups.

3. Support **local communities and Indigenous Peoples** (IPs) groups to find relevant data, especially Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports of extractive industrial projects in Cambodia.

4. Call for **further collaboration between relevant stakeholders** - including the Government, CSOs and the private sector - in sharing their complete EIA reports.

5. Release a fact sheet/**policy brief of the highlights of the event** for future use.

OVERVIEW

The rapid expansion of the extractive industry and its environmental implications

Non-tax revenue generated in Cambodia by the mining sector in 2019 amounted to **$21 million**, which reveals the promising potential of the sector for both private and public revenues.

However, there are many aspects, such as **legislation and data transparency**, to be taken into consideration in order to avoid corruption, social inequality and an excessive environmental impact.

Blog post: https://bit.ly/3AuLpDX

As a fast-growing industry, **mining has both potentially positive and negative impacts** on society, economics, and environment. The potential positive impacts are **development and financial benefits** (wealth creation and increased investment) and **benefits for local people** (employment, skills, improved infrastructure, as well as education and social programs). Cambodia will see how the mining industry can benefit the country after 2023, as it will create a stronger economic foundation, more job opportunities, and more business.

Nevertheless, the potential negative impacts of mining could have an **effect on the environment** (chemical pollution, noise, dust, smoke, and vibrations, waste products, water use, forest clearance, and destruction of habitat) and **on people** (labor, impacts on women, encroachment, displacement, access, indigenous people, loss of income, violence and intimidation, breakdown of communities, and lack of transparency).

In spite of Cambodia's extractive industry growth, up to this day **the country lags behind its neighbors** as these have predominantly large-scale mineral extraction projects. As a matter of fact, it was not until **September 2016 that the first industrial mining license for gold was issued** to a mining company working in Ratanakiri.

Just recently, the first ever industrial gold manufacturing in Cambodia was announced. Renaissance Minerals (Cambodia) Ltd. approved **Okvau Gold Project**, which is expected to produce three tones of pure gold on an annual average for the first eight years of operation[1].

Regarding **legislation** on the sector, most extractive industries -except for oil and petroleum- are regulated by the **Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME)** since, under the constitution, all natural resources are the property of the state and mining conducted without a license is illegal. The MME is responsible for **licensing, managing and inspecting mining operations**, and for ensuring that the provisions of the mining law are respected.

Licensing is covered by the 2001 Law on Managing and Exploring Mineral Resources and the 2016 Sub-Decree on Management of Mineral Exploration and Industrial Mining Licenses. Nevertheless, **the sector suffers from a lack of law enforcement and poor transparency** towards local communities and the general population.

In this regard, **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** is crucial. It is a comprehensive analytical tool used to **assess the significant effects of a project** or development proposal **on the environment**. EIAs make sure that project decision makers think about the likely effects on the environment at the earliest possible time and aim to avoid, reduce or offset those effects. This ensures that proposals are understood properly before choices are made.

According to the Law On Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management, EIA reports are **compulsory for largest development projects** (Government of Cambodia, 1996). The sub decree 72 on Environmental Impact Assessment processes requires **public consultation and participation in the EIA process**.

With the objective to **address the needs and concerns of affected communities** by a given project, the EIA Department of the Ministry of Environment is responsible for **making reports accessible and gathering comments and inputs from relevant stakeholders**, especially Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working closely with grassroots communities. Likewise, the regulation establishes that **the inputs reported from affected communities must be reflected in the report.**

However, citizens' open access to EIA reports, data and information is presupposed, **since this is still not the case in Cambodia**. And while some EIA reports have been open to the public for comment, it's not yet the norm.

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[1] https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50872213/cambodia-to-launch-historic-industrial-gold-manufacturing/

EIA reporting and monitoring remain **highly opaque processes, and corruption practices** often hinder the publication of reports. In spite of the possibility of public audience feedback on EIA reporting, it would be a tremendous challenge for many of them to **understand technical aspects of social and environmental measurements within the report**. Having no 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.

Importantly, **the reports that are actually produced are usually only available in hard copy and not published online.** Hence, it is difficult for communities affected by the environmental degradation of large projects to locate information and use it to raise their voices.

In such a context, it is recognized that **ICT and open data initiatives can make assessments, environmental management plans and monitoring reports easily accessible.** This means that citizen groups, especially those representing directly affected communities, can readily track the progress and implementation of promised measures, like mitigation plans, payments into designated funds, and employment promises. **Timely access to information** can also help the public become involved earlier in the process, during the crucial phase in which the scope and requirements of the assessment are set and project design is not yet finalized. Open access also helps improve the quality and scientific integrity of assessments, making it easier for communities to challenge any perceived technical deficiencies in the analyses.

Moreover, by complementing the information contained in EIA reports with other data, such as environmental indicators and project approvals, ICT and open data initiatives can form a **robust informational hub as a resource for informed debates about projects and development plans**, facilitating comprehensive monitoring schemes and enabling other participation mechanisms with CSOs and inter-ministry meetings, supporting the public interest.

WORKSHOP'S MAIN HIGHLIGHT

Open Data, EIA Monitoring, and Media Engagement

Opening remarks on sustainable development and open data

The workshop began with an emphasis on the fact that **a country's sustainable development requires the engagement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process** including government, private sectors, development partners, and citizens. Thus, the data on EIA for development projects should be available for the public, but the reality is that EIA reports have been hard to find in the past years and development projects are little known to citizens who would benefit from them.

And this is where Information and communication technologies (ICT) come into play digitalizing resources and ensuring that citizens have enough factual information regarding the development and the available solution. Nonetheless, this transparency remains a challenge due to limited tools to make it available online and communities little knowledge in accessing information.

This is why initiatives like the ones launched by ODC aiming to provide open data are so relevant, promoting transparency and providing tools and knowledge for each partner to develop a better approach for public participation.

EI and EIA datasets: how to access trustworthy data

This session was dedicated to EI and EIA datasets and started by explaining how to access and share data on the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Mining Concessions Profile Page on the ODC Website.

Currently, there are 29 draft EIA reports on the ODC website, which were shared by the Ministry of Environment with CSOs prior to the inter-ministry meeting.

The total mining concessions on the ODC website are 297, including:

- **54 government data**: information obtained from official government sources with official documentation in the four identification fields: A. company name; B. location; C. GPS coordinates and/or analog map; D. purpose

- **74 government data partial**: obtained from official government sources, with legal documentation, but missing one or more identification fields.

- **114 secondary resource data**: information obtained from the concessionaire or from government source(s) without legal documentation.

- **55 other data**: information obtained from any other source in the public domain (including documentation from photographs, etc.).

Government Data: 54

Other Data: 55

297
mining concessions on ODC website

Government Data Partial: 74

Secondary Resource Data: 114
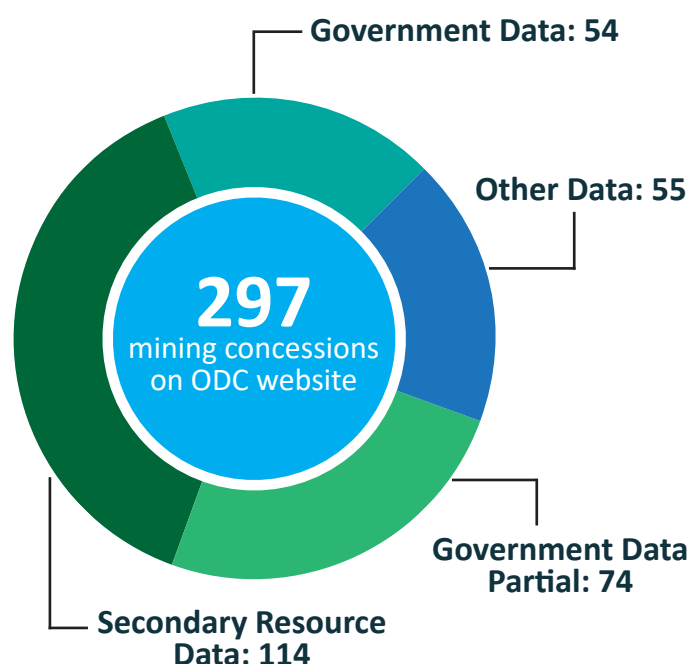
Regarding all this information, participants showed special interest in data updating on ODCs website, since they sometimes noticed it is not completely accurate. This results from the fact that, as discussed previously, some EIA reports are difficult to access because they are opaque and not wisely open for the public, but ODC constantly keeps gathering and updating data by all means.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The role of journalism and EIA on the open of extractive industrial and environmental data

Panelists exposed the inconveniences caused by the limited accessibility to information related to mining and EIA and talked about **journalisms' role, tools and strategies** to bring this data closer to the local community, especially indigenous people.

Journalists are responsible to provide accurate information to all citizens, previously interpreted from raw data gathered by platforms like ODC, and to create awareness towards sensitive issues.

Nonetheless, there are some challenges to be taken into account:

- 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.

- 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 indicates obligation**.

- **A lot of journalists do not show interest in the Extractive Industry**. Thus, 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.

Considering that, there are some strategies that could break some barriers:

- **Implementing 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.

- **Creating more dialogues/events to raise awareness and engage more media** to monitor and report on Extractive Industry, and providing more training on data-driven journalism to ensure an appropriate interpretation of the information.

- **Training citizen journalists:** people who use social media such as Facebook or YouTube to post relevant information for their communities with no external pressure.

One of the panelists shared their **experience and reflected on the mining overview and disclosed EIA**. Oxfam has worked in the mining sector for not less than 15 years, aiming to enhance good governance in the industry by **monitoring projects from the beginning stage** of the investment until the project's end.

The first step when a company first comes is **registering at CDC**, either for exploration or registration, and defining their standard.

Following, the **local community gets primary information about the investment,** since they are the owner of the land. The disclosure is done through social media and journalists and, in order to ensure citizens, receive all data, Oxfam supports **DPA-EISEI** (a national level communication and knowledge-sharing network) that works directly with the Department of EIA. Generally, the CSOs have to give feedback on the EIA report before it is approved.

Then, DPA-EISEI gets the **hard copy of the EIA report to review or check** and give the input to the Ministry of Environment, that includes the points in the report. However, some parts of the report related to mining might be technical, which is a burden for Oxfam and citizens. Also, the companies that share their EIA report sometimes only upload the English version, which might not be understandable for the local community.

Depending on their standards, companies might also share financial information and others, like Renaissance, and this is why Oxfam holds training for journalists on how to read and analyze data to bring it to citizens.

Considering all the potential positive and negative impacts of the extractive industry, it is clear that strengthening collaborations between relevant stakeholders is key to continue protecting the environment and minimizing any potential externalities caused by extractive and development projects.

NEXT STEPS

Committing to sustain the efforts towards improved EIA, a follow-up workshop will take place on the upcoming July 28th, which will focus on the importance of local communities to engage in EIA processes and the mechanisms to do so. The workshop will be hosted by Open Development Cambodia, with the support of Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. A total of 25 participants are expected to join the event, including representatives from the provincial governments, grassroots partners, key CSOs, journalists and NGOs, local communities, indigenous people (IPs), and relevant stakeholders in land management and environmental impact assessment.

The workshop on "Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA): Importance and Opportunity to Engage" will have three main objectives:

1. Raise awareness about the significance and the disclosure of EIA reports.

2. Gather feedback on the EIA profile page and ways to improve it.

3. Discuss the opportunities to engage in the EIA-making process and monitoring.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

Open Development Cambodia (ODC)

Open Development Cambodia (ODC) is the leading open data platform in Cambodia, which makes up-to-date and reliable data and information on socioeconomic and environmental issues publicly available in a "one-stop shop". ODC promotes the use of accurate data for evidence-based and transparent decision-making processes towards a sustainable development of the country. ODC provides a wide range of relevant information and data, including Extractive Industries, Land, Environment and Natural Resources, communal land, among others. Besides, ODC produces interactive maps that locate Indigenous Peoples' areas, effectively registered Indigenous communal land, self-identification of Indigenous communities, mining concessions and oil and gas blocks.

Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO)

The Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO) was born out of the desire to change the destiny of the Cambodian Indigenous Peoples Society to take charge on their culture and tradition and their customary rights to land and natural resources in their community as well as in Cambodia country. CIPO has a strong belief that the indigenous peoples (IP), who have in-depth understanding of the local context, can work effectively (with relevance partners/stakeholders) to make real and sustainable change to the IPs society. CIPO runs the Indigenous Peoples (IP) Data and Development Project, an initiative to build a data center for IPs data with the aim to produce comprehensive demographic data for IP living in Cambodia.

Cambodia Indigenous Women Association (CIWA)

The Cambodian Indigenous Women Association (CIWA) works to promote the rights of indigenous women in Cambodia.

Cambodia Indigenous People Alliance (CIPA)

Cambodia Indigenous People Alliance (CIPA) is an alliance of indigenous communities and peoples' organizations, associations, and networks. It serves as a platform for solidarity, cooperation and coordination of actions for the promotion and assertion of the collective rights of indigenous peoples in Cambodia.

*This report is produced by **Open Development Cambodia (ODC).***

*This workshop is supported by **Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (HBS).***

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The Open of Extractive Industrial and Environmental Data for Better Economy