



Environmental Journalism in Cambodia

Mapping the Landscape, Challenges, and Support Needs

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Executive Summary

Background and Purpose of the Study

Environmental issues—including deforestation, land conflicts, pollution, and climate-related challenges—continue to shape Cambodia’s development landscape and have significant implications for communities, natural resource management, and sustainable development. In this context, environmental journalism plays an important role in informing the public, documenting environmental change, and promoting transparency and accountability in environmental governance.

Despite this role, journalists covering environmental issues often operate in challenging conditions, particularly when reporting on topics involving natural resource management, land disputes, or other sensitive governance issues. However, limited research has been conducted to systematically examine who reports on environmental issues in Cambodia, where environmental reporting takes place, and what risks and challenges journalists face.

To address this gap, the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA), with the support from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), conducted this study to map the landscape of environmental journalism in Cambodia. The study aims to provide evidence-based insights that can help inform efforts to strengthen journalist protection mechanisms, improve collaboration among journalists, and support policy and advocacy initiatives aimed at creating a safer and more enabling environment for environmental reporting.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to capture both patterns and experiences in environmental journalism.

The primary data source was a nationwide survey of 74 journalists, which collected information on journalists’ demographic and professional profiles, environmental reporting practices, geographic coverage, perceived risks, and support needs. The survey results were complemented by a focus group discussion (FGD) with environmental journalists and key informant interviews (KIIs) with senior journalists, media experts, and representatives from civil society organizations.

In addition, a desk review of existing literature and journalist safety monitoring data was conducted to provide context on press freedom, environmental governance, and the safety of journalists in Cambodia.

Key Findings

The study finds that environmental journalism in Cambodia is primarily carried out by field-based reporters and freelancers working largely through digital and multimedia news platforms. Environmental journalists are distributed across 23 locations nationwide, with a significant number based in provinces rich in natural resources, including Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Mondulkiri, Kratie, Kampong Thom, and Preah Vihear.

The profession remains male-dominated, with survey results indicating that men account for approximately 77% of respondents, while women represent 23%. Qualitative findings suggest that cultural norms and newsroom practices may influence field assignments and mobility, sometimes limiting opportunities for women journalists to participate in environmental reporting in remote areas.

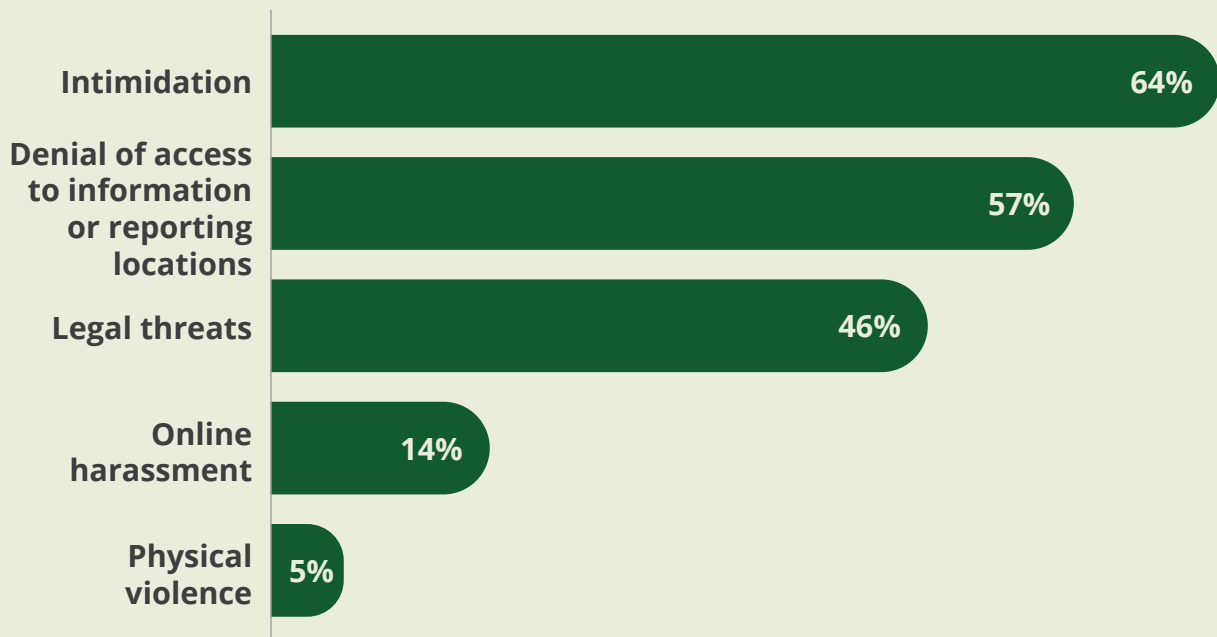
Environmental reporting is concentrated on issues such as deforestation, land disputes, pollution, and climate-related challenges. Journalists rely heavily on local communities (89%) and civil society organizations (55%) as sources of information, while fewer rely on official sources or experts.

Major Risks and Barriers

The study highlights that environmental journalists frequently face significant risks and structural barriers in the course of their work.

Survey findings show that many journalists perceive environmental reporting as unsafe. Approximately 62% of 74 respondents reported feeling unsafe, while 11% (8 respondents) reported feeling very unsafe when covering environmental issues.

Journalists reported experiencing various forms of risk, including:



Monitoring data collected by CamboJA also shows that journalists continue to face violations linked to their reporting activities. In 2025, CamboJA documented 61 human rights violations affecting 57 journalists, including five women journalists. Among these cases, seven were related to journalists covering environmental issues, making environmental reporting one of the topics most associated with violations against journalists.

The study also identifies several barriers that limit environmental reporting, including pressure from local authorities (66%), legal restrictions (54%), and lack of access to reliable data or official information (47%). Limited time and resources, as well as gaps in technical knowledge related to environmental reporting, also affect journalists' ability to conduct in-depth reporting.

Key Recommendations

The study highlights the need for coordinated action among government institutions, media organizations, journalist associations, civil society groups, and international development partners to strengthen environmental journalism in Cambodia.

Key recommendations include:

- » Reform the legal framework, notably the Penal Code sections related to incitement and defamation, so that journalists can do their work without fear of abusive and bogus prosecutions.

- » Improving access to environmental information, including the adoption of the long-delayed Law on Access to Information in line with international human rights standards.
- » Establish an independent press council, with independence guaranteed in its statutes, to serve as a priority mechanism for resolving disputes involving government officials, private sector actors, the public, and the press. The fundings of the press council should be sufficient, stable and diversified.
- » Strengthening protection mechanisms for journalists, including legal assistance, safety training, and accountability for officials who obstruct journalists' reporting activities.
- » Enhancing newsroom safety protocols and gender-inclusive practices to support journalists reporting on environmental issues.
- » Expanding training programs and capacity development initiatives, particularly in investigative reporting, environmental governance, and digital reporting tools.
- » Supporting professional collaboration and networks among environmental journalists, particularly for freelancers and journalists working in provincial areas.
- » Providing resources and reporting support, including story grants and equipment, to enable journalists to conduct in-depth environmental investigations.

Strengthening environmental journalism is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and informed public debate on environmental issues in Cambodia. By improving the safety, capacity, and professional support systems for journalists, stakeholders can help ensure that environmental reporting continues to play a vital role in documenting environmental change and contributing to sustainable development.

I. Introduction

The media landscape in Cambodia continues to deteriorate as journalists face increasing threats, legal persecution, and violence for carrying out their work. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Cambodia ranked 128th out of 180 countries in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index, but fell dramatically to 161st in 2025,¹ reflecting the country's worsening media environment. This decline is exemplified by the February 2023 closure of Voice of Democracy (VoD)—one of Cambodia's last remaining independent media outlets—and the revocation of three media licenses in 2024 in response to reporting published by those outlets.²

In 2024, CamboJA documented 41 cases of harassment against at least 64 journalists, highlighting an intensifying crackdown on press freedom.³ The most common form of harassment was legal intimidation, with 28 recorded incidents, including arrests, lawsuits, charges, detentions, and license revocations. At least five journalists were placed in pretrial detention or sentenced simply for performing their duties. Physical violence against journalists also persisted, with six cases involving threats, assaults on equipment, and personal attacks—including the tragic killing of journalist Chhoeung Chheng in Siem Reap province. Chheng, 63, was a journalist working with Kampuchea Aphiwat news website and has previously reported on deforestation. He was shot in the abdomen by an assailant on December 4 while investigating forest crimes in a northwest district of Siem Reap. He died from his wounds three days later. In May 2025, a Siem Reap court sentenced Sy Loeuy, a woodworker and alleged illegal logger, to 12 years in prison and ordered him to pay USD 13,500 in compensation to Chheng's family. The case marked Cambodia's first killing of a journalist in more than a decade. In 2014, two environmental reporters [Taing Try](#)⁴ and Suon Chan⁵ were murdered in two separate incidents while covering environmental crimes.

1 Reporters Without Borders. (2025). World Press Freedom Index. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/index>

2 CamboJA News. (2023). Shutdown of VOD undermines press freedom, embassies and civil society groups warn. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/shutdown-of-vod-undermines-press-freedom-embassies-and-civil-society-groups-warn/>

3 CamboJA. (2024). Cambodian Journalism Situation Report 2024. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Available at: <https://www.camboja.net/advocacy/annual-monitoring-report/cambodian-journalism-situation-report-2024/>

4 Committee to Protect Journalists. (2014). Journalist probing illegal logging killed in Cambodia. Available at: <https://cpj.org/2014/10/journalist-probing-illegal-logging-killed-in-cambo/>

5 IFEX. (2024). Cambodian journalist who reported on illegal fishing murdered. Available at: <https://ifex.org/cambodian-journalist-who-reported-on-illegal-fishing-murdered/>

The deterioration of Cambodia's media environment occurs alongside government claims of professionalizing the sector. On August 6, 2024, the Ministry of Information launched the Charter for Professional Journalism. However, United Nations experts later called for its suspension, citing the absence of meaningful consultations. Only a few stakeholders were invited to contribute, and the Charter was promulgated just four days after the short consultation deadline. The UN experts also expressed concern about its sweeping scope, noting that it applies not only to media outlets but also to individual journalists, associations, and even social media users.⁶ They emphasized that any professional media code should be developed by and for journalists, not imposed through a ministry-led process.

In pursuit of political stability, the Royal Government of Cambodia has developed and enforced a series of laws and regulations that restrict independent media and free expression. The 1995 Press Law, which guarantees journalists the right to access government-held information, is inconsistently implemented, particularly regarding politically sensitive materials. Subsequent regulations such as the 2018 Prakas 170 on publication controls, the 2021 Sub-Decree on the National Internet Gateway, and the draft Cybersecurity Law have further expanded the government's power to censor online content, monitor users, and control digital communications. Civil society monitoring indicates that blocked websites rose from 37 (June 2022–June 2023) to 65 (July 2023–June 2024), often increasing during election periods.⁷ The majority of these blocked sites were news content, indicating significant censorship in the media sector. At the same time, the long-delayed Access to Information (A2I) Law remains unapproved, leaving journalists without a legal mechanism to compel the release of public-interest data.⁸ Although the government has appointed spokespersons across ministries to improve transparency, independent journalists continue to face obstacles in accessing sensitive or official information.

6 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2024). Cambodia: UN experts call for suspension of professional journalism charter. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/cambodia-un-experts-call-suspension-professional-journalism-charter>

7 Sinar Project, Advocacy and Policy Institute, and Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI). (2024). iMAP Cambodia 2024 Internet Censorship Report. Available at: <https://imap.sinarproject.org/reports/2024/imap-cambodia-2024-internet-censorship-report/imap-cambodia-2024-internet-censorship-report.pdf>

8 CamboJA News. (2025). A2I Draft Law Delayed as Government Revises Press, Fake News Laws Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/a2i-draft-law-delayed-as-government-revises-press-fake-news-laws/>

Adding to these challenges are growing financial pressures. The early 2025 decision by the U.S. government to freeze foreign aid and cut funding to Voice of America and Radio Free Asia—longtime sources of independent reporting—has significantly strained Cambodia’s independent media sector. This has reduced operational capacity, limited citizens’ access to reliable information, and further weakened democratic accountability. These pressures are reflected in the contraction and closure of several media outlets in recent years. For instance, The Phnom Penh Post ceased its print publication in 2024 due to declining advertising revenues,⁹ while Rasmei Kampuchea Daily, one of the country’s longest-running newspapers, shut down entirely in 2023 citing financial difficulties and the impact of digital disruption. Similarly, Lotus Radio ended its FM broadcasting and shifted to online platforms, illustrating how traditional media outlets are being forced to scale down operations amid shrinking revenue streams.¹⁰ Together, these developments point to a broader trend of financial fragility within Cambodia’s media landscape, where economic constraints—compounded by political pressures—are undermining the sustainability of independent journalism.

In April 2025, the Ministry of Information launched a nationwide campaign to combat “fake news,” claiming it undermines public trust and social order.¹¹ However, civil society groups and opposition parties have raised concerns that the campaign could suppress dissent and criminalize critical voices. The Ministry reported that 3,208 posts were classified as “fake news” in 2023, increasing to 3,651 in 2024, with over 2800 cases already recorded in the first nine months of 2025.¹² Officials have warned that legal action will be taken against individuals, media outlets, and digital platforms deemed to have disseminated disinformation, including license revocation and account takedowns in cooperation with social media companies such as Facebook and TikTok.

9 The Associated Press. (2024). Cambodia’s pioneering post-Khmer Rouge era Phnom Penh Post newspaper will stop print publication. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/cambodia-media-phnom-penh-post-stop-print-8b0abbc3e4c7be382053aff1631b8e74>

10 CamboJA News. (2025). Low Revenue Forces Cambodia’s Oldest Newspaper ‘Phnom Penh Post’ To End Print Publication by March 29. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/low-revenue-forces-cambodias-oldest-newspaper-phnom-penh-post-to-close-march-29-final-print/>

11 CamboJA News. (2025). Government Launches Anti-Fake News Campaign; Opponents Fear Suppression of Freedom of Expression. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/government-launches-to-anti-fake-news-campaign-opponents-fear-suppression-of-freedom-of-expression/>

12 Cambodianess. (2025). Over 2,800 Fake News Cases Found in Nine Months. Available at: <https://cambodianess.com/article/over-2800-fake-news-cases-found-in-nine-months>

Against this backdrop, Cambodia's *environmental journalists* operate in an especially dangerous and restrictive landscape. Between January and June 2025, CamboJA documented 24 instances of human rights violations against journalists and media organizations, including two involving women.¹³ Legal harassment accounted for more than two-thirds of all cases. These violations not only infringed Cambodia's constitutional protections of press and media freedom – particularly Articles 41 and 38 – but also contravened international standards under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including basic rights to freedom of expression, physical security, justice and due process and liberty.

In Cambodia, the synergy between a collaborative community of environmental activists and journalists has been instrumental in exposing ecological and social injustices. While their work consistently raises public awareness, it often struggles to prompt systemic policy changes from authorities. However, in rare instances—often fueled by intense social media criticism—the government is forced to take visible, immediate action. For example, broader environmental reporting and public discourse contributed to the cancellation of a controversial development project in Phnom Tamao forest (a wildlife sanctuary known as Ta Mao Mountain) in August 2022. Earlier in January, Hun Sen, the Cambodian prime minister at the time, issued an order allowing four private companies to develop 1,500 hectares of land in the Phnom Tamao area, and subsequently some 600 hectares of forest land area were cleared. However, following widespread criticism and heightened public attention—including media coverage of the large-scale forest clearing—he reversed his decision, halting all private company development projects on the land on August 7 and ordering the replanting of trees.¹⁴ Similarly, reporting by Voice of Democracy (VOD) in 2023 on the fencing of a public beach in Sihanoukville exposed concerns over land ownership and restricted public access. Sustained coverage and public scrutiny were followed by the overnight demolition of the fence by authorities, suggesting a direct response to media attention and public pressure.¹⁵

13 CamboJA. (2025). Journalism Situation in Cambodia: Key Trends in Q2. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Available at: <https://www.camboja.net/advocacy/quarterly-monitoring-report/journalism-situation-in-cambodia-key-trend-in-q2/>

14 Mongabay. (2022). Cambodian government cancels development of Phnom Tamao forest amid outcry. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/08/cambodian-government-cancels-development-of-phnom-tamao-forest-amid-outcry/>

15 Voice of Democracy. (2023). Sihanoukville Beach Fence Demolished Overnight. Available at: <https://vodenglish.news/sihanoukville-beach-fence-demolished-overnight/>

Environmental reporting—particularly on land disputes, corruption, deforestation, and natural resource exploitation—remains among the most perilous beats. This was evident in the case of the Phnom Tamao wildlife sanctuary, where on 16 August 2022, five journalists from the local independent media outlet Voice of Democracy (VOD), along with four environmental activists from a youth group, were arrested and detained for questioning at a district police station for approximately seven hours while covering the land clearance controversy. During the incident, one of the reporters was reportedly slapped in the face, and several members of the youth group were also beaten.¹⁶ More recently, on May 16, 2025, Uk Mao, an environmental journalist known for exposing illegal logging, was arrested without a warrant and charged with incitement and defamation. He faces up to 22 pending legal cases and had previously been physically assaulted by individuals believed to be local officials.¹⁷ His arrest provoked strong condemnation from civil society and international media groups.¹⁸ The Ministry of Information responded by accusing those defending Mao of pursuing a political agenda and stated that he lacked official press credentials, further illustrating the precarious conditions faced by independent reporters.¹⁹

This case reflects a broader context in which individuals and organizations working on environmental and natural resource issues often face pressures and risks. In Cambodia, civil society organizations, community activists, and environmental defenders who raise concerns about land grabbing, deforestation, illegal logging, and the environmental impacts of development projects have at times encountered intimidation, legal action, or other forms of harassment. Reports by national and international human rights organizations have documented cases in which activists and community leaders advocating for environmental protection or land rights have been arrested, charged under criminal laws, or subjected to surveillance and intimidation. For example, environmental activists associated with Mother Nature Cambodia have faced arrests and convictions related to their advocacy on environmental protection and natural resource management.²⁰

16 CamboJA. (2022). Journalists and environmental activists detained, beaten. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/journalists-and-environmental-activists-detained-beaten/>

17 CamboJA. (2025). Environmental Journalist Battles 22 Lawsuits. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Available at: <https://www.camboja.net/advocacy/articles/environmental-journalist-battles-22-lawsuits/>

18 CamboJA. (2025). Immediately Release and Drop the Charges Against Environmental Reporter Uk Mao. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Available at: <https://www.camboja.net/advocacy/joint-statements/immediately-release-and-drop-the-charges-against-environmental-reporter-uk-mao/>

19 CamboJA News. (2025). Information Ministry Accuses NGOs, Press Groups for Politicizing Journalist Uk Mao's Case. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/information-ministry-accuses-ngos-press-groups-for-politicizing-journalist-uk-maos-case/>

20 Amnesty International (2024). Cambodia: Environmental activists jailed after unfair trial. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/cambodia-conviction-of-youth-activists-a-further-blow-to-cambodias-environmental-movement/>

Many of these tensions emerge in connection with disputes over economic land concessions, natural resource extraction, and large-scale infrastructure or development projects, which have long been sources of conflict between communities, private companies, and state authorities. Human rights organizations have documented numerous cases in which land rights defenders and environmental activists have faced legal harassment or criminal charges while raising concerns about land concessions and environmental impacts.²¹ The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia has also expressed concern about restrictions affecting civil society actors and environmental defenders, noting that individuals advocating on environmental and land rights issues have faced legal and administrative pressures.²² As a result, individuals documenting or advocating around environmental issues—including journalists—may face heightened scrutiny or pressure when their work draws attention to sensitive governance challenges.

Within this broader context, environmental journalists often report on the same issues that environmental defenders and community activists seek to highlight. Their work frequently involves documenting disputes over land and natural resources, investigating illegal activities and examining the environmental and social impacts of development projects. As a result, environmental reporting can expose journalists to similar pressures and risks, particularly when their reporting challenges powerful economic or political interests.

Understanding this broader civic space context is therefore essential for examining environmental journalism in Cambodia. Journalists serve as an important bridge between affected communities, policymakers, and the public, helping to bring attention to environmental concerns and governance challenges. However, when the operating environment for civil society actors and environmental defenders becomes constrained, the space for independent environmental journalism may also become more limited.

21 LICADHO. (2022). Land Conflict Monitoring Report and related documentation of legal action against land and environmental defenders in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO). Available at: https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/land_concessions/

22 United Nations Human Rights Council (2025). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia. Geneva: United Nations. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5853-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-cambodia>

This pattern of judicial and physical harassment underscores the urgent need to systematically map the landscape of environmental journalism in Cambodia. Such mapping helps identify who play active roles in conducting environmental reporting, what issues are being covered, where coverage is concentrated, where information gaps exist, and which journalists or regions face heightened risks. It also helps uncover patterns of repression, highlight areas requiring protection and support, and inform advocacy strategies aimed at strengthening the resilience and safety of Cambodia's environmental journalism ecosystem.

Overall Objective

The **Cambodia Environmental Journalism Mapping Study** aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the actors, coverage areas, risks, and challenges facing journalists reporting on environmental issues in Cambodia. The study aims to generate evidence to guide interventions that strengthen protection mechanisms, enhance collaboration, and inform policy and advocacy for a safer and more enabling environment for environmental journalism.

Specific Objectives

The study has the following four specific objectives:

1. Map the landscape of environmental journalism in Cambodia, identifying key journalists, types of outlets, and networks engaged in environmental reporting.
2. Document risks and threats—legal, physical, psychological, digital, and gender-based—faced by environmental journalists, and actors involved.
3. Identify gaps and needs in protection, capacity, and collaboration mechanisms.
4. Provide actionable recommendations to strengthen the safety, visibility, and impact of environmental journalism in Cambodia.

Research Questions

Based on the background and objectives outlined above, the study is structured around the following research questions, which collectively shape the direction of inquiry and analysis.

1. Who are the main actors (individual journalists, media outlets, CSOs, and networks) involved in environmental journalism?
2. What environmental topics are covered?
3. Which regions receive the most and least media coverage and how can these differences be explained?
4. What risks do environmental journalists face (types, patterns, and sources)?
5. What existing mechanisms or networks support environmental journalists, and what gaps exist?
6. How can findings inform the design of interventions for protection, collaboration, and advocacy?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights into environmental journalism in Cambodia, several limitations should be noted.

First, the study's data collection period coincided with heightened tensions and emerging armed confrontations along the Cambodia–Thailand border, which drew significant media attention. During this period, many journalists shifted their reporting priorities to cover developments related to the border situation and associated security concerns. As a result, participation in the survey was affected.

While the study initially aimed to reach up to 100 journalists, the final number of 74 responses was slightly above the minimum target of 70. However, considering the relatively small population of journalists in Cambodia and the limited number of independent journalists currently operating in the country, the number of respondents remains significant. Moreover, the survey data are complemented by literature review, CamboJA's monitoring data on the situation of journalists since 2020, and qualitative insights from one focus group discussion (FGD) and nine key informant interviews (KIIs). Taken together, these sources provide meaningful insights into the experiences of journalists covering environmental issues in Cambodia.

Another challenge faced by the research team was the difficulty in reaching women journalists with experience covering environmental issues. The relatively small number of women working in this reporting area, combined with time constraints during the data collection period, limited the ability to recruit more female participants for the survey and qualitative discussions.

Finally, environmental journalism is a dynamic field that evolves alongside political, environmental, and media developments. The findings presented in this report reflect the situation during the study period and may change over time as environmental issues, media practices, and governance contexts evolve.

Despite these limitations, the study provides important baseline information on environmental journalism in Cambodia and contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing journalists who report on environmental issues.

II. Methodology

This study adopts a **mixed-methods approach** combining quantitative mapping and qualitative inquiry. The design is adaptive and participatory, ensuring inclusivity and safety of journalists in diverse contexts. Given the limited timeframe (December 2025) and resources, the study prioritizes breadth through surveys and depth through targeted interviews and one focus group discussion (FGD).

Data Collection Methods



1. Desk Review

Review of secondary data including CamboJA's previous journalism safety monitoring reports, reports by local CSOs, international NGOs, and UN agencies, laws and policies affecting media and environmental reporting in Cambodia. This method provides the contextual and institutional background needed to frame the research questions, identify existing knowledge gaps, and situate current findings within broader legal, policy, and historical trends affecting environmental journalism.

Use of Secondary Sources

This study draws on a range of secondary sources to provide contextual understanding of the media environment, environmental governance, and the broader civic space in which environmental journalism operates in Cambodia. These sources include monitoring reports by CamboJA from 2020 through 2025, publications by national and international human rights organizations, investigative reporting by credible media outlets, and reports from international institutions.

In particular, the study refers to CamboJA's annual and quarterly monitoring reports on the situation of journalism in Cambodia, which document incidents of threats, harassment, and violations against journalists. These reports provide important longitudinal data on trends affecting media freedom in the country. Additional contextual information is drawn from publications by organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Amnesty International, and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, which provide international perspectives on

press freedom, human rights, and the protection of environmental defenders. Media reports from independent outlets such as CamboJA News (the collaborative news platform run by CamboJA) and Cambodianess were also consulted to document recent developments related to press freedom, legal frameworks affecting journalists, and specific cases involving environmental reporting. These sources help situate the findings of the study within the broader political, legal, and social context shaping journalism and environmental governance in Cambodia.

Together with the primary data collected through the survey, focus group discussion, and key informant interviews, these secondary sources contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing environmental journalists in Cambodia.

2. Survey (Main Data Source)

A structured survey targets approximately 70–100 journalists nationwide, and as a result, 74 journalists participated in the survey that ran in December 2025. This method was used to collect data on:

- » Types of environmental stories covered & reporting frequency
- » Geographic focus and audiences
- » Key risks and challenges faced
- » Access to information, editorial freedom, and institutional support
- » Perceptions of priority environmental topics and emerging trends

The survey enables systematic mapping of who is reporting on environmental issues, where and how coverage occurs, and the prevalence of risks and support needs across a broad sample of journalists, allowing the study to identify patterns and trends at the national level.

3. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

In-depth interviews were conducted with nine individuals (including one female representative of a local media organization) in December 2025. The key informants include:

- » Senior journalists/editors in national and local outlets (5)
- » Environmental NGOs/advocates (2)
- » Media association/organizations or legal experts (2)

The main purpose of the interviews is to gain insight into systemic challenges, evolving trends, and recommendations for protection and coordination.

The interviews probe deeper into coverage trends, systemic barriers, and opportunities for strengthening collaboration and protection. The Key Informant Interviews allow the study to explore underlying structural, legal, and institutional dynamics shaping environmental journalism, providing expert perspectives that help explain and interpret patterns identified through the survey data.

4. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

One FGD was conducted in Phnom Penh with nine experienced journalists (including three female reporters) from Phnom Penh and selected provinces (e.g., Kampong Thom, Battambang, and Kratie). Discussion topics include:

- » Key environmental issues covered and underreported
- » Shared safety experiences and coping strategies
- » Gender-specific challenges
- » Collective needs and recommendations

FGD data was used to complement survey and interview insights to map both topics and patterns in environmental reporting. This method enables collective reflection and peer exchange, helping to surface shared experiences, informal practices, and gendered dynamics, while validating and deepening insights from the survey and Key Informant Interviews to map both thematic and experiential patterns in environmental reporting.

Sampling Strategy

- » Purposive sampling for journalists actively covering environmental issues.
- » Snowball sampling to reach freelance or rural journalists outside major media hubs.
- » Gender and geographic diversity was sought to the extent feasible.

Data Analysis

- » Quantitative (Survey): Descriptive statistics on journalist profiles, coverage areas, and risk patterns.
- » Qualitative (KII & FGD): Thematic coding to identify recurring challenges, opportunities, and narrative insights.
- » Triangulation: Cross-verification of findings from surveys, FGDs, and Key Informant Interviews to ensure reliability.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring the safety and autonomy of participants is a core priority of this study. The research process therefore includes obtaining informed consent, maintaining strict confidentiality, securing all data, and implementing appropriate precautions for individuals who may be exposed to risks as a result of their involvement.

To protect participant safety, most interviewees were anonymized and identified using coded references (e.g., KII, FGD). In cases where interviewees explicitly consented to full attribution, their names or professional titles are used. This approach balances transparency with the need to protect participants, particularly given the sensitive nature of environmental reporting in Cambodia.

Gender and Inclusion Approach

To effectively integrate a gender lens into the mapping research study on environmental journalism in Cambodia, gender considerations are built into every stage of the research process—from design to data collection, analysis, and reporting. CamboJA adopts gender-sensitive framework in the research design, in line with our current human-rights-based and context-sensitive journalism safety monitoring framework. This approach ensures that the study not only identifies who is reporting on environmental issues, but also how gender shapes access, visibility, safety, and storytelling within the field.

In the research design phase, gender is treated as a core variable. The research incorporates key questions that explore the participation of women and gender-diverse journalists in environmental reporting, the specific challenges they face, and how their experiences differ from their male counterparts. We also adopt intersectionality lens in the research framework to understand how gender intersects with other identities like age, ethnicity, and location they operate.

At the data collection phase, all information is disaggregated by gender, including the number of environmental journalists, types of stories they cover, and geographic distribution. The research team actively seeks input from women and gender-diverse journalists, especially those working in underrepresented regions or marginalized communities. The research team provides a safe space through interviews and a focus group discussion to explore gender-specific issues such as sexual harassment, editorial bias, or safety risks in the field.

Finally, during analysis and reporting, the research team highlights gendered patterns in the journalism landscape. This includes identifying any divisions of labor, disparities in recognition or access, and safety concerns that disproportionately affect women or non-binary reporters. This report offers gender-specific recommendations, such as targeted training, mentorship programs, and institutional support for equitable and safe working environments. By taking this comprehensive approach, the mapping study not only reveals where and how environmental journalism is being done but also contribute to building a more inclusive and resilient media sector in Cambodia.

III. Findings

This section presents findings from the nationwide survey of journalists which was carried out from 9th through 24th December 2025 as the main data collection method of the mapping of environmental journalism in Cambodia. The survey provides quantitative evidence on who reports on environmental issues, what topics are covered, where reporting takes place, the risks and barriers journalists face, and the types of support they need. Survey findings form the primary analytical basis of this study and are structured to allow direct comparison with qualitative data collected through a focus group discussion and interviews with key informants.



1. Profile of Environmental Journalists

This section examines who is reporting on environmental issues in Cambodia, where they are based, what roles and media types dominate environmental reporting, and the level of experience among environmental journalists. Survey data provides the primary evidence, while insights from the focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs) help contextualize the patterns observed.

Demographic Characteristics

Gender

Environmental journalism in Cambodia remains a male-dominated field. Survey results show that 77% of 74 respondents are men, while 23% (17 respondents) are women. This indicates that men continue to represent the majority of journalists reporting on environmental issues nationwide.



77%
Male



23%
Female

Qualitative insights from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) suggest that this imbalance is influenced not only by workforce composition in the media sector but also by structural and cultural factors that shape participation in environmental reporting. Environmental journalism frequently requires travel to remote areas, field reporting in forested regions, and engagement with sensitive topics such as land conflicts or natural resource exploitation. Participants noted that these conditions sometimes influence how assignments are distributed within newsrooms.

Several journalists participated in the discussion indicated that news organizations may be hesitant to assign women journalists to field reporting in remote areas, particularly when travel involves logistical or safety concerns.

Key informants interviewed for this study also highlighted that cultural norms and perceptions about gender roles can influence who is most likely to be assigned environmental reporting tasks, particularly in provincial or high-risk contexts. As a result, women journalists may have fewer opportunities to undertake certain field assignments, even when they have the interest and professional capacity to cover environmental issues.

Despite these constraints, both the survey and qualitative discussions show that women journalists remain actively engaged in environmental reporting, particularly within digital newsrooms and independent media outlets. Participants emphasized that expanding opportunities for women journalists in environmental reporting would require greater institutional support and more inclusive newsroom practices.

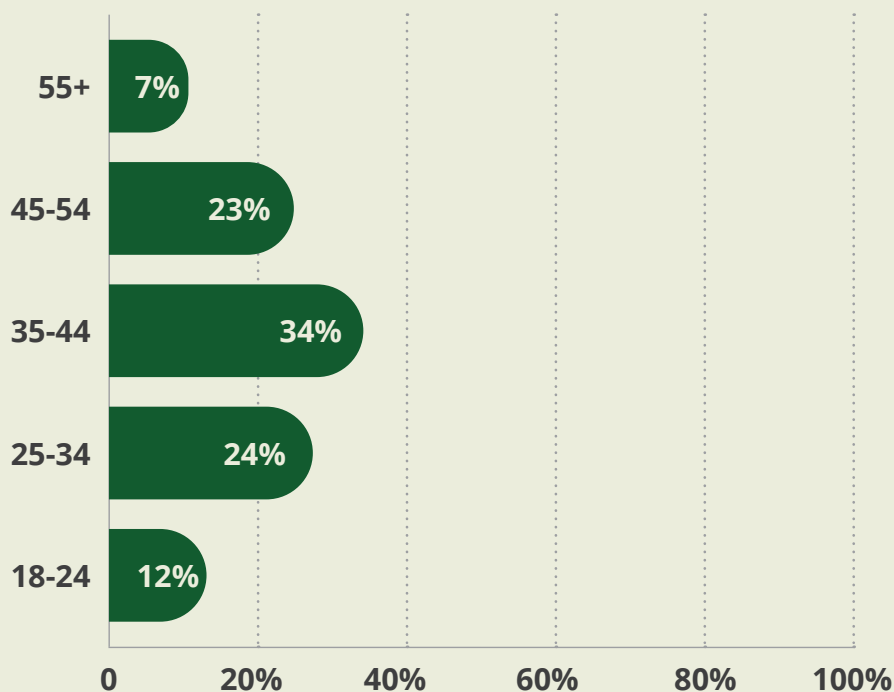
Age Groups

Survey respondents represented a broad range of age groups, indicating participation from both early-career and experienced journalists.

The largest proportion of respondents were aged 35–44 years (34%), followed by 25–34 years (24%) and 45–54 years (23%). Younger journalists below 25 years old accounted for 12%, while 7% were aged 55 years and above.

Overall, the distribution suggests that environmental reporting in Cambodia is largely carried out by mid-career journalists, who combine professional experience with active field reporting responsibilities. The presence of younger journalists indicates emerging interest in environmental reporting among the next generation of media professionals, although they often require additional training and mentorship.

Focus group discussion participants also noted that environmental reporting typically requires both experience and professional networks, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as land conflicts or resource exploitation.



Professional Roles and Media Types

Environmental reporting in Cambodia is primarily carried out by field-based journalists working in digital newsrooms.

Survey results show that reporters constitute the largest proportion of respondents (64%), followed by freelancers (22%). Smaller shares include editors (7%), videographers (1%), and other media practitioners (6.76%). Overall, reporters, freelancers, and videographers together represent 86% of respondents, indicating that environmental coverage is predominantly produced by journalists directly involved in field reporting, multimedia production, and investigative work.

In terms of media platforms, more than 75% of respondents work for digital and multimedia news outlets, reflecting the increasing prominence of online journalism, social media platforms, and website-based news distribution in Cambodia's media landscape. Specifically, 65% of respondents reported working for online media, followed by 11% in multimedia roles, indicating a strong shift toward digital-first content production. Traditional media platforms are less represented, with 12% of respondents working in television, 9% in radio, and only 3% in print media.

Insights from the Focus Group Discussion suggest that the dominance of digital media has influenced the types of environmental stories that receive coverage. Participants noted that newsrooms often prioritize event-driven stories or topics aligned with official environmental campaigns, such as plastic reduction initiatives, as these are perceived as safer to publish and easier to distribute online.

At the same time, journalists reported that in-depth investigative reporting on sensitive issues, such as illegal logging or land encroachment involving powerful actors, is less common due to legal risks and limited newsroom resources.

Cambodia's media landscape remains largely characterized by generalist news outlets rather than specialized thematic media, with only a limited number of independent local newsrooms remaining following the 2017 crackdown, during which major independent newspapers and dozens of local radio stations were forced to shut down or transfer ownership.²³ Against this backdrop, the survey did not collect data on specific outlet names or detailed editorial focus. Instead, it focused on identifying the types of media platforms in which respondents are engaged. This approach reflects both the structure of the media landscape—where environmental reporting is often embedded within general news coverage—and the need to ensure the safety and confidentiality of participants operating in a constrained and sensitive environment.

Existing literature on journalism in restrictive media environments highlights the growing importance of cross-border collaboration and NGO–media partnerships in sustaining investigative reporting, particularly on sensitive issues such as environmental crimes.²⁴ In contexts characterized by shrinking civic space and increasing constraints on press freedom, local media outlets often face legal, financial, and political barriers that limit their ability to conduct in-depth investigations. As a result, international platforms and cross-border collaborative reporting models have become critical. In Cambodia, comprehensive coverage of illegal logging, land concessions, and environmental exploitation has frequently been produced by *Mongabay*, an international environmental news outlet that operates through a collaborative editorial model, working closely with local journalists, freelancers, and partner organizations to publish field-based reporting.²⁵ Such cross-border collaborations provide access to additional editorial independence, resources, and international visibility, helping to mitigate local risks. At the same time, domestic outlets such as *CamboJA News* have made efforts to report on environmental issues, including maintaining a dedicated environment section,²⁶ though their in-depth reporting remains intermittent due to structural constraints. This pattern aligns with broader findings in the literature, which suggest that while local journalists play a crucial role in sourcing and contextualizing information, sustained investigative reporting in restrictive environments increasingly relies on transnational partnerships models.

23 The Guardian. (2018). Newspaper takeover is 'staggering blow' to Cambodia's free press. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/06/newspaper-takeover-staggering-blow-cambodia-free-press-phnom-penh-post>

24 Sambrook, R. (2018), *Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in Investigative Journalism*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/global-teamwork-rise-collaboration-investigative-journalism>

25 Mongabay. (n.d.) About Mongabay. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/about/>

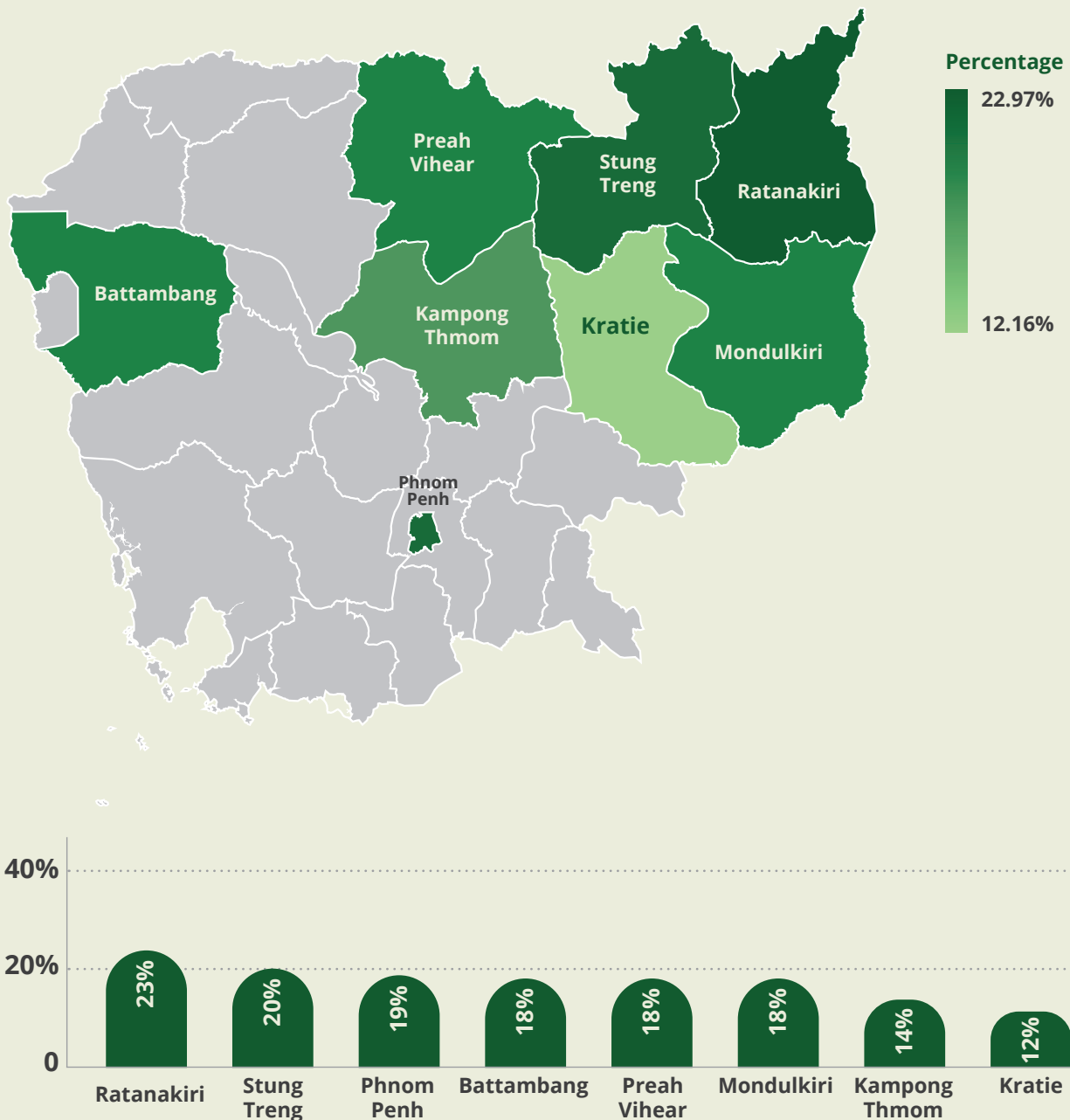
26 *CamboJA News* (n.d.) Environment. Available at: <https://cambojanews.com/category/environment/>

Geographic Distribution

Survey respondents reported covering environmental issues across 22 provinces and the capital city Phnom Penh, representing 23 geographic locations nationwide.

A significant proportion of respondents are based in natural resource-rich and environmentally sensitive provinces, particularly in the northeastern and north-central regions of Cambodia. These include:

Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Surveyed Environmental Journalists



This geographic distribution suggests that environmental journalism in Cambodia is strongly rooted in frontline areas affected by deforestation, land disputes, hydropower development, and extractive industries.

Experience and Professional Capacity

The age distribution and professional roles identified in the survey suggest that environmental reporting is primarily conducted by mid-career journalists with field reporting responsibilities, often working within small digital newsrooms or as freelancers.

Insights from the focus group discussion indicate that journalists covering environmental issues frequently rely on personal initiative and professional commitment, as newsroom resources for investigative environmental reporting remain limited. Participants also emphasized the importance of specialized training, investigative skills, and risk assessment capacity to improve the quality and safety of environmental reporting.

Despite the challenges, participants expressed a strong sense of professional responsibility to document environmental issues, particularly when reporting on deforestation, land conflicts, and the exploitation of natural resources.

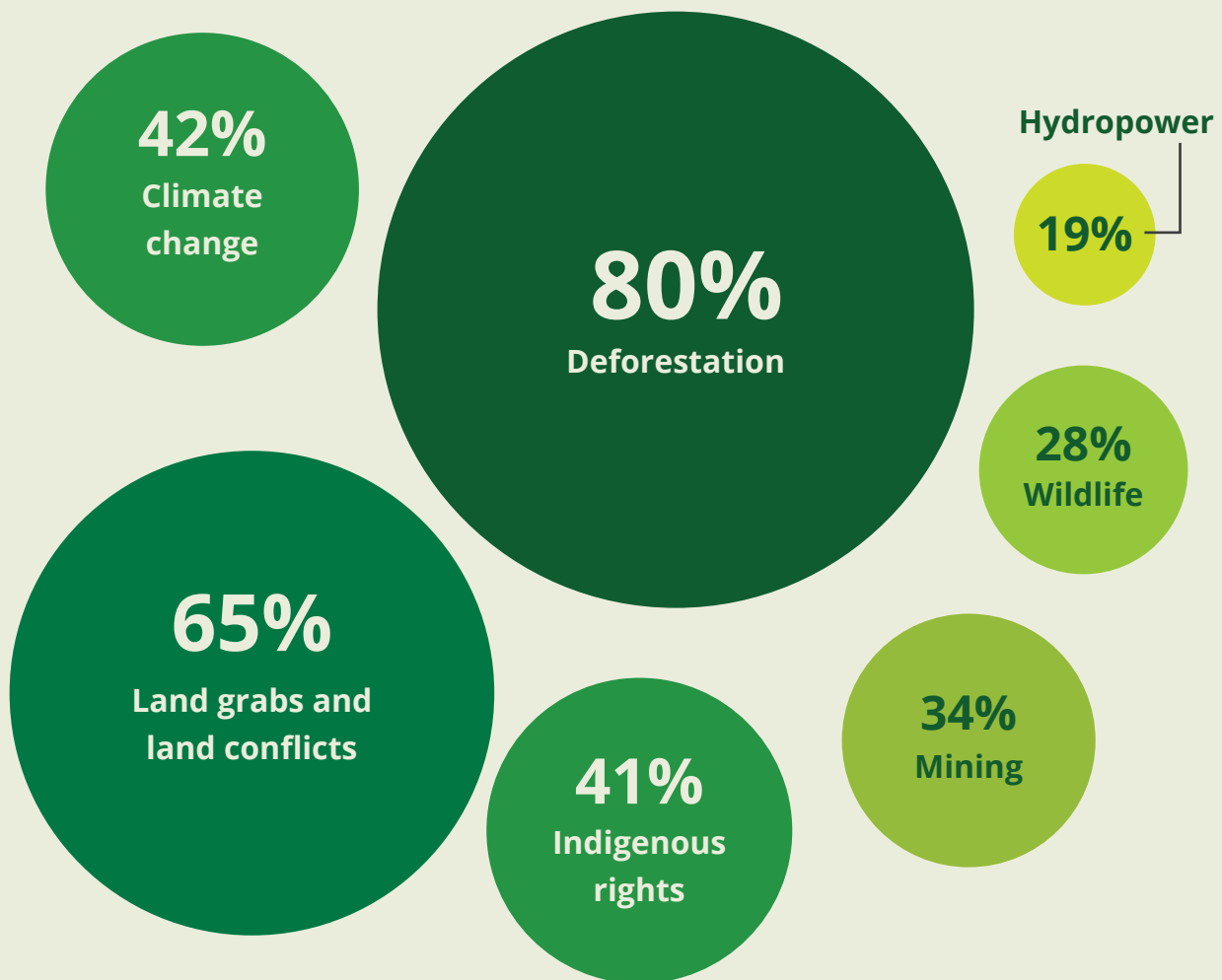
2. Environmental Reporting Practices

This section examines what environmental issues journalists report on, where reporting takes place, and which sources are most frequently used in environmental coverage. Survey data provides the primary evidence, while insights from the focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs) help explain patterns in coverage and editorial decision-making.

Environmental Topics Covered

Survey results show that environmental reporting in Cambodia is concentrated on a small number of high-visibility issues, particularly those related to forests, land use, and natural resource management.

The most frequently reported environmental topics include:



The prominence of deforestation and land-related issues reflects the central role forests and land governance play in Cambodia's environmental challenges, as well as their direct impact on rural livelihoods and indigenous communities.

At the same time, some environmental topics receive comparatively less coverage. In particular, **hydropower development** and certain forms of **forest land encroachment** were identified as underreported issues. Insights from the FGD suggest that these topics are often perceived as **politically sensitive** or **difficult to investigate**, particularly when they involve powerful actors or large development projects.

Participants also noted that environmental coverage sometimes prioritizes **event-based or campaign-related stories**, such as plastic reduction initiatives or community environmental activities. These stories are often easier to access and carry lower perceived risks for journalists and their news organizations.

Focus group discussion participants explained that editorial decisions about which environmental topics to cover are influenced by several factors, including **newsroom capacity, access to sources, and perceived legal or political risks**. As one participant observed:

“

Some journalists are reluctant to report news that could offend those in power, because it may lead to threats against them.

(Focus Group Discussion Participant, P4)

Key informant interviews reinforced these findings and highlighted additional structural factors influencing environmental reporting. According to Gerry Flynn, a Cambodia-based investigative journalist with Mongabay, who was later barred from entering Cambodia, several critical environmental issues remain underreported, including large-scale environmental crimes involving politically connected individuals and the root causes of systemic environmental destruction. Flynn identified multiple factors contributing to underreporting, including restricted access to information, legal threats, high travel costs to remote areas, declining funding across the media sector, and self-censorship. As he noted:

“

The real issue is whether reporting is critical [...] or if journalists are having to censor themselves to avoid retribution. Pro-government media skews toward suggesting law enforcement works, which our reporting shows it doesn't.

Similar concerns were raised by another key informant (KII-02), who noted that highly sensitive environmental stories involving natural resources and powerful individuals are often underreported. According to this informant, barriers to reporting include limited access to information, fear of legal consequences, restrictions on expressing opinions, and the sensitivity of topics affecting influential actors. These constraints often lead to editorial filtering and selective publication of environmental stories. As the informant explained:

“

Sometimes Only one out of five stories can be published if the issue is not too sensitive.

v(KII-02)

Another key informant (KII-04) highlighted structural newsroom priorities that also contribute to limited environmental coverage. According to this participant, environmental reporting often competes with routine administrative or protocol news, which tends to receive higher editorial priority:

“

Environmental and forestry reporting occurs less frequently than reporting on the protocol news of local authorities... it is easily overshadowed or erased by these routine administrative updates.

(KII-04)

These insights highlight how structural constraints—including access limitations, legal risks, editorial caution, and newsroom priorities—shape the depth and scope of environmental reporting in Cambodia.

Geographic Focus of Environmental Reporting

Environmental reporting is geographically diverse, reflecting Cambodia’s varied environmental challenges across regions. Survey respondents reported covering environmental issues across 22 provinces and the capital city Phnom Penh.

Survey data indicate that reporting attention is particularly concentrated in natural resource-rich and environmentally sensitive provinces, including: **Ratanakiri, Mondulhiri, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, Kratie, Kampong Thom.**

These provinces are frequently associated with forest governance, land conflicts, hydropower development, and natural resource extraction, which generate ongoing environmental news stories.

Participants in the focus group discussion emphasized that provincial reporting often provides more direct access to environmental developments, as journalists based outside Phnom Penh are closer to affected communities and environmental sites. However, provincial reporting also presents practical challenges. Journalists participating in the survey, focus group discussion, and interviews noted that access to information is often limited due to restricted access to protected areas, reluctance of local authorities or company representatives to provide comments, and the absence of formal information channels at the provincial level. In some cases, journalists also reported difficulties in obtaining official documents, verifying information, or securing interviews with relevant authorities. Additionally, travel costs, limited infrastructure, and concerns about safety—particularly when reporting on sensitive issues such as illegal logging, land disputes, or mining—can further constrain ground reporting. As one participant described:



When reporting environmental stories in the provinces, it is easier to see what is happening on the ground, but it can also be more difficult to access information or move freely.

Breakdown of Main Environmental Topics Covered in Concentrated Geographic Locations

Note: Individual journalists may cover multiple locations and environmental issues, particularly when reporting on cross-provincial developments such as deforestation, land concessions, or hydropower projects. Therefore, the figures below represent the frequency of issues reported in each province rather than the number of journalists working exclusively in those locations.

1. Forest Frontier Regions: Northeastern Cambodia

Cambodia's main forest frontier areas are concentrated in the northeastern provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, and Stung Treng, and the southwestern provinces of Kampong Speu, Koh Kong, and Pursat, where large tracts of forest and protected areas remain.²⁷ However, based on survey responses, journalists are more concentrated in northeastern provinces such as Ratanakiri, Steung Treng, Preah Vihear, Mondulkiri, and Kampong Thom, with deforestation being reported consistently as the most frequently covered topic. This reflects ongoing pressures from illegal logging, land concessions, infrastructure development, and agricultural expansion in these forested regions. Reporting in these provinces also frequently intersects with **land grabs, indigenous rights, wildlife conservation, mining, and climate-related impacts**, highlighting overlapping environmental pressures affecting forest ecosystems and forest-dependent communities. The concentration of environmental journalists in these regions reflects their role as frontline areas for forest governance and conservation in Cambodia.

2. Forest–Agriculture Expansion Zones: Preah Vihear, Kampong Thom, Battambang, and Kratie

Environmental reporting in Preah Vihear, Kampong Thom, Battambang, and Kratie shows similar patterns driven by **deforestation and land-related conflicts**, often linked to agricultural expansion, land concessions, and forest-edge development. Reporting in these provinces also frequently references **indigenous rights, mining activities, wildlife conservation, and climate-related impacts**, reflecting increasing development pressures across forest-edge landscapes.

²⁷ Open Development Cambodia. (2020). Protected Forest. Available at: <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/topics/protected-forest/>

Hydropower-related reporting also appears in these provinces, which may be explained by recent government efforts to explore small-scale hydropower projects beyond traditional dam locations. For example, feasibility studies have been conducted for potential small hydropower dams in Battambang and Preah Vihear as part of efforts to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on imported fuel amid rising energy costs.²⁸ These overlapping environmental pressures help explain the concentration of environmental journalists in these provinces, where forest governance, agricultural expansion, and development projects intersect.

3. Urban Environmental Governance: Phnom Penh

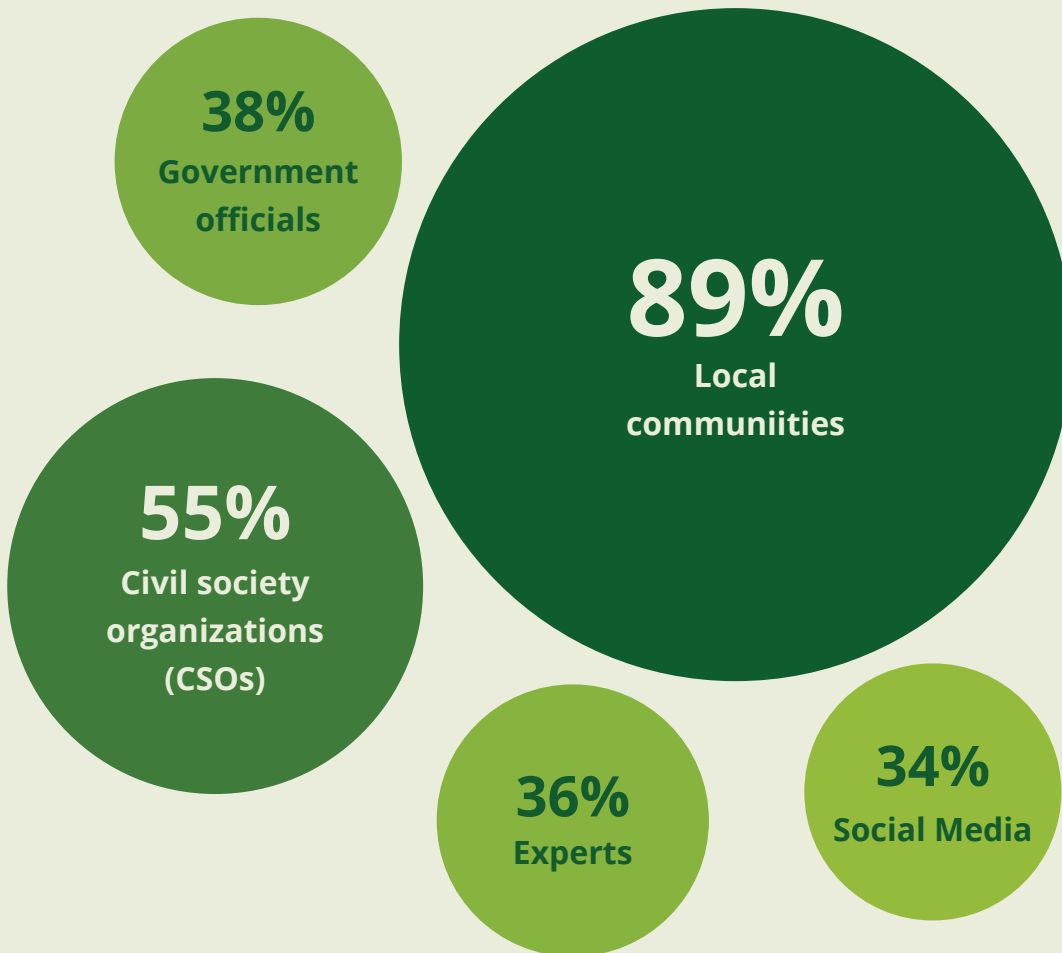
In contrast to forest frontier areas, Phnom Penh presents a distinct environmental reporting profile focused primarily on **land grabs and climate-related issues**, reflecting urban expansion, infrastructure development, and climate vulnerability. Unlike provincial areas, environmental journalism in Phnom Penh is less centered on forest governance and more focused on urban environmental challenges, including flooding, land disputes, and environmental impacts of rapid urbanization.

These findings suggest that environmental reporting in Cambodia is strongly shaped by geographic proximity to environmental issues, but also by the varying levels of access and safety journalists experience across regions.

²⁸ Cambodianess. (2026). Cambodia Looks to Small Hydropower Dams as Fuel Prices Rise. Available at: <https://cambodianess.com/article/cambodia-looks-to-small-hydropower-dams-as-fuel-prices-rise>

Sources of Information

Survey results indicate that journalists rely heavily on community-based and civil society sources when reporting on environmental issues. The most frequently cited sources include:



In this study, **local communities** refer to residents living in or near affected areas, including farmers, Indigenous communities, forest-dependent households, community forestry members, local activists, and village authorities. These groups often experience environmental changes directly and therefore play a critical role in identifying emerging issues.

The strong reliance on local communities reflects the importance of grassroots information in environmental reporting. Communities often serve as the first source of information about environmental changes, such as forest clearing, land conflicts, pollution incidents, or wildlife trafficking. Journalists participating in the focus group discussion noted that community members frequently alert them to incidents occurring in remote areas that may otherwise go unnoticed. Several participants explained that journalists often rely on community networks to identify story leads, verify developments on the ground, and gain access to affected areas (FGD participants). As one environmental reporter explained:



Indigenous communities play such an important role in helping journalists gather information and act as guides during field reporting.

(KII-05)

This highlights how local communities, particularly Indigenous groups in forested regions, often provide not only information but also logistical support, local knowledge, and access to remote areas that may otherwise be difficult for journalists to reach.

Another key informant (KII-07) from an environmental protection community network emphasized that the relationship between community networks and environmental journalists is one of mutual reliance. Community members provide ground-level access, documentation, and firsthand evidence of environmental violations, while journalists help amplify these issues and bring them to public attention. According to the informant, journalists play an important role in providing visibility and transparency that local authorities may otherwise restrict, thereby strengthening accountability in environmental governance.

Civil society organizations also play a significant role by providing technical information, legal analysis, and advocacy perspectives related to environmental governance. In this study, **'civil society organizations'** refer primarily to non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, research institutions, and advocacy groups working on environmental protection, natural resource governance, indigenous rights, and land issues.

In some cases, journalists also rely on human rights organizations and development NGOs whose work intersects with environmental concerns, particularly in cases involving land conflicts, community displacement, or natural resource exploitation.

However, the comparatively lower reliance on official sources suggests ongoing challenges in accessing information from government institutions. Both focus group discussion participants and key informants noted that limited transparency and restricted access to official data can hinder journalists' ability to verify environmental information or obtain official responses.

Participants in the focus group discussion also emphasized that sources themselves may be reluctant to speak publicly, particularly in cases involving land disputes or resource exploitation. According to several participants, local residents and community representatives may fear repercussions from authorities or powerful individuals if they provide information to journalists. This reluctance, driven by fear of potential repercussions, can significantly limit journalists' ability to gather information and contributes to the under-reporting of sensitive environmental issues.

Together, these findings suggest that environmental reporting in Cambodia depends heavily on community networks and civil society actors, while access to official information remains comparatively limited.

Key Patterns in Environmental Reporting Practices

Overall, the survey findings indicate that environmental reporting practices in Cambodia are shaped by **three key dynamics**:

1. **Topic concentration**, with coverage focused primarily on deforestation, land conflicts, and visible environmental issues.
2. **Geographic proximity**, with reporting often concentrated in resource-rich provinces where environmental impacts are most visible.
3. **Reliance on community and civil society sources**, reflecting both the importance of grassroots information and the challenges journalists face in accessing official data.

Qualitative insights from the focus group discussion and interviews further suggest that **editorial caution, limited newsroom resources, and constraints on information access** contribute to uneven coverage across environmental issues. These factors influence not only which topics are reported, but also the depth and frequency of environmental reporting across different regions and sectors.

3. Risks and Safety Challenges

Environmental journalists in Cambodia operate in a reporting environment where multiple forms of pressure and risk are present, particularly when covering issues related to land governance, natural resource exploitation, and environmental regulation. Survey findings indicate that journalists encounter a range of **legal, institutional, digital, and physical risks**, while qualitative insights from the focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs) provide further context on how these risks occur in practice and who the main sources of pressure are.

This study uses risk categories based on **CamboJA's human rights-based journalism safety monitoring framework**, which examines threats against journalists as potential violations of fundamental human rights. This approach helps explain how risks faced by journalists go beyond professional challenges and may affect their personal safety, freedom, and ability to work.

The risks identified in this study relate to several key rights:



When violations occur without accountability, journalists' right to effective remedy may also be affected.

Using this human rights-based approach helps provide a clearer understanding of the different risks faced by environmental journalists and highlights how these challenges can affect both their safety and their ability to report on issues of public interest.

3.1 Perceptions of Safety

Survey results indicate that a large majority of environmental journalists perceive their work as involving significant personal risk. When asked how safe they feel while reporting on environmental issues, 62% of 74 respondents reported feeling unsafe, while 11% reported feeling very unsafe. In contrast, 22% reported feeling neutral, and only 5% reported feeling safe when covering environmental stories.

Overall, **more than seven in ten respondents** indicated that they feel **unsafe or very unsafe** while conducting environmental reporting. These perceptions reflect the broader climate of pressure and uncertainty surrounding environmental journalism in Cambodia.

Insights from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) illustrate how these perceptions are shaped by journalists' experiences in the field. Participants described situations in which environmental reporting requires travel to remote areas or engagement with sensitive issues such as land conflicts and natural resource exploitation. These conditions can create uncertainty about personal safety and access to information. As one participant explained:



Whenever I go to report environmental stories in the province or somewhere far away, I always feel nervous... but the desire to do the story erases my fear.

(Focus Group Discussion Participant, P8)

Key informants interviewed for the study also noted that perceptions of insecurity are influenced by broader structural conditions, including legal uncertainty, limited protection mechanisms for journalists, and the sensitivity of environmental reporting topics.

Trends in Violations Against Journalists Covering Environmental Issues (2020–2025)

Monitoring data collected by CamboJA indicates that journalists reporting on environmental issues in Cambodia continue to face various forms of harassment and intimidation. These incidents include legal threats, questioning by authorities, obstruction of reporting activities, and other forms of interference that may affect journalists' ability to report freely on environmental issues.

In 2025, CamboJA documented a total of 61 human rights violations affecting 57 journalists, including five women journalists. The majority of these incidents involved legal harassment, such as lawsuits, summons for questioning, or other legal pressures against journalists.

Among the violations documented in 2025, seven cases were related to journalists covering environmental issues, compared with 16 cases recorded in 2024. While this represents a decline in the number of environmental-related violations, the decrease appears to be linked in part to a shift in journalists' reporting priorities during the year. A significant number of violations occurred in connection with coverage of the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict, which accounted for 23 documented cases.

Despite the decline in 2025, environmental reporting remained one of the most affected reporting topics, ranking second among the issues associated with violations against journalists.

CamboJA's monitoring reports from previous years (2020 – 2024)²⁹ also show that environmental reporting has repeatedly appeared among the topics associated with violations against journalists, particularly when coverage involves deforestation, illegal logging, land disputes, and other natural resource governance issues. These topics often involve powerful economic or political interests and may therefore expose journalists to increased risks.

²⁹ CamboJA. (2020-2024). Annual Monitoring Reports on the Situation of Journalism in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Available at: <https://www.camboja.net/category/advocacy/annual-monitoring-report/>

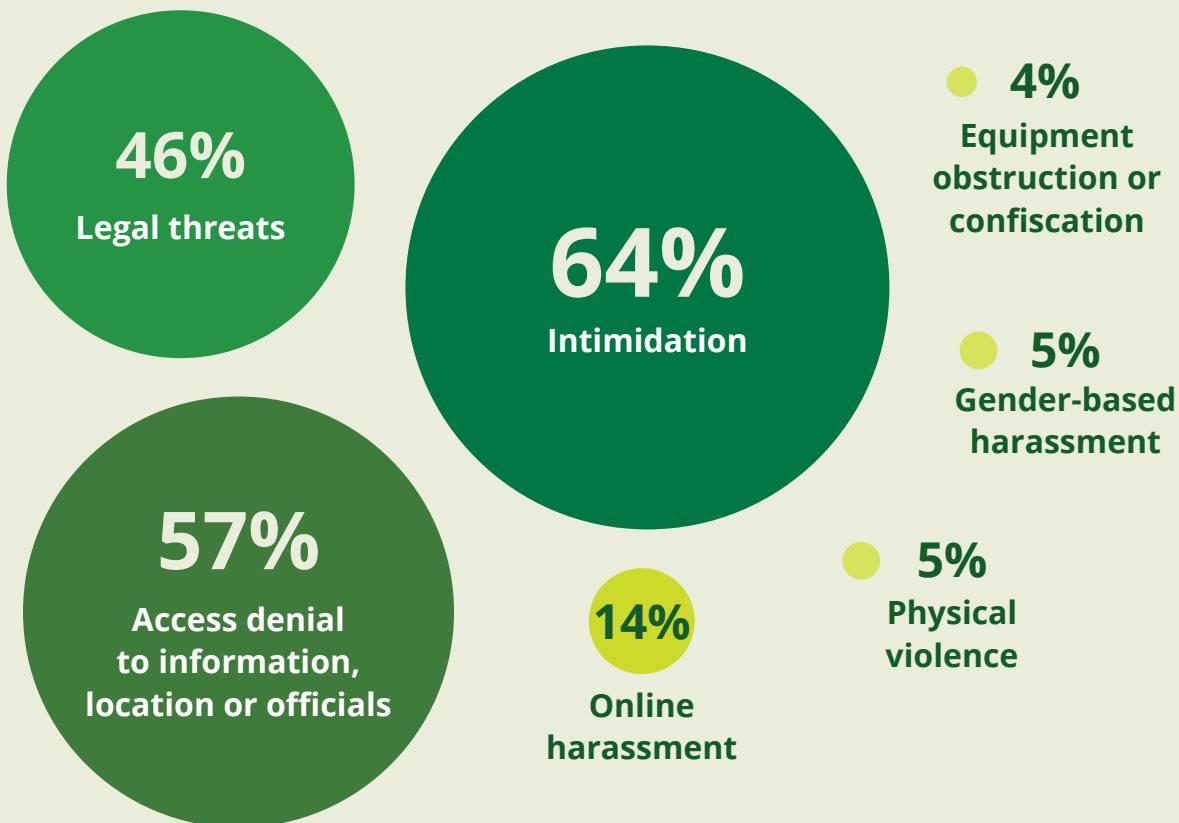
This pattern is consistent with broader regional trends affecting journalists and environmental defenders. A ten-year global analysis by the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre documented more than 6,400 attacks against human rights defenders raising concerns about business-related harms between 2015 and 2024.³⁰ In Asia, the highest number of attacks occurred in the Philippines (411), India (385), Cambodia (279), and Indonesia (216), indicating that Cambodia is among the countries where individuals raising concerns about environmental and resource-related issues face significant risks.

These patterns reinforce the findings of this study, which show that many environmental journalists perceive their work as high-risk, particularly when reporting on issues related to land, forests, and natural resource management.

3.2 Types and Prevalence of Risks

Survey findings show that environmental journalists frequently encounter non-physical forms of pressure, particularly intimidation and restrictions on access to information.

The most commonly reported risks include:



30 Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2025). Defending Rights and Realising Just Economies: Human Rights Defenders and Business (2015–2024). Available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/briefings/human-rights-defenders-and-business-10-year-analysis/defending-rights-and-realising-just-economies-human-rights-defenders-and-business-2015-2024/>

Only 12 % of respondents reported not experiencing any risks, indicating that the majority of journalists covering environmental issues encounter some form of pressure during their work. These findings suggest that legal and institutional pressures are more common than direct physical violence, though the latter remains a concern in certain reporting contexts.

Intimidation - 64%

Intimidation refers to verbal threats, pressure from authorities or private actors, surveillance, or other actions intended to discourage journalists from reporting. According to CamboJA's monitoring framework, intimidation may constitute violations of journalists' right to safety and freedom of expression. FGD participants described situations where journalists felt pressured while reporting in remote areas or when investigating sensitive issues.

Access denial to information, locations, or officials - 57%

Access denial refers to situations where journalists are prevented from obtaining information, entering reporting locations, or contacting relevant officials. This may include refusal to provide interviews, blocking access to reporting sites, or withholding official data. Such restrictions can significantly affect journalists' ability to verify information and produce comprehensive reporting.

Legal threats - 46%

Legal threats refer to the use or threat of legal action to discourage or punish journalists for their reporting. These may include warnings of lawsuits, criminal complaints, summons for questioning, or the filing of charges related to journalistic work. According to CamboJA's human rights-based monitoring framework, such actions may affect journalists' right to liberty, due process, and freedom of expression.

While survey respondents identified legal threats as a common risk, qualitative insights from FGDs and key informant interviews provide further detail on the types of accusations journalists face. Participants noted that legal threats often involve allegations such as defamation, incitement, spreading false information, trespassing, or unauthorized access to restricted areas, particularly when reporting on land disputes, deforestation, and natural resource exploitation.

FGD participants also noted that legal threats are sometimes used as a deterrent, even when cases do not proceed to court. Journalists described situations in which warnings from authorities or summons for questioning created pressure to avoid further reporting. Key informants further emphasized that the risk of legal action can lead to self-censorship, particularly among freelance journalists or those working in provincial areas with limited access to legal support.

Online harassment – 14%

Online harassment includes abusive comments, coordinated attacks on social media, or digital intimidation targeting journalists. These forms of harassment may affect journalists' psychological well-being and discourage reporting on sensitive topics. Key informants noted that online harassment often intensifies when journalists publish stories involving controversial environmental issues.

Physical violence – 5%

Physical violence refers to threats or acts of physical harm against journalists, including assault, intimidation involving weapons, or attacks that may endanger personal safety. It may also include the destruction of equipment during acts of violence. Although less frequently reported, such risks remain significant due to their severity. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants noted that reporting in remote forest areas or documenting illegal activities can expose journalists to physical danger.

Gender-based harassment – 5%

Gender-based harassment refers to discriminatory treatment, inappropriate comments, or harassment targeting journalists based on gender. Qualitative findings suggest that women journalists may face additional safety concerns when reporting in remote areas or interacting with authorities and sources.

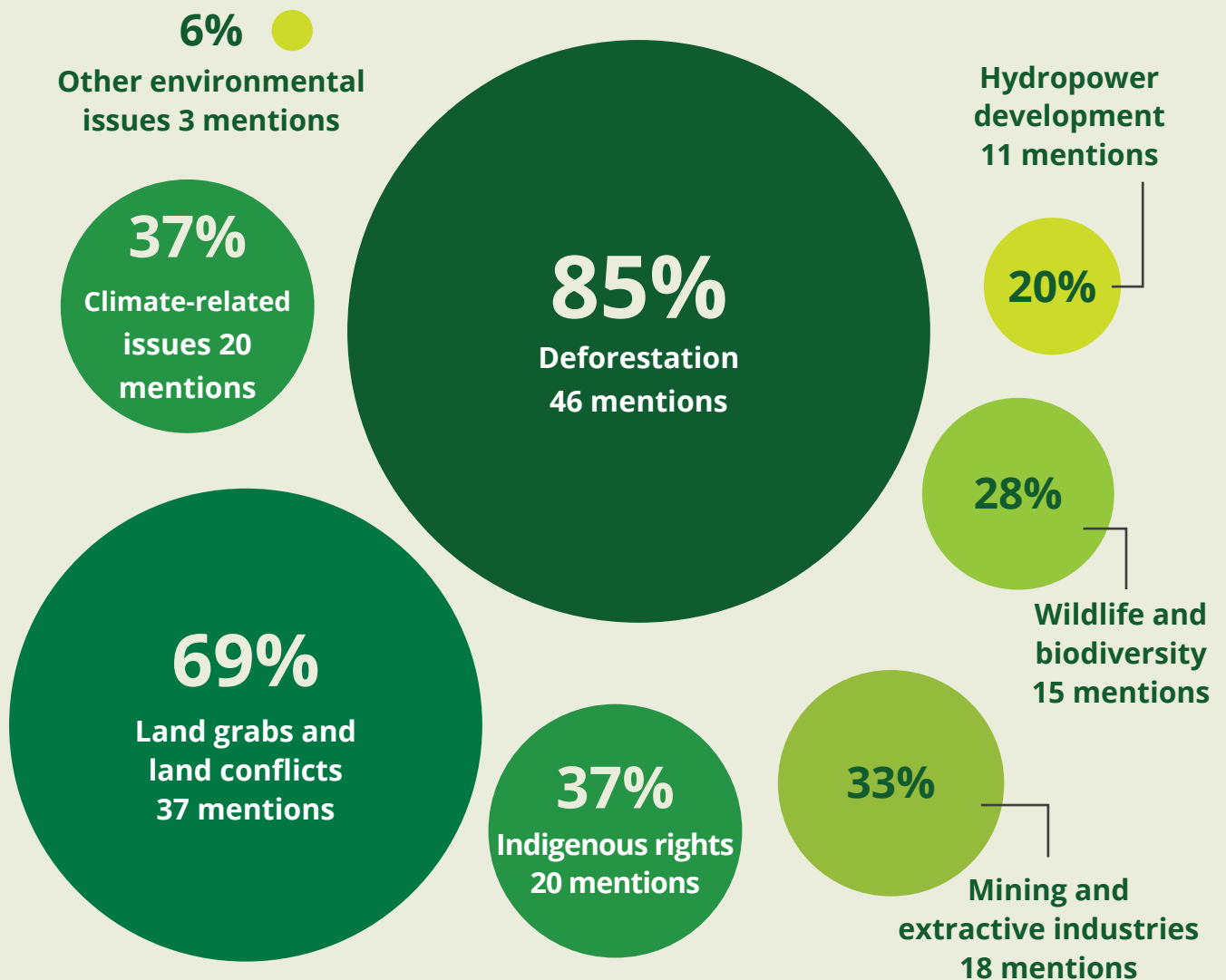
Equipment obstruction or confiscation – 4%

Equipment obstruction or confiscation refers to situations where journalists are prevented from recording, filming, or documenting events without the use of physical violence. This may include being ordered to stop filming, restricted from using cameras or drones, or having equipment temporarily confiscated by authorities or other actors.

These findings demonstrate that environmental journalists in Cambodia face a combination of legal, institutional, and safety-related risks, with non-physical pressures being the most common. However, even less frequent risks—such as physical violence—remain significant due to their potential impact on journalists’ safety and their ability to report freely.

3.2.1 High-Risk Reporting Topics

Survey responses also provide further insight into which environmental topics are associated with higher perceived risks. Among the 54 respondents who reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe, the following topics were most frequently covered:



Deforestation and land-related issues appear most frequently among journalists who reported feeling unsafe, suggesting that reporting on forest governance and land conflicts carries particularly high risks. These topics often require travel to remote areas, documentation of environmental violations, and interaction with authorities or private actors.

These findings are consistent with insights from focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs), which indicate that reporting on natural resource governance, land disputes, and forest exploitation tends to expose journalists to intimidation, legal threats, and restrictions on access to information.

3.3 Sources of Pressure

Survey findings indicate that local authorities are the most frequently cited source of pressure, followed by legal and institutional constraints.

Participants in the FGD identified several actors as sources of pressure, including:

- » State institutions
- » Local authorities
- » Powerful individuals linked to land or resource interests
- » Unidentified or third-party groups

Journalists described incidents such as being questioned by authorities, denied access to reporting locations, or warned against publishing sensitive information. In some cases, reporters reported being blocked from entering environmental sites while attempting to verify information on the ground.

Key informants interviewed for the study noted that these pressures are often linked to local governance dynamics around land and natural resources, where environmental reporting may intersect with powerful political or economic interests.

3.4 Structural Drivers of Risk

Insights from the key informant interviews (KIIs) suggest that the risks faced by environmental journalists are not only situational but also structural.

Key informants identified several systemic factors contributing to the risk environment:

- » Limited access to environmental information and official data
- » Legal uncertainty and fear of litigation
- » Local power dynamics surrounding land and natural resources
- » Weak institutional protection mechanisms for journalists

These structural constraints create conditions in which journalists must navigate legal ambiguity and political sensitivity when reporting on environmental issues.

While the risks described above affect environmental journalists broadly, the findings also indicate that these challenges are not experienced equally by all journalists. Evidence from the survey, focus group discussion (FGD), and key informant interviews (KIIs) suggests that women journalists may face additional constraints related to gender norms, workplace practices, and safety concerns when reporting on environmental issues. These dynamics influence not only the types of risks women journalists encounter, but also their access to field assignments, mobility during reporting, and the likelihood that gender-related risks are formally reported. The following section therefore examines gender-specific challenges in environmental reporting and how structural and cultural factors shape the experiences of women journalists.

4. Gender-Specific Challenges in Environmental Reporting

Women remain underrepresented in Cambodia's media sector, particularly in field-based reporting roles. According to UNESCO, only about 9% of journalists in Cambodia are women, with even fewer holding decision-making positions.³¹ This broader gender imbalance is also reflected in environmental journalism, which often involves field-based reporting in remote and potentially risky environments.

31 UNESCO. (2024). Spotlight on Cambodian Media: Break the Silence to Promote Gender Equality and Combat Gender-Based Violence. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/spotlight-cambodian-media-break-silence-promote-gender-equality-and-combat-gender-based-violence>

As a result, although women represent a smaller share of environmental journalists in Cambodia, the findings suggest that they face distinct professional and safety challenges that can affect their participation in environmental reporting.

Survey results provide an initial indication of gender-related risks. While 17 (23%) of the 74 survey respondents identified as women, only 4 respondents (5%) reported experiencing gender-based harassment while reporting. Although this proportion appears relatively small, qualitative findings suggest that gender-related risks may be underreported or normalized within professional environments, particularly when journalists perceive harassment or discriminatory treatment as part of routine fieldwork conditions. While survey respondents did not specify the types of harassment they experienced, qualitative data from interviews and the focus group discussion suggests that reported forms of harassment include inappropriate comments, questioning of professional credibility, dismissive attitudes from sources or officials, and online harassment, particularly when covering sensitive environmental issues or engaging with authorities.

Insights from the focus group discussion (FGD) provide a clearer picture of the additional challenges women journalists face in practice. Participants described how environmental reporting often requires travel to remote areas, overnight stays in unfamiliar locations, and engagement with potentially hostile actors. In this context, women journalists may encounter additional concerns related to personal safety, mobility, and accommodation, particularly when working alone in distant provinces.

FGD participants also emphasized that gender norms and cultural expectations can influence newsroom decisions about reporting assignments. Some journalists noted that editors or media organizations may hesitate to send women reporters to remote areas or sensitive reporting locations due to perceived safety risks. While often intended as a protective measure, these practices can inadvertently limit women journalists' opportunities to participate fully in field-based environmental reporting.

One participant described the influence of gender stereotypes on reporting assignments:



Because of the stereotype that we are women, people see us as more at risk than men.

(Focus Group Discussion, Participant 7)

Key informant interviews further reinforce these observations. Four out of nine key informants identified gender-based harassment as a specific risk affecting women journalists, particularly in online spaces or during interactions with officials and other sources. Informants also noted that gender-related pressures may include questioning of professional credibility, dismissive attitudes toward women reporters, or inappropriate comments during field reporting.

A director of a media support organization interviewed for this study emphasized that broader safety concerns discourage women from entering or remaining in journalism, despite having the necessary skills:



Despite having the necessary skills, many female journalists are held back by fear, as safety concerns often discourage them from pursuing a career in journalism.

(Director of a media support organization, KII-09)

Several informants emphasized that these challenges are often rooted in broader cultural norms and structural inequalities within the media sector, rather than isolated incidents. As a result, gender-related risks may not always be formally reported or documented, particularly when journalists lack institutional support or fear negative professional consequences.

Despite these challenges, women journalists participating in the FGD expressed strong commitment to environmental reporting. Several participants emphasized that their motivation to document environmental issues and support affected communities often outweighs the personal challenges associated with the work.

Overall, the findings suggest that while environmental journalism remains male-dominated, women journalists play an important role in reporting on environmental issues. Addressing gender-specific challenges—particularly those related to field assignments, safety support, and newsroom practices—could contribute to more inclusive participation in environmental reporting and strengthen the diversity of perspectives within environmental journalism.

5. Coping Strategies and Support Networks

Environmental journalists often rely on a combination of formal institutional support and informal coping strategies to navigate the risks and operational challenges associated with reporting on environmental issues. Survey findings provide an overview of the networks and support needs identified by journalists, while insights from the focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs) help explain how these support systems function in practice and where significant gaps remain.

Overall, the findings indicate that while several journalism and civil society networks provide important forms of support, many journalists continue to rely heavily on personal networks, informal coordination, and individual risk assessments when conducting environmental reporting.

5.1 Journalism Networks

Survey results show that a majority of respondents reported being connected to at least one journalism network or professional support organization. Among these, 23 respondents specifically identified CamboJA as their primary professional network, highlighting the association's role as a key platform for journalist support, coordination, and advocacy in Cambodia. A local environmental reporter known for exposing illegal logging, who was interviewed for this study, said:

“

I actually got CamboJA to help me. [...] They helped pay for medical expenses and medicine (for treating mental health problems due to trauma related to his work as a journalist), as well as travel expenses. [...] Now I am much better.

(Uk Mao, who was arrested without a warrant and charged with incitement and defamation. He faces up to 22 pending legal cases and had previously been physically assaulted by individuals believed to be local officials.)

In addition to journalism associations, respondents and FGD participants also referenced several civil society organizations and networks that provide legal, safety, or advocacy support, including organizations such as Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC), and other local and international partners. These organizations are often contacted when journalists encounter legal threats, intimidation, or other forms of pressure while reporting. They noted that these support organizations can provide legal advice, safety guidance, and public advocacy, which helps reduce risks and enables them to maintain their reporting work, particularly when covering sensitive environmental issues.

Gerry Flynn, a foreign environmental journalist interviewed for this study, also highlighted that diplomatic embassies can serve as an additional support channel, particularly in high-risk situations involving detention. However, such support is often considered a last resort and may be limited in impact. As the journalist noted:

“

Embassies have intervened to get us released [...], but they can't perform miracles. The changes we want have to come from the Cambodian government.

(Gerry Flynn, an Investigative Environmental Journalist, Mongabay)

FGD participants further noted that such networks are particularly important during high-risk reporting situations, as they can provide rapid support, legal referrals, or public advocacy when journalists face threats. In some cases, journalists also rely on local community members or environmental protection groups to help facilitate access to information or to provide early warnings about potential risks in the field.

Despite the presence of these networks, participants indicated that support mechanisms remain unevenly distributed, particularly for freelancers or journalists working in remote provinces who may have less access to institutional resources.

5.2 Coping Strategies in Practice

Beyond formal support networks, journalists frequently rely on informal strategies to manage risks during environmental reporting.

FGD participants described several common practices used to reduce personal risk, including:

- » Conducting informal risk assessments before traveling to reporting locations
- » Working closely with local communities or trusted sources to verify information and assess safety conditions
- » Traveling in groups or coordinating with other journalists when covering sensitive stories
- » Temporarily withdrawing from reporting locations when tensions escalate

These strategies reflect the practical realities of environmental reporting, particularly when journalists must work in remote areas or politically sensitive contexts where institutional protection may be limited.

Participants also emphasized the importance of professional networks and peer support in managing risk. Informal communication between journalists often helps reporters share information about potential threats, local power dynamics, or safe approaches to reporting certain stories.

However, several participants noted that reliance on informal coping mechanisms can place a significant burden on individual journalists, particularly freelancers or provincial reporters who may lack institutional backing.

5.3 Capacity Development Needs

Survey responses indicate a strong demand for capacity-building initiatives that strengthen both safety and reporting skills among environmental journalists.

The most frequently identified support needs include:

- » **Legal support: 80% (59 respondents)**
- » **Safety training: 47% (35 respondents)**
- » **Environmental reporting training: 59% (44 respondents)**
- » **Advocacy support: 38% (28 respondents)**
- » **Mentorship opportunities: 45% (33 respondents)**
- » **Emergency protection mechanisms: 49% (36 respondents)**
- » **Mental health support: 42% (31 respondents)**

These responses suggest that journalists seek both protective support mechanisms and professional development opportunities to enhance the quality and safety of environmental reporting. The high demand for legal support and emergency protection mechanisms reflects concerns about legal risks, harassment, and safety challenges associated with environmental reporting. At the same time, requests for environmental reporting training and mentorship opportunities indicate a need for specialized knowledge and professional guidance to cover complex environmental issues effectively.

Insights from the FGD reinforce this demand, with participants highlighting the need for advanced investigative skills, risk assessment training, and legal preparedness when reporting on sensitive environmental topics. Participants emphasized that environmental reporting often requires specialized knowledge, including understanding environmental laws, natural resource governance, and investigative techniques.

Key informants interviewed for the study also noted that strengthening journalists' technical capacity and legal awareness could help reduce vulnerabilities and enable reporters to navigate complex environmental stories more effectively. These findings suggest that a comprehensive capacity development approach—combining technical training, safety support, and legal protection—would help strengthen environmental journalism in Cambodia.

5.4 Equipment and Reporting Resources

In addition to training and legal support, participants identified a need for practical reporting resources and equipment to improve both safety and reporting quality.

FGD participants highlighted several types of equipment that could support environmental reporting, including:

- » Field reporting equipment such as cameras, drones, and GoPro devices
- » Protective equipment for field reporting
- » Digital/technological tools for environmental monitoring and data collection

Journalists noted that environmental reporting frequently requires travel to remote locations, documentation of environmental changes, and visual evidence collection, all of which depend on access to appropriate equipment. One focus group participant emphasized the need for protective gear and safer documentation tools when reporting in high-risk areas:



Frequently filming in Prey Lang, I lack protective gear like body armor. I specifically need a body-worn GoPro for continuous recording; it is safer than a phone, as we can be attacked before we even begin filming. Additionally, drones allow us to document illegal logging while maintaining a safe distance of five kilometers from potential attackers.

(Focus Group Discussion Participant, P4)

Participants also emphasized the importance of digital tools and data analysis skills, including the use of satellite imagery, mapping tools, and other technologies that can support investigative environmental reporting. However, access to reliable data and official information remains a significant challenge. As one local reporter explained:



The lack of information is also a challenge for journalists. Because we cannot reach them and they [authorities] are not cooperative in providing information, our reporting is not comprehensive.

(Local reporter, KII-05)

Key informants further suggested that improving access to equipment and technical tools could strengthen journalists' ability to produce evidence-based environmental reporting, particularly in cases involving deforestation, land encroachment, or natural resource exploitation.

5.5 Gaps in Current Support Mechanisms

Despite the existence of several support networks and initiatives, the findings suggest that significant gaps remain in the support ecosystem for environmental journalists.

First, support mechanisms are often fragmented and project-based, meaning that journalists may not have consistent access to legal assistance, training opportunities, or safety resources.

Second, freelance journalists and reporters working in remote provinces appear to face greater challenges in accessing support networks and professional resources.

Third, journalists emphasized the need for more coordinated and long-term support mechanisms, including structured safety protocols, stronger legal protection frameworks, and sustained capacity-building programs.

Key informants also noted that strengthening collaboration between journalism organizations, civil society groups, and international partners could help build a more comprehensive support system for environmental journalists.

Overall, the findings suggest that while journalists have developed informal coping strategies and rely on professional networks for support, there remains a need for more structured, accessible, and sustainable support mechanisms to strengthen environmental journalism in Cambodia.

IV. Discussion: Implications for Protection, Collaboration, and Advocacy

The findings of this study provide important insights into the conditions under which environmental journalism is practiced in Cambodia, including the professional profiles of environmental reporters, the topics they cover, the risks they face, and the support mechanisms available to them. Taken together, these findings highlight both the critical role environmental journalists play in documenting environmental issues and the structural challenges that affect their ability to report safely and effectively.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing interventions that strengthen journalist protection, professional collaboration, and advocacy for a more enabling environment for environmental journalism.

The findings should also be interpreted within Cambodia's evolving media landscape, where environmental journalism operates under broader constraints affecting press freedom and access to information. These conditions shape how environmental journalists operate, particularly when covering sensitive topics such as land governance, deforestation, and natural resource extraction.

Environmental reporting is especially sensitive in this context because it often involves scrutiny of natural resource management, land governance, and environmental regulation, areas that can involve powerful actors and complex political dynamics. The survey findings in this study—particularly the prevalence of intimidation, legal threats, and denial of access to information—reflect the broader pressures affecting journalists who report on sensitive governance issues.

Environmental journalists therefore operate at the intersection of press freedom and environmental accountability, where constraints on media freedom can directly affect the availability of independent information about environmental challenges and governance practices.

Environmental Journalism and Environmental Governance

The findings also highlight the close relationship between environmental journalism and environmental governance in Cambodia. Many of the environmental topics most frequently covered by journalists—such as deforestation, land conflicts, and natural resource exploitation—are closely linked to broader governance issues involving land concessions, forestry management, infrastructure development, and community rights.

Cambodia's forest ecosystems and natural resources have undergone significant changes over the past two decades, including large-scale deforestation, expansion of economic land concessions, and infrastructure projects such as hydropower dams and transport corridors. These developments have often generated environmental and social concerns, particularly for rural and indigenous communities whose livelihoods depend on natural resources.

Environmental degradation in Cambodia also carries significant economic and social costs. According to Global Forest Watch, Cambodia has lost approximately 2.9 million hectares of tree cover between 2001 and 2024, with over 93,000 hectares of forest being lost in 2024 alone, and more than half of this loss occurring inside protected areas.³² According to the World Bank, climate change and environmental damage could reduce Cambodia's national income by up to 9% by 2050, while also increasing poverty levels, particularly in rural communities dependent on natural resources.³³

In this context, environmental journalism plays an important role in documenting environmental impacts, amplifying community perspectives, and bringing public attention to environmental policy issues. Journalists frequently serve as intermediaries between affected communities, policymakers, and the broader public.

³² Global Forest Watch. (n.d.). Cambodia. Available at: <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/KHM/>

³³ World Bank. (2024). Press release: Acting on Climate Change is Key for Cambodia to Achieve its Development Goals. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/10/31/acting-on-climate-change-is-key-for-cambodia-to-achieve-its-development-goals>

However, the findings of this study also suggest that journalists face barriers that can limit their ability to perform this role effectively. Difficulties in accessing official information, pressure from authorities or powerful actors, and safety concerns can discourage in-depth reporting on sensitive environmental issues. As a result, some environmental topics may receive limited coverage or be reported primarily through event-based stories rather than investigative reporting.

Strengthening environmental journalism can therefore contribute to greater transparency and accountability in environmental governance, supporting more informed public debate about the management of Cambodia's natural resources.

Implications for Protection and Support Mechanisms

The findings highlight the need for stronger protection mechanisms for environmental journalists, particularly in light of the high levels of perceived insecurity reported by survey respondents. More than seventy percent of respondents reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe while reporting on environmental issues, reflecting the cumulative impact of intimidation, legal threats, and restrictions on access to information.

While direct physical violence appears relatively less common, the risks faced by journalists are often legal, institutional, or procedural in nature, including threats of litigation, questioning by authorities, or being prevented from accessing reporting sites. These risks can create a climate of uncertainty that discourages journalists from pursuing sensitive environmental investigations.

Effective protection mechanisms therefore need to address both immediate safety concerns and structural vulnerabilities. This may include expanding access to legal assistance, strengthening risk assessment and safety training programs, and establishing rapid-response support systems for journalists facing threats.

The findings also highlight the importance of professional networks and peer support systems in helping journalists manage risks. Journalism associations and civil society organizations can play a key role in facilitating communication between journalists, providing legal referrals, and advocating for journalists' rights when safety concerns arise.

Strengthening Professional Collaboration and Capacity

Another key insight from the study is the importance of professional collaboration and capacity development in strengthening environmental journalism. Survey responses and qualitative discussions reveal strong demand for training in environmental reporting, investigative journalism, and risk management.

Environmental reporting often requires specialized knowledge of environmental laws, natural resource governance, and technical environmental data. Journalists also identified the need for skills related to mapping technologies, satellite imagery analysis, and investigative reporting techniques, which can help them verify environmental information and produce more evidence-based reporting.

In addition to training needs, journalists emphasized the importance of equipment and reporting resources, particularly for field reporting in remote areas. Access to tools such as drones, cameras, and digital mapping platforms can significantly enhance journalists' ability to document environmental changes and produce compelling visual evidence.

Expanding capacity-building programs and improving access to reporting resources could therefore strengthen both the quality and safety of environmental reporting.

Implications for Policy, Advocacy, and Programming

The findings suggest that efforts to strengthen environmental journalism should adopt a multi-dimensional approach, combining protection measures, professional capacity development, and advocacy for systemic reforms.

Policy and advocacy initiatives may focus on improving access to environmental information, transparency in natural resource governance, and legal protections for journalists. At the same time, development programs could prioritize training, mentorship, and professional networking opportunities that support journalists working on environmental issues.

Special attention may also be needed for freelance journalists and reporters based in provincial areas, who often face greater risks and have fewer opportunities to access professional support networks.

By strengthening collaboration between journalist associations, civil society organizations, environmental experts, and international partners, it may be possible to build a more resilient ecosystem supporting environmental journalism.

Alignment with International Frameworks

The findings of this study are closely aligned with international frameworks related to press freedom, sustainable development, and journalist safety.

Environmental journalism contributes directly to the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:

<p>13 CLIMATE ACTION </p> <p>which emphasizes the importance of public awareness and information-sharing on climate-related issues.</p>	<p>15 LIFE ON LAND </p> <p>which focuses on sustainable management of forests and ecosystems.</p>	<p>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS </p> <p>which promotes access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms.</p>
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Strengthening environmental journalism also supports the objectives of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which aims to improve the safety of journalists and ensure accountability for attacks against media professionals.

By improving protection mechanisms, strengthening professional networks, and supporting capacity development for environmental reporters, stakeholders can contribute to both safer working conditions for journalists and stronger public oversight of environmental governance.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that strengthening environmental journalism in Cambodia requires coordinated efforts across multiple areas, including journalist protection, professional collaboration, institutional support, and policy advocacy.

The following section builds on these insights to present specific recommendations for key stakeholders, including government institutions, media outlets, journalist associations, civil society groups, donors, and development partners.

V. Recommendations

This section presents recommendations aimed at strengthening the ecosystem for environmental journalism in Cambodia. Drawing on the study's findings, the recommendations focus on improving journalist protection, professional collaboration, access to information, gender inclusion, and institutional support mechanisms. They are directed toward key stakeholders—including government institutions, media organizations, journalist associations, civil society organizations, and international development partners—whose actions can help create a safer and more enabling environment for environmental reporting.

1. Government Institutions

Legally guarantee access to environmental information

Government agencies responsible for environmental management and natural resource governance should strengthen transparency and ensure timely access to environmental data, policy documents, and official information. To provide a clear legal framework for access to public information, the government should expedite the adoption of the long-delayed draft Law on Access to Information and ensure that the legislation aligns with international human rights standards on freedom of expression and access to information. Such a law would help strengthen transparency in environmental governance and enable journalists and the public to access reliable information on environmental policies, natural resource management, and environmental decision-making.

Ensure appropriate use of legal frameworks in media-related cases

Media lawyers and legal experts have emphasized the importance of ensuring that media-related disputes are handled primarily under the Press Law rather than through criminal law provisions. Courts and relevant authorities should ensure that legal interpretations in cases involving journalistic work are consistent with the principles of press freedom and the protections provided under Cambodia's Press Law.

Establish an independent press council

The government should support the establishment of an independent press council in consultation with media stakeholders, journalist associations, and civil society organizations. To ensure credibility and effectiveness, the council's independence should be clearly guaranteed in its statutes, including safeguards against political or institutional interference. The council should also serve as a priority mechanism for resolving disputes involving journalists, government officials, the private sector, and members of the public, helping reduce reliance on legal action and strengthening press freedom.

Strengthen legal protections for journalists

Relevant institutions should review and strengthen legal safeguards that protect journalists from harassment, arbitrary detention, or legal intimidation related to their reporting activities.

Media experts have also recommended that the Ministry of Information review and update the Press Law to ensure it reflects current media practices and challenges. The revision process should provide opportunities for civil society organizations, media institutions, and journalist associations to contribute input, allowing for broader consultation and the inclusion of provisions that address existing gaps in the law.

Facilitate safe reporting and address the issues of impunity

Authorities at national and local levels should ensure that journalists are able to conduct reporting activities without intimidation, obstruction, or undue restrictions, particularly when covering environmental issues particularly in provincial areas. Government institutions should also establish clear mechanisms to investigate and take appropriate action against officials who obstruct reporting activities or violate journalists' rights, including incidents involving denial of access, intimidation, or harassment during reporting assignments.

Promote gender-inclusive engagement with journalists

Government institutions should ensure that journalists of all gender identities are treated equally when accessing information, attending press briefings, and conducting field reporting. Authorities should also take steps to prevent and address gender-based harassment that may occur during interactions between officials and journalists.

2. Media Outlets

Strengthen editorial support for environmental reporting

Media outlets should encourage in-depth environmental reporting and allocate sufficient editorial resources to support investigative coverage of environmental issues.

Develop gender-sensitive safety protocols

News organizations should establish internal safety guidelines and risk assessment procedures for journalists reporting on sensitive environmental topics, particularly when assignments involve travel to remote areas. These protocols should incorporate **gender-sensitive risk assessments**, recognize the specific challenges faced by women journalists, and include practical measures to ensure their safety and equal participation in field reporting.

Promote gender-inclusive newsroom practices

Media organizations should ensure that journalists of all gender identities have equal opportunities to participate in environmental reporting assignments, including field reporting and investigative work. Newsrooms should avoid informal practices that restrict certain journalists from field reporting due to perceived safety concerns and instead provide appropriate logistical and safety support.

Address gender-based harassment in professional settings

Media organizations should establish clear policies and reporting mechanisms to address gender-based harassment, discrimination, and unequal treatment within newsrooms and during reporting assignments.

3. Journalist Associations, Professional Networks, and Media Support Organizations

Strengthen journalist protection mechanisms

Associations should continue to develop support systems such as legal assistance, psychosocial support, emergency response mechanisms, and safety resources for journalists facing threats.

Expand professional networks for environmental journalists

Creating platforms for environmental journalists to share experiences collaborate on reporting projects, and exchange knowledge can help strengthen professional solidarity and reduce isolation among reporters working in provincial areas.

Provide targeted training programs

Training programs focusing on environmental reporting, investigative techniques, legal preparedness, and digital safety can help strengthen journalists' professional capacity.

Support journalists across genders in environmental reporting

Journalist associations should develop mentorship and networking programs that support journalists of diverse gender identities, while also addressing the specific structural barriers faced by women journalists in environmental reporting.

Promote gender-sensitive safety and gender equality training

Media support organizations and journalist associations should provide regular training on gender equality and gender-sensitive safety practices for newsroom staff, including editors, managers, and leadership. These trainings should address gender-related risks faced by journalists, strengthen awareness of gender bias in reporting assignments and newsroom practices, and provide guidance on preventing and responding to gender-based harassment encountered during field reporting or in digital spaces.

4. Civil Society Organizations

Strengthen collaboration between journalists and environmental experts

Civil society organizations can facilitate partnerships between journalists, environmental researchers, and community groups to improve the quality and accuracy of environmental reporting.

Support access to environmental information

Organizations working on environmental governance can assist journalists by providing technical information, research findings, and policy analysis related to environmental issues.

Promote inclusive community engagement

Civil society groups can help connect journalists with local communities affected by environmental issues, ensuring that diverse voices—including those of different gender groups and marginalized communities—are represented in environmental reporting.

Support gender-sensitive environmental reporting

Civil society organizations can collaborate with journalist associations to promote gender-sensitive approaches to environmental reporting and highlight how environmental issues affect communities differently across gender groups.

5. Donors and Development Partners

Support capacity development programs

Donors can fund capacity development initiatives that strengthen journalists' skills in environmental reporting, investigative journalism, and data analysis.

Provide resources for environmental reporting

Grant programs, story fellowships, and reporting funds can help independent journalists conduct in-depth environmental investigations, particularly for freelancers and journalists working for small newsrooms.

Invest in safety and protection mechanisms

Donor support can help strengthen journalist protection initiatives, including legal assistance programs, safety training, and emergency support systems.

Promote gender-inclusive programming

Programs supporting environmental journalism should adopt gender-inclusive approaches that expand participation of journalists of diverse gender identities, including targeted mentorship opportunities, leadership development initiatives, and support mechanisms addressing structural barriers faced by women journalists.

Support long-term institutional development

Sustainable support for journalist associations and media support organizations can help ensure that protection mechanisms, training programs, and advocacy initiatives continue beyond individual project cycles.

VI. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive overview of environmental journalism in Cambodia, combining survey data with qualitative insights from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). The findings offer a clearer picture of who reports on environmental issues, how environmental reporting is conducted, the risks journalists face, and the support systems currently available.

Summary of Key Insights

The findings show that environmental journalism in Cambodia is largely driven by field-based reporters and freelancers working primarily through digital media platforms. Environmental journalists are distributed across 23 locations nationwide, with many operating in provinces rich in natural resources where environmental pressures such as deforestation, land disputes, and resource extraction are most visible.

The profession remains male-dominated, with the survey indicating that men account for approximately 77% of 74 respondents, while women represent 23% (17 respondents). This gender imbalance reflects broader structural patterns within the media sector and has implications for participation in environmental reporting, particularly in field assignments that often require travel to remote areas. Qualitative findings also suggest that cultural norms, newsroom practices, and lack of resources may influence assignment decisions and mobility, sometimes limiting opportunities for women journalists to participate in certain reporting activities.

Coverage is concentrated on issues such as deforestation, land conflicts, pollution, and climate-related challenges, reflecting the most pressing environmental concerns facing the country. Journalists frequently rely on local communities and civil society organizations as key sources of information, underscoring the role of grassroots actors in bringing environmental issues to public attention.

At the same time, the study highlights the challenging conditions under which environmental journalists operate. Many respondents reported feeling unsafe while reporting on environmental issues and have experienced intimidation, legal threats, or restrictions on access to information. These risks often emerge when environmental reporting intersects with sensitive governance issues related to land, natural resources, and economic interests.

The findings also point to structural constraints affecting environmental journalism, including limited access to official information, uneven access to professional support networks, and gaps in specialized training and reporting resources. In addition, gender-related challenges—such as gender-based harassment and institutional hesitancy to assign women journalists to certain reporting contexts—highlight the importance of promoting gender-inclusive newsroom practices and safety measures within the environmental journalism ecosystem.

The Importance of Strengthening Environmental Journalism

Environmental journalism plays a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability, and informed public debate on environmental issues. By documenting environmental changes, investigating governance challenges, and amplifying the voices of affected communities, journalists contribute to greater public awareness of environmental risks and policy responses.

In Cambodia, where environmental issues are closely connected to natural resource management, rural livelihoods, and sustainable development, independent environmental reporting can support more transparent and inclusive environmental governance. Strengthening environmental journalism is therefore closely linked to broader efforts to promote press freedom, access to information, and the safety of journalists.

Future Directions

The findings highlight several priorities for strengthening environmental journalism in Cambodia. These include:

- » **Improving journalist protection mechanisms**
- » **Expanding professional collaboration networks**
- » **Strengthening capacity development programs**
- » **Improving access to reporting resources and environmental data**

Future initiatives may also focus on supporting journalists working in provincial areas, strengthening gender-inclusive newsroom practices, and fostering collaboration between journalists, environmental experts, and civil society organizations. Such partnerships can help enhance the quality and impact of environmental reporting.

Final Reflection

Environmental challenges in Cambodia—from deforestation and natural resource exploitation to climate-related impacts—will continue to shape the country's development trajectory. In this context, environmental journalism serves as a critical bridge between communities, policymakers, and the public, helping to ensure that environmental decisions are informed by credible information and diverse perspectives.

Strengthening the safety, capacity, and professional networks of environmental journalists is therefore not only a matter of protecting journalists—it is also essential for supporting transparency, public accountability, and sustainable environmental governance. By working together to create a more enabling environment for environmental reporting, stakeholders can help ensure that journalists are able to continue documenting environmental change and contributing to informed public dialogue about Cambodia's environmental future.

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About CamboJA

The Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA) is a membership-based professional journalists network dedicated to promoting press freedom, journalist protection, and professional journalism in Cambodia. Established in 2019 to support journalists and strengthen the media sector, CamboJA works to improve the safety, capacity, and working conditions of journalists across the country.

CamboJA's work focuses on several key areas, including monitoring and documenting violations against journalists, providing referral legal and emergency support, strengthening professional networks among journalists, and promoting ethical and responsible journalism practices. Through its monitoring initiatives, CamboJA produces regular reports on the situation of journalism in Cambodia, documenting threats, harassment, and other challenges faced by media professionals.

In addition to advocacy and monitoring activities, CamboJA implements capacity-building programs, research initiatives, and collaborative news publication platforms that support journalists in covering issues of public interest, including governance, human rights, and environmental protection. The association also works closely with national and international partners to advance policies and initiatives that strengthen press freedom and the protection of journalists.

By supporting journalists and promoting an enabling environment for independent media, CamboJA seeks to contribute to greater transparency, accountability, and informed public dialogue in Cambodia.

For more information, please visit:

Website: <https://www.camboja.net>

E-mail: communications@camboja.net

Address: SSP Office Space, 4th floor (G), #48, Samdech Pen Nut Boulevard (289), Sangkat Boeung Kak 2, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Annexes

- » Survey questionnaire
- » Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide
- » Key Informant Interview (KII) guides

1. Survey Questionnaire

SECTION A: Demographic & Professional Profile

1. Age: Under 25 / 25–34 / 35–44 / 45–54 / 55+
2. Gender identity: Woman / Man / Non-binary / Prefer not to say
3. Location (Province): _____
4. Current role: Reporter / Editor / Photojournalist / Videographer / Freelance / Other
5. Years of experience: <1 / 1–3 / 4–7 / 8–12 / 13+
6. Outlet type: Online / Radio / TV / Print / Social media
7. Is your outlet legally registered? Yes / No / Not sure / Not applicable

SECTION B: Environmental Reporting Practices

8. Do you report on environmental issues? Regularly / Occasionally / Rarely / Not at all
9. Topics covered: Deforestation, Land grabs, Hydropower, Mining, Wildlife, Climate, Indigenous rights, Other
10. Geographic focus: National / Provincial / Protected areas / Urban issues
11. Main sources used: Communities / CSOs / Officials / Experts / Companies / Courts / Social media

SECTION C: Risks & Challenges

12. Experienced any of the following? Legal threats, Intimidation, Physical violence, Online harassment, Gender harassment, Access denial, Equipment obstruction, None
13. Safety level (1–5): ____
14. Biggest barriers (choose three): Legal restrictions, Local authority pressure, Company pressure, Editorial limits, Time/resources, Lack of knowledge, Lack of data access

SECTION D: Support & Needs

15. Member of journalism network? Yes / No
16. Needed support (choose up to 3): Legal support, Safety training, Environmental training, Mentorship, Emergency protection, Mental health support
17. Additional comments: _____

2. Focus Group Discussion Guide

Motivation

- » What motivated you to cover environmental issues?

Coverage Patterns

- » Which environmental issues receive most/least coverage? Why?
- » Differences in access to info across regions?

Safety & Risk

- » Challenges or risks encountered?
- » Who are main sources of pressure?
- » Gender-specific differences in risk?

Coping & Networks

- » What support networks/formal groups exist?
- » What informal strategies are used?

Recommendations

- » What support is needed to improve safety and reporting quality?

3. Key Informant Interview Guide


Senior Journalists / Editors

- » Current state of environmental journalism?
- » Most/least covered issues and reasons?
- » Editorial or structural constraints?
- » Common risks faced by journalists?
- » Gender-related differences?
- » Existing networks and gaps?
- » Key recommendations?

Environmental NGO / Advocate

- » Most urgent environmental issues now?
- » Collaboration patterns with media?
- » Barriers to information access?
- » Difficult regions or cases?
- » Needed support mechanisms?

Media Association / Legal Expert

- » Impact of legal frameworks on journalism?
 - » Most common legal risks?
 - » Existing protection mechanisms?
 - » Policy/advocacy options?
- 

Contact us



Address

#48, Samdech Pen Nut Blvd (289),
Boeung Kak 2, Toul Kork, Phnom Penh.



Website

www.camboja.net



Phone

+855 23 882 311



Email

communications@camboja.net