



## How effective are transparency and accountability initiatives? An overview of new evidence

Abundant natural resources can be a boon to economic prosperity, provided the profits translate into more investment in infrastructure and public goods. However, promoting economic growth by transforming underground natural resources into physical and human capital has not been straightforward. Importantly, natural resource abundance often perpetuates violence and conflict. Unaccountable and mismanaged government institutions responsible for natural resources are believed to be the root cause of resource-related conflicts and poor use of resource wealth.

Better transparency and accountability in the natural resources sector is considered to be the antidote to this 'resource curse'. There is a wide array of transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) in the extractive natural resources sector to increase citizens' awareness and the demand for good governance. Despite considerable efforts, the overall evidence on the impact and effectiveness of TAIs on developmental outcomes is remarkably sparse.

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) developed the Transparency and Accountability Evidence Programme to increase the body of high-quality, policy-relevant evidence on TAIs to improve governance in the natural resources sector. 3ie-funded grants evaluated TAIs in Ecuador, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Peru, Tanzania and Uganda. All seven studies evaluated programmes that provided information to promote awareness and/or knowledge of the generation and allocation of revenue from extractives industries and of the environmental implications of the extractives sector.

### Highlights

- Interventions that combined information with some form of deliberation improved the absorption of the information and resulted in more support for collective action and demands for accountability.
- Disseminating well-structured information, aimed at very clearly defined sets of stakeholders within a manageable geographical scope, increases impact.
- Paying more attention to the type and format of the information, the mode of dissemination, the intended recipients, and the frequency of information provision will likely increase impact.
- Platforms for deliberating the new information help promote the citizens' demands for accountability and collective action and enhance their trust.

## Overview of our studies

In **Ecuador**, the study examined whether a rapid and relatively inexpensive transparency programme could improve water treatment, management and storage at the household level, in the context of oil-related contamination.

Another study in **Ecuador**, which included **Peru**, used a combination of advanced technologies and big data to evaluate the impact of community monitoring of the extractives sector's socio-environmental liabilities. The interventions were expected to enhance the capabilities of communities to detect, monitor and report oil spills in their territories as a strategy to strengthen their ability to produce socio-environmental claims.

In **Ghana**, the study evaluated the impact of the Public Interest and Accountability Committee, created under government legislation to

disseminate key information and engage with citizens on issues relevant to the extractives sector. The study evaluated the committee's impact on citizens' knowledge, attitude towards natural resources revenue, and demand for better transparency and accountability.

In **India**, the study evaluated a 2006 environmental clearance reform that directed mines larger than 5 hectares to obtain regulatory approval before beginning extraction. The study attempted to estimate the impact of an expanded public hearing requirement on the costs and benefits of the clearance process.

The study in **Mozambique** evaluated the effectiveness of citizens meetings on the behaviour and expectations of villagers and local elites. These meetings deliberated upon the main priorities for spending extractives revenues.

The **Tanzania** study used a form of public consultation called deliberative polling. The intervention sought to assess public perception both before and after people had a chance to engage with complex resource management issues. The study examined the impact of effective communication and deliberation on citizens' knowledge of the extractives sector and their demand for public accountability.

Multi-stakeholder forums in **Uganda** were held to explain to community members the key junctures in an oil company's planning cycle, as well as their rights and how to exercise them, and encouraged community members to engage with oil companies and government. The study evaluated the effectiveness of these forums on the demand for knowledge and accountability and development outcomes for the community.





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## Key findings from the synthesis

- The studies found mixed evidence on the ability of information alone to lead to changes in the level of knowledge and awareness. There was clear support for combining information campaigns with some form of deliberation, which had a significantly higher impact on knowledge and awareness as well as the demand for transparency.
- Deliberative interventions led to better-informed elites who made decisions that were more closely aligned with the preference of the majority of citizens. However,
  - providing information only to leaders did not lead to any clear within-community effort for distributing information to citizens.
  - The studies found weak evidence on information campaigns' ability to lead to changes in attitudes if the intervention was targeted towards citizens alone.
  - The interventions led to no significant change in the level of trust or citizens' desire to contribute or punish across the interventions arms.
- Most studies (six of seven) did not look at the impact of TAIs on development outcomes. The study in Uganda did not find any significant impact of the multi-stakeholder forums on land management or land ownership.
- Our findings indicate no significant effect of the interventions on regulatory compliance or on environmental compliance, measured as air pollution, water pollution and forest cover.

## Key lessons from evaluating TAIs

### Theory of change and scope of evaluations

- Findings indicate a need for more realistic evaluation theories of change and more manageable evaluation scopes. This requires evaluations of TAIs that are designed to measure multiple, intermediate outcomes within a more complex theory of change of transparency and accountability, with sufficient attention to complex political economy contexts.
- A follow-up survey of selected studies in the 3ie evidence programme could shed light on the long-term development impact of TAIs and the sustainability of their impacts.

### Designing more effective initiatives

- Clear evidence exists for combining information campaigns with some form of deliberation, which has significantly higher impact on improving knowledge and awareness.
- There is a need for initiatives to provide more clarity on actions citizens can take based on the information they receive. Few TAIs have provided them as part of the information citizens deliberated.
- TAIs should seek to reduce the differences between the information local leaders and elite can access and what is available to the public.
- TAIs should build feedback loops for the elites to understand citizens' preferences.

### Evidence gaps

- A key gap identified in existing literature, including from 3ie's TAI evidence programme, is that the studies do not assess the relative importance of different modes of information disclosure and/or deliberation.
- Our findings point towards the role of big data in measuring impact. Community-based, high-technology environmental monitoring of extractive industries, especially in remote, hard-to-reach areas, can be an effective tool to increase transparency and accountability.
- More gender-responsive and inclusive TAIs and evaluations need to be designed using a politically aware context analysis and published gender analysis framework.



## About this brief

This brief is based on *Transparency and accountability in the extractives sector: a synthesis of what works and what does not*, 3ie Working Paper 33, by Francis Rathinam, Priyanka Cardoz, Zeba Siddiqui and Marie Gaarder.

## About 3ie working papers

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