Innovative Reform Initiatives in Asia:
Promoting justice and strengthening civil society

East-West Management Institute, Inc. (EWMI), a US public charity, works in partnership with grass roots groups, local governments and international organizations to build just, prosperous and democratic societies. EWMI has implemented innovative projects in collaboration with partners in Cambodia, Fiji, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and regionally.

Using Technology to Promote Data Governance, Access to Information, Transparency and Support Development
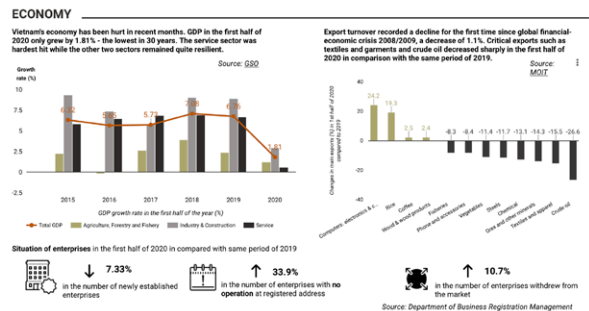
Open Development Initiative

EWMI's Open Development Initiative (EWMI-ODI), created and continues to support an open data and information platform (Open Development Mekong (ODM)) that sheds light on development trends in the Mekong region, a trans-boundary ecosystem shared by six countries that serves as the central livelihood and food security system for 65 million people. The open data platform includes five national websites and one regional website serving Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam. EWMI-ODI's approach relies on impartial presentation of data, using open data standards alongside objective analysis through visualizations, briefings, maps, and other data products to increase transparency and accessibility. The platform has since evolved into a network supporting data and digital rights that are reflective of and accessible to all citizens across the Mekong region. The target audience of civil society, private sector, government, academia, and marginalized communities utilize ODM's rich repository of data and information to support research, analysis, and decision-making. This approach natively supports crowdsourcing data and facilitates multi-sectoral and transborder views.

► *ODM is now a reliable and diverse platform that provides data and information on significant development issues of national and regional relevance.*

Open Development Cambodia, the first platform established in 2011, is now an independent NGO and boasts more than 90,000 unique users per month. It is widely used by local advocacy groups and other stakeholders as a source of data, which have found that its neutrality and integrity strengthens the authority of their claims. For example, in December 2018, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) published a report on business practices that affect land rights that relied extensively on ODC data on economic land concessions. One

Working in partnership with grass roots groups, local governments and international organizations to build just, prosperous and democratic societies.

of the companies cited in the report subsequently contacted CCHR and took corrective action to remedy water pollution it had caused, and the Cambodian government responded to the report by strengthening environmental reporting requirements in Special Economic Zones. CCHR attributed the impact of its report to its use of ODC data.

Open Data for Development: Asia Hub

In 2018, OD4D's Asia Hub was launched to improve the availability and impact of open data in Southeast Asia and maximize it use in support of sustainable development. The hub aims to build a stronger community of practice in Southeast Asia comprised of open data technologists, civil society, government officials, donors, and researchers. With funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), EWMI's Open Development Initiative

▶ *The Cambodian Center for Human Rights used open source data on economic land concessions from Open Development Cambodia to support a report investigating land-related rights violations.*

has been managing the hub in partnership with Sinar Project Malaysia since 2018. Through collaboration between OD4D, Open Development Initiative and partners in Malaysia, India, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos, a community of open data advocates is engaged to increase the quality, impact, and sustainability of individual initiatives and collaboration in the region, establishing links with regional and global networks. As the community and the work they are leading has matured, there are new opportunities and entry points to use the open data in meaningful ways to advance development outcomes and the Sustainable Development Goals. New opportunities to advance gender equality using open data are also emerging, such as mapping out how women and girls use government services in order to design more responsive services.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Asia Network

Since the expansion of the ODI networks across the region and an increased focus upon data governance, data privacy and digital rights it was apparent that the international and regional focus on the protection of personal data and privacy rights is inadequate for Indigenous People. Additionally, the representation of Indigenous data is hugely problematic, with many national level statistics under-representing, misrepresenting or not taking into consideration Indigenous data rights. There is an urgent need for the development and implementation of collective Indigenous privacy laws, regulations and standards. The ODI has collaborated with stakeholders across the region including partnerships with the Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and other national Indigenous groups to promote and disseminate the best practices of implementing Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) to ensure that Indigenous Peoples have agency over their data and the ability then to dictate the narratives about their communities. IDS is vested in a data governance and management approach that puts people in control of their own data. The global framework is outlined in the CARE principals which we have been supporting translation and dissemination off. The ODI team has also contributed to the best practices standards for RDA COVID-19 Guidelines for Data Sharing Respecting Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Improving Access to Information

EWMI is working to help Indigenous women and other vulnerable groups obtain and use information necessary to express their concerns and hold the government to account. With funding from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Rights, and Labor (DRL), EWMI is creating a platform for vulnerable populations, and in particular Indigenous women, to exercise their right to freedom of information in order to participate more fully in their communities. EWMI and local partners are building the capacity of Indigenous women and other vulnerable groups to gain access to information about government services and decisions that affect their lives by designing and delivering training and mentoring tailored to them.

In Cambodia, the USAID Civil Society Strengthening Project, implemented by EWMI supports increased access to information through a grant to the Women's Media Center to develop an on-line fact-checking service and capacity building to develop savvy media consumers. Since it was launched in 2019, it has become a reliable source of information and an example of responsible and ethical journalism in Cambodia and a credible counterweight to charges of "fake news" that are used to dismiss unwelcome information.

In Malaysia, our partners are working to strengthen freedom of expression, promote right to information, strengthen independent media, and combat censorship. They are working to build awareness and support for Right to Information (RTI) reforms, including strengthening the legislative framework to incorporate best international frameworks, develop framework for RTI test cases, and facilitate broad awareness about RTI through education and social media campaigns and partnerships with various stakeholders. In Sri Lanka, EWMI has supported efforts by local CSOs to build Sri Lankan journalists' capacity to properly use the RTI law and improve their investigative skills in exposing cases of bribery and corruption

Improving Access to Justice

EWMI understands that a justice system is not just if it is beyond the reach of the poor and the vulnerable. An important part of EWMI's mission is to help expand

▶ *Jaffna Legal Aid Centre*

the breadth and quality of legal aid and develop innovative public awareness campaigns so that people understand their rights and how to exercise them. In Cambodia, through a legal defense fund, EWMI's legal aid partner represents constitutional rights defenders, including those charged with incitement, sometimes based on social media or private comments about COVID-19. EWMI helped produce a television series designed to educate Cambodians about their legal system at work, and provided extensive support to CSOs providing legal aid for the indigent. Additionally, EWMI facilitated the first "Legal Aid Leadership Forum," which provided a venue for the leaders of legal aid service providers to discuss common issues and problems. In

Myanmar, EWMI coordinated a trip for 16 leaders representing several civil society and legal aid groups to Cambodia where they visited legal aid centers and other civil society groups, observed client interviews in prisons, visited courts, and held meetings with villagers displaced by land grabs. In addition, EWMI provided technical assistance and training to lawyers in Myanmar on different types of public interest and legal aid efforts, and models of funding. In Sri Lanka, during its civil war, EWMI assisted in the establishment and supported the Jaffna Legal Aid Centre, which continues to operate today. EWMI also served the people of Jaffna through mobile land law clinics, public legal education programs, and bar association trainings. Through the work of the mobile land law clinics, EWMI obtained final certification of land deeds for 324 Jaffna-based displaced families. Leveraging technology to increase access to justice, EWMI supported the Vietnam Judicial Support Association for the Poor (VIJUSAP) in the launch of its web-based legal aid directory of legal assistance resources available to individuals or CSOs. The online platform links public interest-oriented lawyers with CSOs, communities and individuals who need basic legal information, advice or formal representation, and is the only one of its kind in Vietnam. The names of CSOs that provide legal advice or information and the names of individual lawyers, law firms and legal aid agencies that provide legal representation is arranged in an innovative and highly accessible map-based catalog. From January to March 2020, the web directory received 6,693 visits.

Improving Judicial Performance through Automation

Under the Program on Rights and Justice in Cambodia, EWMI made a significant contribution to case management efficiency in the courts. EWMI worked with the Ministry of Justice to promote the concept of judicial databases, starting with a targeted focus on Trafficking in Persons cases, for which the Ministry was keen to demonstrate effective prosecution and reporting. The database was expanded to include gender-based violence cases, which then led to EWMI's piloting of a general criminal case database at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. The system allowed judges to track the status and flow of their cases, court administrators were able to monitor the performance of judges and prosecutors, and defendants and their lawyers benefitted from increased access to case information (case status, scheduling, location of client's detention, etc.). One of the results was the virtual elimination of excessive pretrial detention in the Court. As EWMI's project concluded, OHCHR rolled the database out to five more courts, and ultimately to every court in the country, with a central server that now links the data of all courts.

Environment and Sustainability

The human rights of many of the planet's poorest people are indivisible from the natural resources upon which their lives depend. A thriving forest not-destroyed supports the livelihoods of thousands of families, protects the water and food resources of whole countries, and helps preserve the global environment. Building upon the civil society work and grassroots initiatives it has supported in the past,

► *Deforestation in Cambodia*

EWMI's environment program is designed to work with local citizens to find sustainable and community-based solutions to urban and natural environmental conservation issues. In 2019, EWMI launched a new special initiative, Green Equity Asia, that works at the intersection of natural resources conservation, and community empowerment in the dynamic growth economies of Asia. Our initial priority is the Lower Mekong sub-region, a region of breathtaking biodiversity, conservation innovation, and mounting investment. EWMI's Open Development Initiative has also published and made available Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) documentations across the ODM platform and these documents allow users to access information about investment projects being developed.

Data Literacy Programs

With support from the World Bank, a data literacy program in Myanmar was piloted by Phandeeyar in partnership with East-West Management Institute's Open Development Initiative. The mission was to educate leaders across organizations ranging from government affiliated think tanks, civil society groups, technology enterprises, media groups, research institutes and universities about the importance of building a data-driven culture, and helping them realize the positive benefits of investment in data training and upskilling. The experience from Myanmar confirmed our belief that enabling individuals to work with data will not only improve their ability to realize its value, but also help boost their confidence to take action using these insights – ensuring that data is seen as a benefit, not a burden. Thus, within a month of its completion in Myanmar, we adapted and replicated the data literacy training program in Cambodia under EWMI's Cambodian Civil Society Strengthening project, a USAID funded program, where our national country partner—Open Development Cambodia (ODC)—delivered data literacy training to journalists, NGO representatives from various sectors, and researchers, highlighting that data literacy programs can benefit professionals across a wide range of sectors. With support from the EU-funded Voices for Mekong Forests Program implemented by RECOFTC, EWMI has since been localized and adapted the curriculum for participants from the forestry sector in Thailand and Vietnam.

► *A meeting of NGO representatives in Fiji, under the Dialogue Fiji Program.*

Peace Building and Conflict Mitigation

Working in post-conflict societies, conflict mitigation and peace-building strategies have always been integrated into EWMI's access to justice and civil society projects. In Fiji, EWMI promoted dialogue and tolerance by bringing together community leaders, CSOs, religious leaders, and government officials to discuss key issues such as human rights, interethnic relations,

and constitutional reform. Recognizing the importance of strengthening, supporting and sharing Asian approaches to conflict transformation, EWMI has been providing institutional support to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies with the primary goal of establishing and supporting the Cambodia Peace Museum. Although a number of museums in Cambodia confront the nation's history of conflict, these institutions document the violence committed by the Khmer Rouge without pivoting to explain how everyday citizens can learn from the past to work towards reconciliation. Opened on October 23, 2018, the Peace Museum fills an institutional gap in the curriculum for educating young people on Cambodian history.

Protecting Land Rights

Land conflicts and land rights violations continue to pose a challenge to the protection of human rights in Cambodia and throughout the lower Mekong region. EWMI has been working since 2001 to improve land tenure rights, supporting dispute resolution and strategic litigation, raising public awareness through radio series, story posters, and road show performances, and using ODM platforms as an unbiased and detailed comprehensive data source on land and natural resources. During this time, EWMI fostered a network of Party Assistants to advise and assist citizens in resolving their land disputes. EWMI also supported two community land documentation programs to help communities map, document, and preserve their land use and occupation history to help prove their ownership

▸ *Supporting community land documentation efforts.*

rights. EWMI supported human rights partners to provide legal representation to victims of land grabbing, land disputes and forced evictions. EWMI supported grassroots community efforts of groups such as the Community Peace Building Community Network, which has collected tens of thousands of thumbprints of citizens from communities whose livelihoods are threatened by land grabbing and natural resource destruction, and the Prey Lang Network, which undertakes community patrolling, education and outreach activities aimed at preserving the threatened Prey Lang Forest.

In Myanmar EWMI-ODI is supporting partner Landesa to build a platform that houses and stores data and information on land tenure records across the country. The Land Management Information System provides for digitization and records of spatial data accessible to stakeholders enabling them to track and monitor progress on the land reform process.

Promoting Social Accountability

In Cambodia, EWMI supports a diverse portfolio of local NGOs to identify and expand opportunities to engage citizens in local democratic processes. Through

a combination of grants, capacity building and legal support, EWMI helps these groups flexibly navigate in an ever-changing space and demonstrate that they can contribute to a strong democratic Cambodia with engaged citizens and a responsive government. EWMI-supported training sessions, citizen patrols and community meetings have led to citizen calls for government action, which have led to increased responsiveness by government officials in targeted areas. In the second quarter of 2020 alone, despite restrictions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, citizens engaged with EWMI partners raised 96 issues with subnational authorities, including requests for services and calls for enforcement of natural resource laws, and 27 commune councils took concrete action in response to citizen concerns (e.g., by ordering land grabbers to return community forest land, or by repairing roads). The cumulative effect of all these activities—and their success—ushers in new norms and expectations about the roles of citizens and officials. Ultimately it changes the fabric of target communities and serves to expand civil society space throughout Cambodia.

Improving Legal Education

EWMI institutionalized first-ever practical legal skills training programs at Cambodia's largest law faculty and highly successful and well-publicized annual litigation skills competitions, the Client Counseling Competition and the Mock Trial Competition, at two leading law faculties. EWMI also expanded the Alternative Dispute Resolution, Ethics, and Introduction to Advocacy classes it helped develop at the Royal University for Law and Economics (RULE), as well as extending the breadth of the existing English-language program at RULE. EWMI fostered a new generation of young women lawyers through a scholarship program for women from the provinces, which has been continued by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. Additionally, EWMI spearheaded the creation of the first academic law journal in Cambodia, the production of the first Khmer-English ADR book and the first publication of the Annotated Cambodian Code of Criminal Procedure.

Cambodian youth attend a USAID-Mozilla Foundation forum created by EWMI to expand the reach and enhance the security of the award-winning human rights data portal www.sithi.org.

Promoting Human Rights

In Cambodia, EWMI provided technical and financial support to human rights partners for more than 10 years, resulting in the investigation of over 2,600 allegations of human rights abuses and more than 4,000 interventions with the courts and Ministry of Interior on behalf of prisoners. In addition, EWMI supported NGO human rights monitoring and database efforts, which led to substantially increased access to objective data and more effective advocacy. EWMI also supported the development of several NGO human rights data systems. The Sithi Hub, developed by an EWMI grantee, was the first technology hub designed to support human rights

in Cambodia. Sithi Hub aggregates, analyzes and displays information on a wide range of rights related issues, while also providing a space where innovators and human rights advocates can meet to share ideas and exchange information. The Sithi Hub accommodates 100 active members working to utilize technology to protect and promote human rights in Cambodia. EWMI also provides ongoing support for innovative public interest law firms that have led critical strategic litigation efforts in Cambodia. In Sri Lanka, EWMI raised human rights awareness among local government officials and some of Sri Lanka's neediest citizens, a majority of them women and IDPs, through mobile legal clinics and training. In Myanmar, EWMI facilitated a strategic discussion and exchange of ideas between human rights activists working on land registration efforts, criminal legal defense for land activists in detention, and land rights advocacy campaigns.

A significant part of EWMI's work with civil society groups, activists, and public interest lawyers around the world includes work with LGBT communities. EWMI's focus on LGBT issues in Southeast Asia has included several programs in Cambodia and involved hundreds of participants in trainings, forums, and research projects in the community development, justice, and health sectors.

▶ *A particiapant at a multi-day workshop to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT).*

Combatting Corruption

With funding from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Rights, and Labor (DRL), EWMI helped promote anti-corruption social media messaging in Sri Lanka through a sub-grant to local CSO, Sarvodaya-Fusion. Between January and March 2020, Sarvodaya-Fusion launched a cohesive outreach campaign across several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp, structured around a series of seven trilingual (Sinhala, English and Tamil) videos that raised awareness of how bribery and corruption negatively impact the economy, society and physical environment of Sri Lanka, and informed the audience on corruption prevention mechanisms. The campaign reached approximately 1.2 million citizens across the country. Separately, EWMI helped produce an anti-corruption song and music video that was also used in a variety of affiliated outreach campaigns and was posted on the new website that EWMI had helped Sri Lanka's anti-corruption commission update.

EWM's projects in Asia have been made possible through the generous support of various bilateral and multilateral institutions as well as private foundations and individual donors, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of State, Asian Development Bank, European Commission, International Development Research Centre, Luminate, MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, SPIDER Center, RECOFTC, Open Society Foundations, The World Bank Group, and various other private foundations and donors.

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