

# Business, Human Rights and the Environment

## Survey Summary

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# INTRODUCTION

RISING SEA LEVELS, UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER PATTERNS, HAZARDOUS AIR AND WATER POLLUTION AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS THREATEN TO UNDERMINE THE FABRIC UPON WHICH BUSINESS AND SOCIETY FLOURISH, AND PUT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS—RIGHT TO LIFE, RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD, RIGHT TO CLEAN WATER AND FOOD—at grave risk.

Over a three-week period, UNDP Business and Human Right in Asia programme (B+HR Asia), alongside UNEP and other partners, hosted an online survey to capture perceptions of environmental risks and their relationships to human rights abuses. Respondents were also asked for their views on the most effective means of addressing the challenges these risks and abuses posed. With inputs from our partners at the European Union (EU), the results will help inform UNDP programming efforts on business, human rights, and the environment (BHR/E) in Asia in the coming years.

The Survey on Human Rights and the Environment, involved 13 questions and elicited 609 responses from business and civil society actors, government officials, employees of multilateral institutions, students, and people from other walks of life.

The survey was translated from English into Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Singhalese, Tamil, and Thai. Admittedly, the survey methodology employed was imperfect and the sampling size was small for a region so vast.

Yet, while the perception survey does not provide a definitive picture, it does provide clues and indications. Importantly, the responses to open ended questions are both detailed and informed suggesting that the survey reached people who are seized of the subject matter.

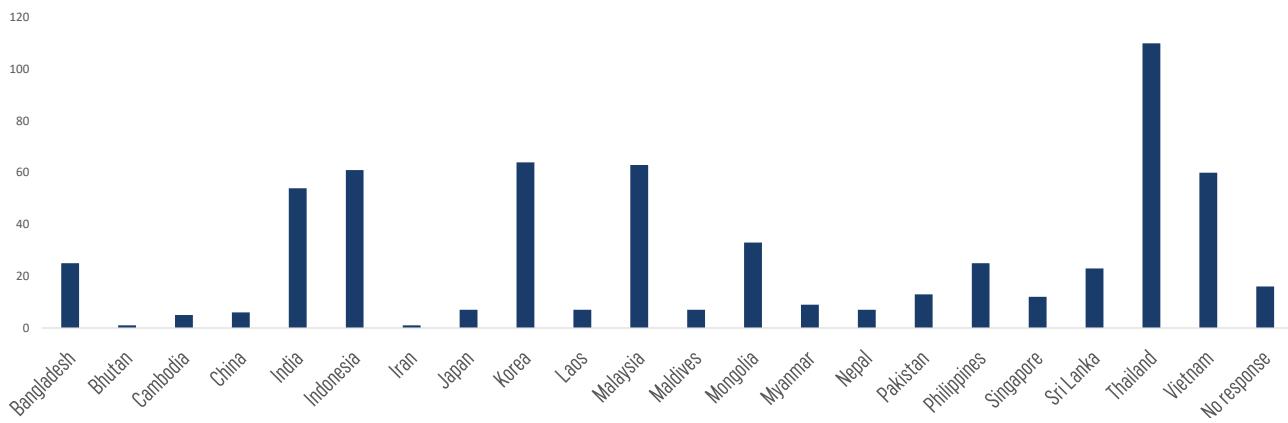
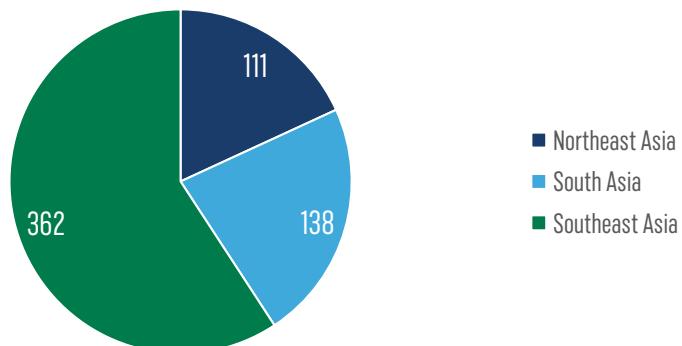
With thanks to our esteemed respondents for taking the time to fill in the survey questionnaire. We hope you find the results and the conclusions illuminating.



# RESPONDENT PROFILE

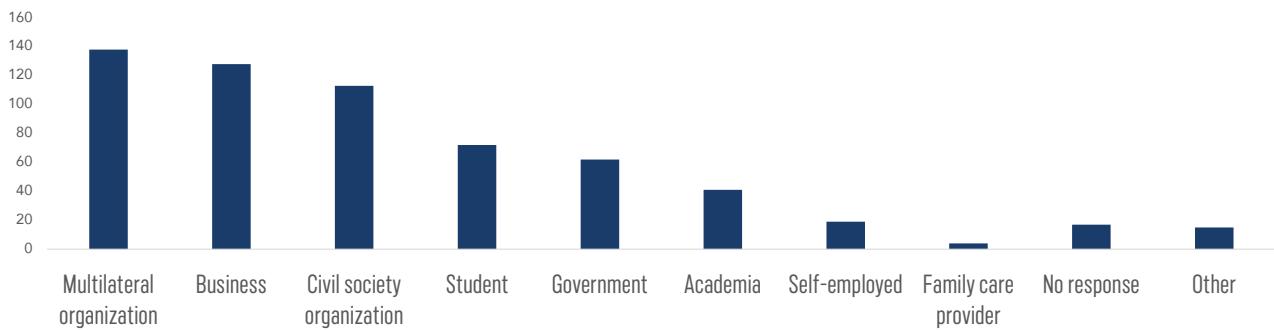
## 1. WHICH REGION OR COUNTRY DO YOU CURRENTLY LIVE IN OR CONSIDER AS YOUR HOME COUNTRY?

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were from Southeast Asia. The strongest response rate came from two Southeast Asian and one Northeast Asian country: Thailand, Korea, and Malaysia.



## 2. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT?

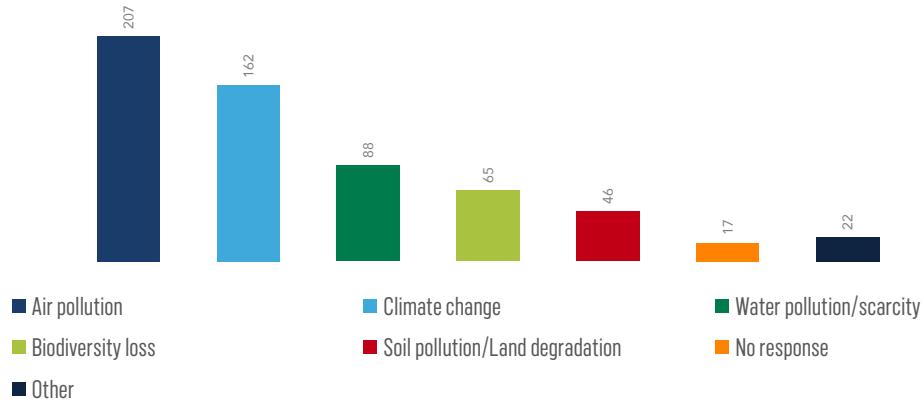
Most respondents worked at multilateral institutions which might reflect the nature of the survey's distribution. However, employees of large businesses and SMEs also responded in high numbers. In fact, business actors were the second most frequent respondents.



# ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES

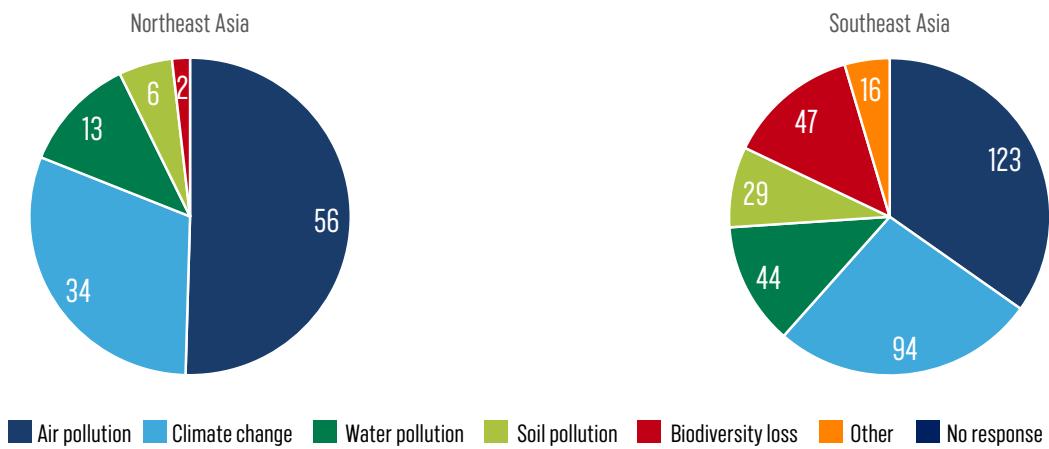
## 3. WHAT IS THE MOST PRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE FOR YOUR COUNTRY?

Air pollution and climate change were the most commonly identified priority areas across regions.



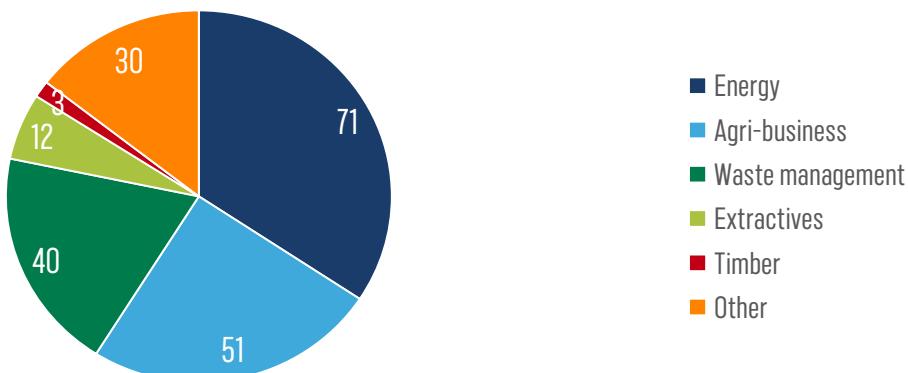
When disaggregated by region, the results above are duplicated in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Air pollution is considered the most pressing environmental priority, followed by climate change and water pollution/scarcity.

However, in South Asia, climate change and water pollution/scarcity rank higher than air pollution.



## 4. IF YOU CHOSE AIR POLLUTION, WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

Energy and agri-business industries were identified as the most significant contributors to air pollution.

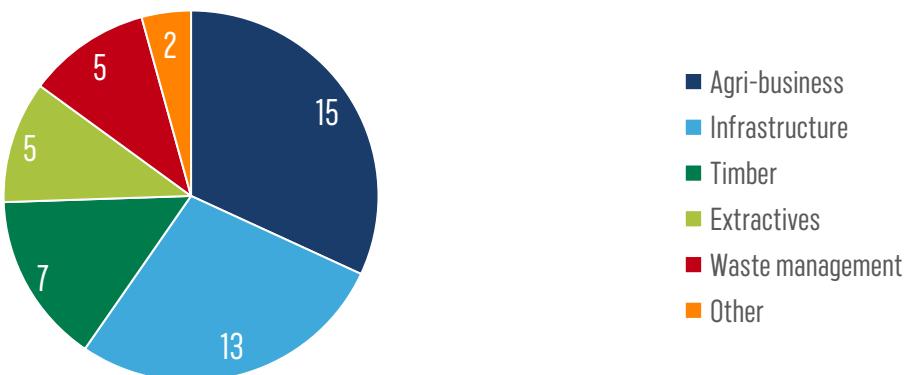


Humans must have the right to breath clean air. Air pollution in Thailand harms our bodies, we feel it in our chests, our kids get nosebleeds from going to school. We need alternative ways of farming to reduce PM2.5 levels. We need to allow nature to replenish itself.

- Respondent

## 5. IF YOU CHOSE SOIL POLLUTION/LAND DEGRADATION, WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

The agri-business and infrastructure industries were identified as the most significant contributors to soil pollution and land degradation.

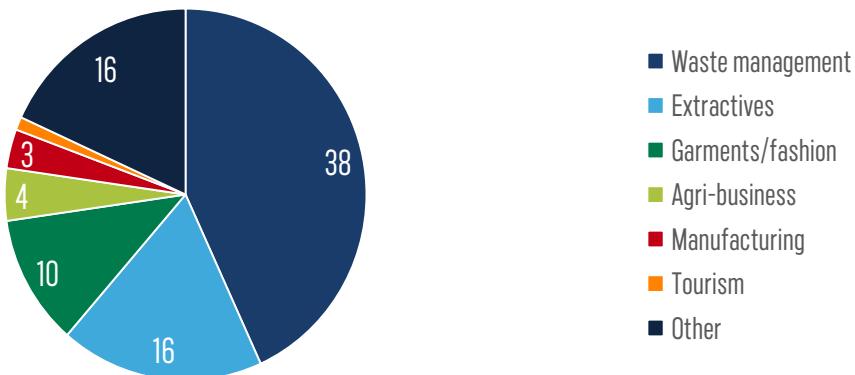


Harm from land-grabbing and acquisition for business development, especially in the monoculture sector (palm oil and rubber), is difficult to reverse. It affects biodiversity and the local climate and has grave repercussions on the rights of indigenous communities who depend on their land and environment.

- Respondent

## 6. IF YOU CHOSE WATER POLLUTION/SCARCITY, WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

The waste management and extractives industries were identified as the most significant contributors to water pollution and water scarcity challenges. The garment industry came in as a close third. The "Other" category involved many different sub-industries related to manufacturing, slightly complicating the picture.



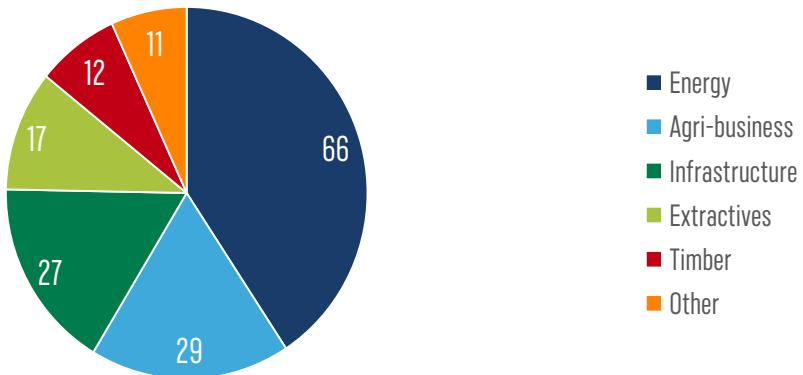
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There have been various incidents involving water pollution in Malaysia in the past few years, ranging from toxic fumes emitting from rivers to hazardous waste being dumped into rivers. At least one incident resulted in school closures, preventing children from continuing their education and the pollution may even have lasting impact on their health.

- Respondent

## 7. IF YOU CHOSE CLIMATE CHANGE, WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

The energy and agri-business industries were identified as the most significant contributors to climate change.



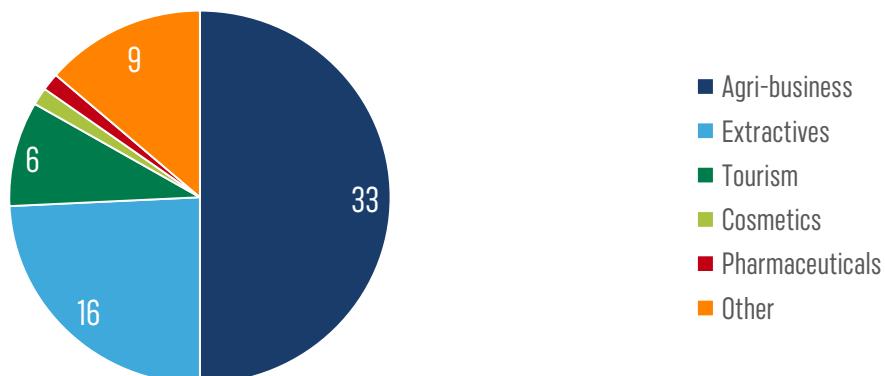
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Current climate change implications and predictions tell us that the existence of the Maldives as a nation and the survival of its people and culture is hanging by a thread. Maldivians have lived in these islands for over 2000 years. Leaving these islands does not only translate to displacement. It also means that a nation with its own culture, heritage, language is destroyed forever.

- Respondent

## 8. IF YOU CHOSE BIODIVERSITY LOSS AS THE MOST PRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY, WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

The agri-business and extractives industries were identified as the most significant contributors to biodiversity problems.



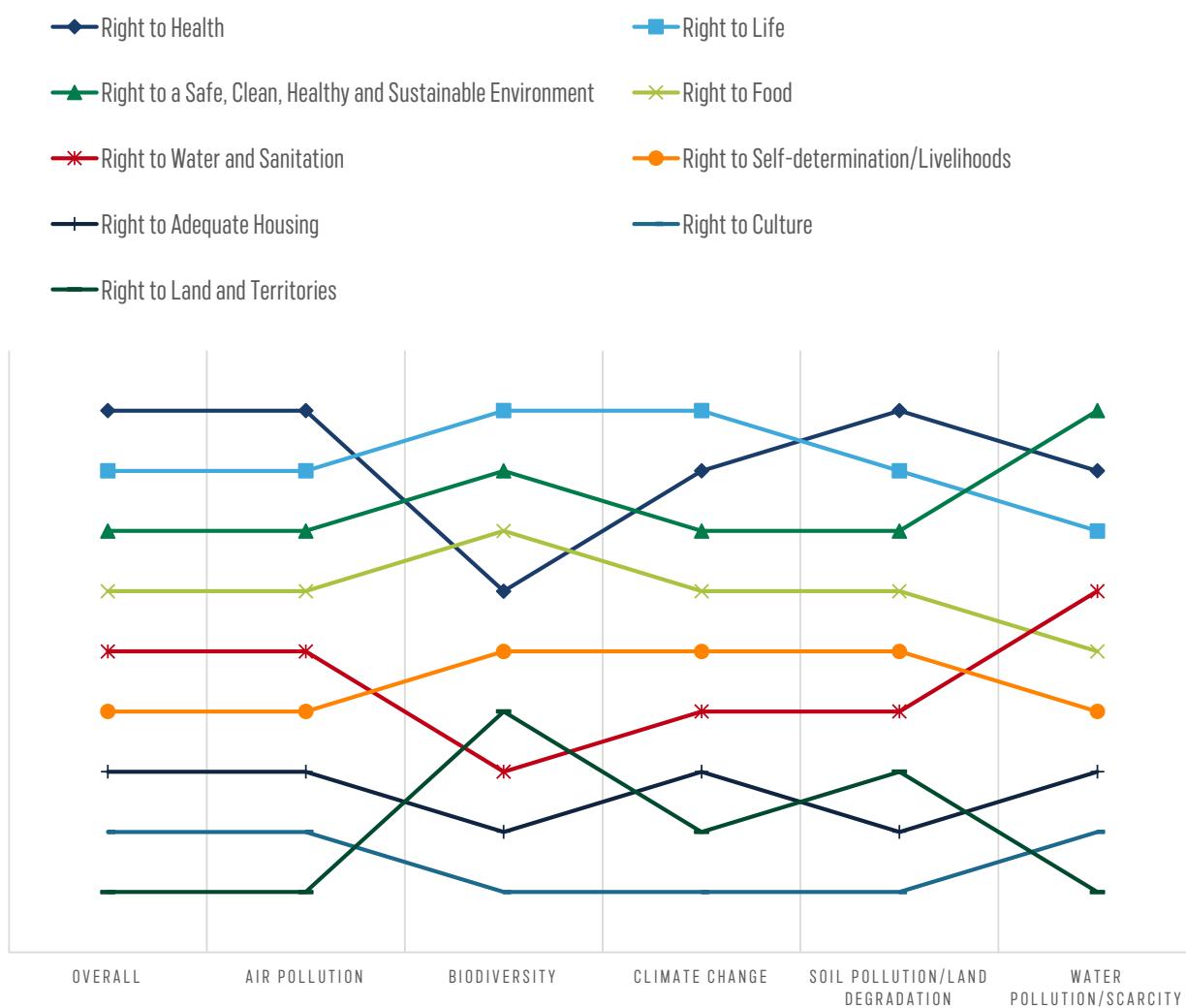
The loss of plant and animal species, and the degrading ecosystems affect our sources of food, water, clean air and shelter, and endangers human lives. Saving biodiversity is the foundation to sustainable development. The loss of biodiversity could mean loss of human lives as we all depend on the fruits of the earth.

- Respondent

# HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

## 9. PLEASE RANK WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE ADVERSELY IMPACTED IN THE ORDER OF RELEVANCE/IMPORTANCE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM IDENTIFIED.

Among those human rights put most at risk by environmental harm, include: the right to health, the right to life, and the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Differences in ranking between human rights priorities reflect the environmental priorities selected in the previous set of questions. Thus, respondents who chose biodiversity as the most pressing priority, naturally ranked land rights higher than those who selected air pollution.



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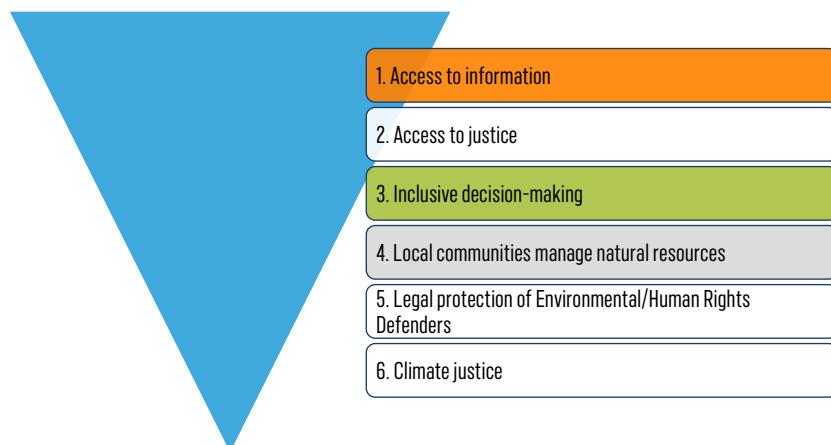
There is an urgent need to improve awareness on the environmental human rights issues in the region, among governments, businesses and civil society. Given the pressing challenges of environmental pollution, degradation and climate change, human rights are at greater risk. On-going NAP processes and consultations are unique opportunities to promote awareness and improve uptake.

- Respondent

# SOLUTIONS

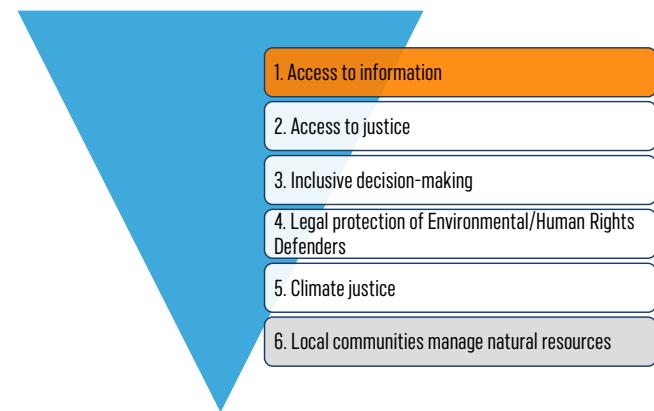
## 10. PLEASE RANK THE PROCEDURAL RIGHTS SOLUTIONS THAT WILL MOST LIKELY LEAD TO PROGRESS ON THE PRIORITY HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT ISSUE YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED ABOVE.

In order to best address BHR/E related issues from a procedural rights standpoint, access to information was deemed most relevant, followed by access to justice and inclusive decision making.



Access to information, access to justice and inclusive decision-making were all ranked highly as priority interventions for both CSOs and business.

Business respondents



CSO respondents



In Indonesia, the access to information and justice are threatened, particularly for environmental activists and environmental human rights defenders. In pursuing economic growth, environmental impacts such as deforestation and air pollution are neglected. Marginalized groups including, indigenous people, cannot enjoy their human rights.

- Respondent

## 11. PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING LEGAL AND REGULATORY SOLUTIONS THAT MIGHT ADVANCE PROGRESS ON THE PRIORITY HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT ISSUE YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED.

Investments in stronger and more credible environmental impact assessments ranked first among legal and regulatory solutions, followed by stronger legal frameworks and enforcement.

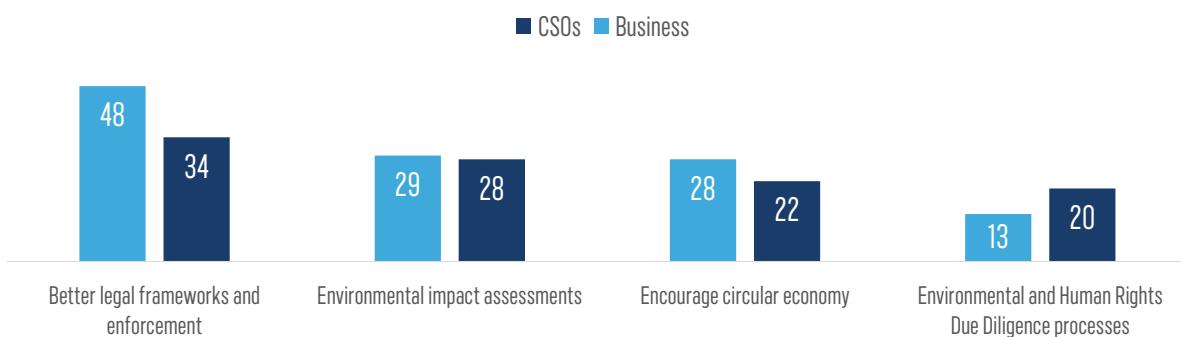


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Unfortunately, environmental impact assessments are not properly implemented, partly due to the lack of monitoring. Addressing issues right at the beginning would help avoiding future conflicts. Rather than providing temporary solutions, companies must follow a proper due diligence process.

- Respondent

Here, too, there were similarities in responses from CSOs and business in terms of priority interventions selected. Both groups ranked “better legal frameworks and enforcement” as the most important priorities. However, compared to CSO actors, business people found due diligence less important.



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Only international enforcement will ensure a level playing field. A patchwork of national or regional regulation will just lead to “leakage”, and those not committed to move to where enforcement can be evaded.”

- Respondent

## 12. PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW WE MIGHT WE BETTER ENGAGE YOUTH IN SOLUTION MAKING.

A significant number of responses to this question involved the need for awareness raising and improving young people's access to information related to environmental challenges. Several responses emphasized the role of formal education in achieving this, but also the importance of new media, social media channels and innovative platforms.



**Environmental harm and the uncertainty of the future is affecting the mental health of children and young people. This also contributes to a divide/conflict between older and younger generations.”**

- Respondent

Another recurring theme was the need for dialogue between youth and decision-makers. Respondents pointed out that involving youth in decision-making should rise above mere rhetoric. It was recognized that young activists, academics, entrepreneurs and others, need space to share ideas, contribute and make an impact.



**“It is important to make youth comfortable to express their concerns and share innovative ideas. Moreover, there need to be systematic ways to support policymakers to listen to youth and make meaningful changes based on the concerns and ideas they share. When we talk about engaging youth, it is not enough to say “we involve youth”. Youth involvement should lead to actual changes at the policy level. We need to ensure youth are indeed genuine stakeholders at any table.”**

- Respondent

# CONCLUSIONS

The BHR+E survey is an imperfect but still informative reflection on Asia's perceptions of environmental and human rights priorities. The results may provide a further basis for government and multilateral organizations to formulate policy and programming interventions. We are grateful to our respondents and partners for making the survey happen. A quick scan again of the results includes the following:

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were from Southeast Asia. The strongest response rate came from two Southeast Asian and one Northeast Asian country: Thailand, Malaysia and Korea. Most respondents worked for multilateral institutions, but respondents from business were close behind as the second most frequent group of respondents.

Air pollution and climate change were the most commonly identified priority areas across regions. When disaggregated by region, the results above are duplicated in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. In South Asia, climate change and water pollution/scarcity rank higher than air pollution.

Energy and agri-business industries were identified as the most significant contributors to air pollution. Waste management and extractives industries were most closely identified with water pollution and scarcity. Energy, agribusiness, and infrastructure development industries were considered the most responsible for climate change. Agribusiness was identified by a wide margin to be responsible for biodiversity loss.

The right to health, right to life and the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment were cited as the most pressing human rights risks related to environmental priorities, overall.

To address these challenges, access to information, access to justice and inclusive decision making were ranked highest as the procedural rights interventions most likely to lead to change. The legal and/or regulatory solutions most likely to advance progress included, environmental impact assessments, stronger legal frameworks and enforcement and environmental/human rights due diligence processes.

Meaningful dialogue with youth, and real decision-making authority were considered key components to ensuring youth engagement and progress in addressing risks to the environment and related human rights.

As a preliminary conclusion, work must be done on combatting air pollution, climate change and water pollution/scarcity as a priority pointing to existing obligations of the State to protect the right health and right to life. Among other priorities is the need to strengthen the linkages to environmental challenges to the emerging right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. With these priorities in mind, there is a need for a stronger understanding of where and how best to invest efforts to strengthening the rule of law, environmental impact assessments, environmental and human rights due diligence, access to information, access to justice and inclusive decision making. We hope that further conversations of the survey will provoke some agreement on the way forward for multilateral organizations and government, and encourage both to make the appropriate investments.



European Union

