

Unlocking Transparency for News Media Information Access: Mapping the 'Information Curse' in Tanzania's extractive industry

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Abstract

Tanzania is endowed with a wealth of extractive resources, including minerals and natural gas. However, alongside this potential arises the challenge of accessing vital information from Extractive Industries (EI). This article introduces the concept of the *information curse*, highlighting the detrimental effects of a lack of or limited transparency regarding access to critical Extractive Industry Information (EII) for news media. The inability of the news media to access vital non-exempt EII held by the government means the public relies on speculation, rumours, and pavement radio. The article contends that when news media access government-held EII and report on it, it cultivates a more informed society, encourages public discourse, enhances industry transparency, and significantly reduces the risk of unnecessary tensions and violence. The right-to-access information framework and the EITI Theory of Change inform the study presented in this paper. Data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and website content reviews to gather insights and thoughts about the topic.

Keywords

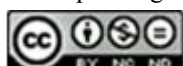
Information curse, transparency, extractive industry, information access, Tanzania

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Introduction

Tanzania has extensive mineral reserves and has entered the ranks of prominent global oil and gas sector players. In this competitive environment, it faces numerous challenges, including developing local capacities, securing improved agreements with multinational firms, creating beneficial policies and fiscal frameworks, and devising effective strategies for value addition to evade the “resource curse”, a concept coined by Auty (1993). Even though these efforts are worth pursuing, the news media and journalists—the Fourth Estate—ought to provide the public with meaningful information about the Extractive Industry (EI), foster public debate,

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and oversee the industry's transparency. In fulfilling their rightful role, they must access critical information about the EI, such as contracts, revenue expenditure and allocation, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports. However, accessing such information has become increasingly more challenging for news media and journalists, like extracting gemstones and oil. News media and journalists are *often hindered by an inability to access vital information that could otherwise enable and empower them to exercise their watchdog role effectively*.

This article outlines the Extractive Industry Information (EII)—information within EI—the framework of extractive transparency, which remains beyond the reach of the Fourth Estate in Tanzania. It introduces the concept of the 'information curse,' a deliberate restriction of EII to citizens, and demonstrates how it impacts the news media's capacity to monitor EI transparency. The article, therefore, weaves its discussion around the information curse, thus shifting from a dominant paradigm that visualises EI using the 'resource curse' lens to one that looks at the industry from an 'information curse' perspective.

Background Information

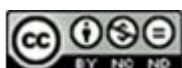
Understanding the information curse

This article introduces a new concept known as the 'information curse'. The concept originates from the resource curse phenomenon, coined by Auty (1998). In the seminal book 'Escaping the Resource Curse', Humphreys, Sachs and Stiglitz (2007) ask: "What is the problem with Natural Resource Wealth"? This question, or a similar one, is frequently requested by scholars such as Mailey (2015), Frankel (2010), Rosser (2007), and Larsen (2006) about natural resource wealth. To put this in context, Humphreys et al. (2007) note:

There is a curious phenomenon that social scientists call "resource curse"... Countries with large endowments of natural resources, such as oil and gas [including minerals], often perform *worse* in terms of economic development and good governance than do countries with fewer resources. Paradoxically, despite the prospects of wealth and opportunity that accompany the discovery and extraction of oil and other natural resources, such endowments often impede rather than facilitate balanced and sustainable development (Humphrey et al., 2007, p. 1).

The resource curse narrative articulates the paradox where resource-rich nations often fail to harness their natural wealth for socio-economic development, owing to poor governance and a lack of transparency. While this narrative predominantly focuses on the political and economic perspectives, this paper advances a new form of a curse where there is a systematic restriction of EII to the public. This creates a scenario where the actual stakeholders—citizens who are the rightful owners of the nation's natural resources—remain deprived of critical information regarding the management and benefits of their wealth. This lack of access to EII exacerbates the resource curse, hindering informed public engagement and accountability in the stewardship of natural resources.

Section 4 (1) of the Natural Wealth and Resources (Permanent Sovereignty) Act of 2017 states that "The people of the United Republic shall have permanent sovereignty over all the natural wealth and resources," with Article 9 (c) of the Constitution proclaiming that Government



activities related to natural wealth must be for the common good (URT Const. art. 9(c)). Although many commentators link ‘permanent sovereignty’ and ‘common good’ to economic gains, absolute sovereignty resides in people’s ability to access vital information about their natural wealth, specifically extractive resources. The EII is akin to a common good—every citizen with permanent sovereignty over extractive resources must have access to it.

Notwithstanding these constitutional and legal demands, access to EII has often been shrouded in secrecy. Industry players—government and companies—purposely withhold and block public access to EII. These two entities have the sovereign power to disclose information under their terms. Indubitably, EII is no longer a common good but a preserve of the few who sit in the C-suite. Thus, the introduction of a new concept termed an *information curse* aims to account for this deliberate restriction. In the context of this paper, this term captures the phenomenon of information holders—whether public institutions or private entities—deliberately withholding critical EII, resulting in an almost complete blackout of news dissemination. This strategic withholding of information obscures industry developments from stakeholders, including the news media and journalists, effectively rendering them uninformed about significant occurrences within the burgeoning extractive industry.

Consequently, these stakeholders are metaphorically *cursed* with a lack of transparency, which undermines their ability to engage meaningfully with the complexities and dynamics of the extractive industry. When this *curse* affects news media and journalists, the public, who are the real owners of the country’s natural resources and largely depend on news media for information, continue groping in the dark. This explanation differentiates critical EII from genuine, sensitive commercial information that requires legitimate protection. The discussion in this article strives to distinguish between the two categories of data.

Situational Analysis

Access to EII is instrumental in enabling citizens to exercise their rights and voice their concerns in the extractive sector, oversee and hold their government and companies accountable, and participate in dialogue with an informed understanding of decisions in the EI that directly or indirectly affect their lives. Empowering all citizens, especially vulnerable groups, is essential for them to assert their rights and entitlements in the industry. After all, access to information fosters an informed society, which is crucial for promoting good governance. Significantly, a knowledgeable citizenry is fundamental to effective governance in the extractive industry. Without informed citizens, achieving transparency and governance within the sector will remain elusive.

Globally, managing public expectations after discovering proven natural resources in a country has become challenging. Providing accurate, relevant and timely information to manage public expectations presents unavoidable difficulties in extractive industry governance. For instance, the discovery of commercially viable natural gas in the Mtwara and Lindi regions incited unwarranted excitement and expectations among the citizens in those areas, who hoped for the immediate betterment of their lives through employment and revenue generation. Protests erupted in 2013 against the planned 532km pipeline from Mnazi Bay in the Mtwara region to Dar es Salaam.

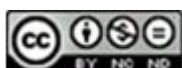
Despite the opposition, the Tanzanian government maintained its commitment to the project, asserting that the natural gas in question was a national resource rather than confined to a specific area (Katunzi & Siebert, 2015). Subsequently, the military contained protests that had resulted in the destruction of property and even deaths (ibid.). The protests stemmed from multiple causes: political rivalry between the ruling party, CCM (standing for Chama cha Mapinduzi, meaning Revolutionary Party) and opposition parties, namely CHADEMA (Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo, Party for Democracy and Progress) and CUF (Civic United Front); the government sanctioning of the deal to build a 532 km pipeline from Mtwara to Dar es Salaam with Chinese government funding; poor communication between the government and Mtwara residents; and Western governments' intervention aimed to stave off growing Chinese investments in the gas-rich region (Katunzi & Siebert, 2015).

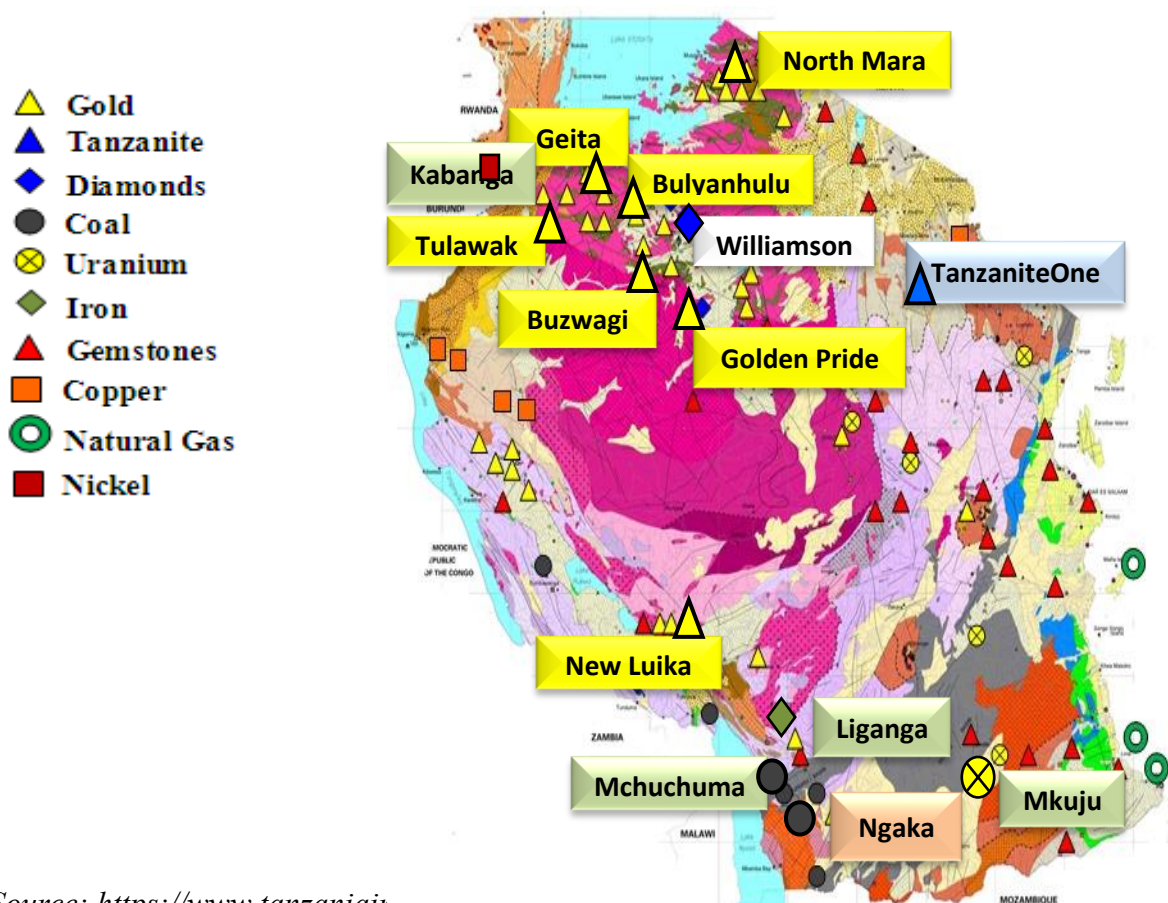
Nevertheless, experts identify the public's lack of access to information on how they could finally benefit from pipeline construction as the primary cause. As one analyst noted, "The people were not opposed to the project. Rather, the sentiments were due to a lack of clear information on how the project would bring them tangible benefits" (ibid.). Various studies also support this narrative. A 2014 study by Twaweza, an East Africa regional non-governmental organisation, and the World Bank (WB), "Managing natural resources: What do citizens say?" found that even though 64 percent of the respondents had heard about natural gas discoveries, almost the same percentage craved more information (Twaweza & WB, 2014).

Twaweza's follow-up study in 2015, "Great Expectations: Citizens' views about the gas sector," established four significant issues related to natural gas information:

- The majority of citizens (77%) want more information on natural gas, particularly recent discoveries.
- Three (3) out of four (4) citizens are not aware of the new gas policies, and
- More than 50% of the respondents believe that the government is already pocketing gas revenues (which was not the case) (Twaweza, 2015).

Ndimbwa (2014) studied the problem of natural gas conflict and its impacts on society in Mtwara region and found that conflict over natural gas resulted from a lack of information and education regarding the natural gas project. Based on the explanation above, it is evident that a lack of access to EII from relevant authorities is indeed a concern. Without objective and trusted information from relevant authorities, citizens are left with only one option: relying on speculations, unfounded rumours, and pavement radio, which, in most cases, leads to misinformation. Misinformation is a fertile ground for conflict.





Source: <https://www.tanzaniair>

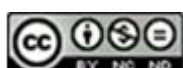
Figure 2: Mineral Deposit Reserve in Tanzania

Extractive Industries and Access to Information in Tanzania

Legal framework for access to information

Tanzania is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and numerous other international instruments that guarantee access to information. The UDHR states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (United Nations, 1948, art 19). Unequivocally, the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania states under Article 18 (b): "Every person has a right to seek, receive, and disseminate information regardless of the national frontier" (URT Const. art. 18 [b]).

Paradoxically, despite the 1977 Constitution enshrining the right of access to information, the Tanzanian government took 39 years to enact the Access to Information Act of 2016 to effect that Constitutional provision. Section 5 (1) of the Act states: "Every person shall have the right of access to information which is under the control of information holders." Implicitly,



access to information is constitutionally recognised as an essential right for citizens, journalists included.

Access to Extractive Industries Information (EII)

Public access to EII has sparked concern, prompting opposition politicians, civil society groups, religious leaders, professional organisations, and the media to demand transparency, openness, and accountability in the extractive sector. Within the mining industry, the government has entered into multiple, mostly confidential Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) with multinational firms. However, some details, like those of the Buzwagi mining contract, have become public knowledge due to leaks (Curtis & Lissu, 2008). Additionally, an addendum to the PSA for the Norwegian state-owned oil company Equinor (formerly Statoil) was leaked in July 2014 (National Resource Governance Institute [NRGI], 2014).

After discovering the commercial value of natural gas, the Tanzanian government formulated the National Natural Gas Policy of 2013, which recognises the importance of media as an agent for creating public awareness in the extractive industry, stating:

The role of the media in providing accurate and balanced information on the natural gas industry issues to the public is important. In this regard, the media need to strengthen their capacity in understanding [the] natural gas industry [...] to deliver information accurately and timely. This will increase public awareness, transparency, and accountability regarding the natural gas industry (Article 5.1.9).

Despite this recognition of the media's importance in the sector, Katunzi (2019) argues that the policy paradoxically relegates the media's role to 'providing accurate and balanced information' rather than overseeing the industry's transparency and governance. In the government's thinking, 'providing accurate information' means reporting information drawn from government sources, whereas 'providing balanced information' refers to giving government voices an upper hand when balancing stories. As Poncian (2020) aptly notes, the government utilises the news media to manage extractive resources, focusing on informing the public and defending the government's position.

Though the policy acknowledges the media's role in the subsector and the need to strengthen its capacity is laudable, it leaves the responsibility of strengthening media capacity in understanding the subsector to the media, which is struggling financially to run. Indeed, many media houses that struggle to pay their staff salaries cannot afford to finance their training in natural gas reporting. In addition, media houses also lack internal expertise in extractive journalism to organise in-house training. On the other hand, the Tanzanian government joined the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2009, a global organisation championing transparency and accountability in the extractive sector, to demonstrate its commitment to accessing information from extractive industries.

EITI makes it mandatory for its members to disclose information along the entire industry value chain—from how oil and gas rights are awarded to how accrued revenues are allocated through the government and how they are utilised to benefit the people. The EITI Tanzania Chapter, the Tanzania Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (TEITI), has been publishing reconciliatory reports of revenues the government collects from companies.

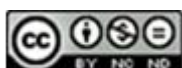
Furthermore, the government passed the Tanzania Extractive Industry Transparency Act of 2015 (TEITI, 2015) to boost transparency and accountability in the extractive industry. Specifically, Section 16 (1) of the TEITI Act of 2015 states: “...to ensure transparency and accountability in extractive industries, the Committee [TEITI Committee] shall cause the Minister to publish a) in the website or through a media which is widely accessible all concessions, contracts and licences relating to extractive industry companies” (TEITI Act, Section 16 (a)). Although the TEITI Regulation of 2019 includes a provision allowing the committee and contracting parties to decide which parts of a contract can remain confidential, no contracts or portions of agreements have been published to date. Nonetheless, the government, especially ministries responsible, industry regulators, and the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation (TPDC), disseminate EI information via their websites.

News media’s role and coverage of the extractive industry

The role of news media in governing the extractive industry is a crucial yet underexplored area within contemporary scholarship. Dupuy et al. (2019) identify four primary roles of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the extractive sector: information provision, agenda-setting, oversight, and representation. These roles are relevant to CSOs and resonate with the news media’s responsibilities as enablers of extractive governance. For the media to fulfil these roles effectively, they require robust access to information related to extractive industries (EIs). Indeed, comprehensive coverage of the extractive sector is crucial in promoting effective resource governance (Coryat, 2015; Behrman et al., 2012; Schiffrin, 2009). Organisations advocating for improved practices in the sector have long acknowledged the news media’s potential to influence extractive governance. The ‘theory of change’ assumes that media reporting can enhance transparency and promote accountability regarding questionable governance practices (Le Billon et al., 2021).

This recognition, however, has failed to attract academic inquiry into the intersection of news media and the extractive industries that, as a result, remains sparse. This article follows limited studies that have critically evaluated media coverage from a transparency perspective. After all, current research indicates that media reporting on EIs often falls short in terms of analytical depth, context, and balance, resulting in inadequately sourced content (Behrman et al., 2012; Abdul Kareem et al., 2011). Journalists frequently over-rely on government and industry stakeholders for information, with a lack of alternate channels for acquiring critical insights about the sector often constraining them (MCK, 2015). This over-dependence on these two sources with their interests to serve limits the media’s capacity to monitor industry practices effectively, as they typically report on events and reproduce official statements—including on socioeconomic issues, environmental concerns, business developments, and political discourse—rather than engaging in rigorous investigative journalism (MCK, 2015).

Research has further demonstrated that responsible media reporting can expose unethical practices, advocate for contract transparency, demand accountability from authorities and corporations, and incentivise some in power to commit to reform (Le Billon & Arsenault, 2022). Moreover, Armand et al. (2020) assert that providing citizens with accessible information on extractive resources and fostering public discourse can enhance civic mobilisation and mitigate violence associated with resource governance. These findings affirm three key points: news media are a vital stakeholder in extractive governance; their role



centres on promoting transparency and accountability through coverage; and effective media engagement can enhance citizen involvement in discussions regarding extractive industries, ultimately contributing to a reduction in resource-related conflict.

Probing the media’s coverage of the Tanzania Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (TEITI) reports from 2013 to 2016, Poncian and Kigodi (2018) found a pronounced inclination towards transparency as a central theme. Their analysis reveals that contracting and tax compliance issues have become permanent agenda items, facilitating ongoing debates on resource extraction and its socioeconomic implications. Similarly, Manley and Lassourd (2014) highlight the public demand for clarity on the government’s management of oil and gas resources, exemplified by the 2014 leak of the Statoil (now Equinor) agreement addendum. Such coverage sustains public discourse and catalyses industry governance improvements, as evidenced by regulatory reforms that media scrutiny prompts (Poncian & Kigodi, 2018; Jacob & Pedersen, 2018; Lange & Kinyondo, 2016).

Theoretical framework

This article is framed within the right-to-information framework and the EITI Theory of Change (ToC), which is also built on the EITI’s success in providing “credible information, creating constructive dialogues, and contributing to institutional reforms” (Le Billon et al., 2020, n.p.). Specifically, the article employs the public debate model, which utilises transparency as a mechanism for enhancing resource governance (Rustad et al., 2017). This model presented here suggests that information provision helps increase public knowledge, leading to a demand for better resource governance and improved development (see the model below).

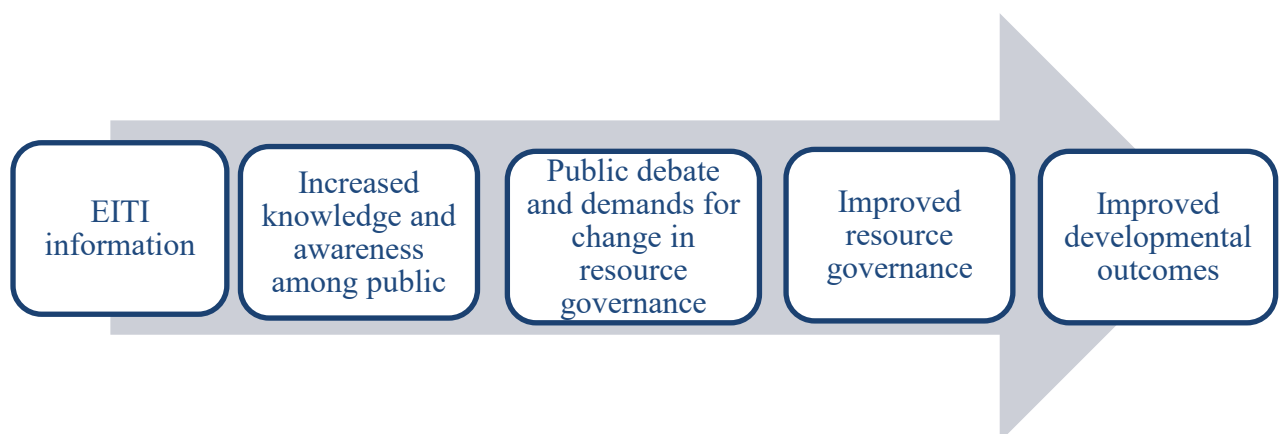


Figure 3: Public Debate Model

Source: Le Billon et al. (2020).

Materials and Methods

The study employed two primary data collection methods: Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and the review of selected government websites related to Extractive Industries (EI) organisations. The KII involved three categories of respondents: newspaper managing editors, radio station managers, and a TEITI official. Initially, we reviewed and extracted critical information from organisations responsible for EI in the country. Then, we engaged with media respondents who processed and published this information for public consumption. We

also developed a framework for the website reviews to identify and extract information on EI transparency, such as contract data, revenue information, financial reports, EIA reports, and ongoing projects, as Table 1 further illustrates:

Table 1: Framework of evaluation

S/N	Aspects of evaluation	Specific areas of evaluation
1	Contracts	Contracts and license allocations Beneficial ownership
2	Revenue information	Revenue collection Revenue allocation Sub-national transfer and payment
3	Financial reports	Financial audited reports
4	EIA	Relevant reports
5	Ongoing reports	Reports about ongoing projects and their benefits to the public and the country.

Source: Researcher's creation

Results and Discussion

As already pointed out, access to information is guaranteed under the 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania and the subsequent Access to Information Act of 2016. Within the EI, access to industry information is guaranteed under Section 16 (1) of the TEITI Act of 2015. Although this section refers to “concessions, contracts, and licences,” the discussion in this article transcends these three areas as, generally, the TEITI Act captures a broad spectrum of information to be disclosed beyond these three, including company financial and investment information, shareholders’ names, implementation of Environmental Management Plans.²

To establish the typology of information available to news media as part of the access to information framework, the study reviewed the official websites of governmental organisations dealing with EI: The Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation (TPDC) (<https://tpdc.co.tz/>), TEITI (<https://www.teiti.go.tz/>), the Petroleum Upstream Regulatory Authority (PURA) (<https://www.pura.go.tz/>), the Ministry of Minerals (<https://www.madini.go.tz/>), and the Ministry of Energy (<https://www.nishati.go.tz/>). These organisations serve as the national oil company, a transparency organisation, a regulator, and ministries responsible, hence key players in the industry. Table 2 summarises the status of the information gathered:

²Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, *The Tanzania Extractive Industries (Transparency and Accountability) Act*, art.16.

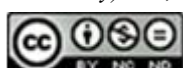


Table 2: Extractive Transparency Information Available on Government Organisational Websites³

Institutions	Contracts	Useful documents	Revenue information	Financial reports	EIA reports	Ongoing projects
Ministry of Minerals	INA	Acts and Regulations	Revenue trend (2018-2022); Mineral and Gem Houses (Mineral Markets) Performances to December 2021	INA	INA	INA
Ministry of Energy	INA	Acts and Regulations	INA	INA	INA	INA under the Petroleum and Gas submenu
TPDC	INA	Acts and Regulations; Exploration activity map (2021)	INA	Consolidated financial statements (2016-2023)	INA	Available
PURA	INA	Policies, Acts, Regulations, Guidelines and Rules; Gas discovery (2022); exploration wells; offshore licensing rounds; petroleum activity reference map (2024)	INA	INA	INA	INA
TEITI	INA	Policies, Acts, TEITI reports, list of oil and gas information, list of	Available on TEITI reports	CAG report, June 2023	INA	NA

³The websites were visited on 12th October 2024.

		transferred mineral licences for 2020/2021				
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Source: Government institutions' websites: INA= Information Not Available. NA=Not Applicable

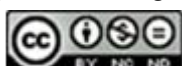
As Table 2 demonstrates, a significant portion of information intended for public access, including news media, is unavailable on government institutional websites. The EI regulatory framework documents, such as policies, acts, and regulations, are available in English without their Kiswahili versions (see column under 'useful documents'). Notably, the main policy document in the oil and gas sub-sector, the National Natural Gas Policy of 2013 (NNGP), is missing from the websites of the Ministry of Energy, TPDC, and PURA; it is only available on TEITI's website (<https://www.teiti.go.tz/publications/policy>). Additionally, accessing contracts and reports linked to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) can be challenging. TEITI, the statutory body responsible for ensuring transparency in the sector, has failed to post these contracts on its website. Moreover, the TEITI Regulation of 2019 permits the TEITI Committee and any involved parties to designate specific sections as confidential, thereby exempting them from disclosure obligations. This regulation notwithstanding, no contracts or their parts have been published. A senior managing editor said:

It has been over ten years since the TEITI Act of 2015 was passed, despite its intention to promote transparency; no contracts or parts of contracts have been released. Given the extensive time that has passed, I believe that the government should have been able to prepare for releasing this information, even in small parts. This situation suggests a lack of serious intention on the part of the government to disclose the information. The public is eager to understand the details of these contracts, particularly the government's agreements with multinational companies regarding the extraction of our resources. Since these contracts remain in the hands of a select few, the [news] media cannot report effectively on this matter (Managing editor 4, personal communication, June 10, 2024).

Another managing editor similarly stated that much needs to be done, especially in informing the public about what Tanzania stands to gain and how the investment can trickle down to the people. The editor insisted that Tanzania had much untapped natural wealth that required the news media to "pay attention to the contracts as that is what defines our [country] involvement in the extraction of resources" (Managing editor 1, personal communication, May 27, 2024). As these contracts are as challenging to locate as the natural resources themselves, the editor further contends that it is nearly impossible for the news media to create a meaningful agenda regarding extractive transparency concerning contracts. All respondents supported this position.

In February 2024, TEITI published a document, "Revised Roadmap for Disclosing Contracts in Tanzania"⁴ and envisioned to establish a portal for disclosing contracts by June 2024. By January 2025, neither the portal nor any contracts had been made public. Although the TEITI website has yet to publish EI contracts as a legal requirement, it has valuable data on beneficial ownership transparency (<https://www.teiti.go.tz/publications/BO>). The beneficial ownership

⁴<https://www.teiti.go.tz/storage/app/uploads/public/665f34087/665f34087c686539429748.pdf>



disclosure exposes the identities of owners of extractive companies, often concealed behind a chain of shell companies. This transparency allows journalists and news media to probe the relationships between owners and government officials.

The data could further help uncover potential tax evasion resulting from the owners' undue influence over government leaders and expose corruption. Since 2011, developing countries have lost an estimated USD 1 trillion due to corruption and illegal deals, many of which involve anonymous companies (EITI, n/y). Investigative journalism has revealed significant data leaks, as the Panama Papers (<https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/new-panama-papers-series-exposes-secret-deals-africa/>), Pandora Papers (<https://eiti.org/blog-post/what-pandora-papers-tell-us-about-extractive-industries>), and Luanda Leaks (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-master-class-in-corruption-the-luanda-leaks-across-the-natural-resource-value-chain/>) illustrate. The TEITI website also serves as a vital resource by publishing detailed reconciliatory reports (<https://www.teiti.go.tz/publications/report?page=1>).

These reports aim to reconcile the financial transactions involving material payments made by extractive companies and the corresponding receipts recorded by government agencies. Since the initiative's inception in 2011, 14 comprehensive reports have been released, with the most recent one published in June 2024. Significantly, these reports are not merely lists of figures; they offer a rich tapestry of information, analysis, and data that delve into the intricacies of EI. They are an invaluable resource for news media and journalists, providing a clear and transparent view of financial flows between extractive companies and the government. By doing so, they enhance transparency and foster informed reporting on issues related to the extractive industries, making them crucial for understanding the economic landscape of the resource sector.

The 2024 report, analysing the financial year 2021/2022, presents a comprehensive overview of the extractive industry, which encompasses the mineral, oil, and gas sectors. It details the industry's economic contributions, the fiscal framework governing the sector, the allocation of licenses in minerals, oil, and gas, the disclosure of beneficial ownership, and the performance of state-owned enterprises. Moreover, it encompasses payment flows in the extractive sector, revenue collection and distribution, the reconciliation of extractive data, analysis of government revenues, scrutiny of reported company data, social spending, and environmental payments. This report is a crucial resource for journalists and news media covering the industry. Although they produce in-depth data and valuable insights, these reports fail to garner significant interest from news media and journalists.

In an interview with a TEITI officer, it emerged that budget restrictions have limited the organisation's ability to engage with the media effectively. They have managed to hold only a few workshops aimed at raising awareness. Budget challenges are common among many government organisations, frequently limiting their effectiveness in performing essential functions. Therefore, this issue extends beyond TEITI. While the release of reports is worthy of praise, their impact significantly wanes if not actively shared and discussed with key stakeholders, especially the news media. Without robust engagement and outreach efforts, the critical information in these reports risks being ignored by the press.

Commenting on the usefulness of TEITI's reconciliatory reports, a radio station manager in a mining extraction region noted that while the reports provide essential information about the mining sector, the disclosure of mining contracts, as mandated by law, should have happened long ago:

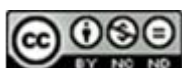
We need to know precisely what agreements the government has entered into with mining companies and how beneficial these agreements are to the country and its people. The [news] media can hardly fulfil its oversight role on [extractive] transparency if it does not have access to the contract's content. We are all in the dark (Radio station manager, personal communication, June 12, 2024).

The PURA website features a 'petroleum register' established under Article 85 of the Petroleum Act of 2015. This registry is designed to maintain records of petroleum agreements, licences, permit authorisations, and court decisions. The Article reads in part: "[A]ny person may request access to information in the Petroleum Registry, and the information registered shall be public except as otherwise provided by law."⁵ However, reviewing the 'petroleum register' on PURA's website disclosed the unavailability of the designated information. Although the register has three sub-menus—licensing rounds (<https://www.pura.go.tz/pages/licencing-rounds>), a digital reference map (no link), and a reference map (<https://www.pura.go.tz/pages/refernce-map>)—it only includes the petroleum activity maps for 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. The 2024 activity map (Figure 1) provides a snapshot view of petroleum activities in the country, including blocks under exploration licenses, development licenses (Songo Songo, Mnazi Bay, Kiliwani North, and Ntorya), TPDC's reserved blocks, open blocks and gas fields. The information serves as a quick reference for journalists, identifying blocks, block owners, block locations, exploration licenses, development licenses, and what is reserved for the national oil company, TPDC. Also, the PURA website had no information on the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project despite having a website submenu titled 'LNG project reports' under the publication-annual reports submenu. After the government and investors finalise the agreement, the LNG project will be one of the megaprojects in the region, commanding a staggering figure of more than \$40 billion. Despite the projected significant investment, no information is available about its likely impacts on the national economy, opportunities for local content, or environmental effects on the petroleum regulator's website. However, a two-paragraph description of the LNG project is available on the national oil company's website (TPDC) (<https://tpdc.co.tz/portfolio/the-tanzania-liquefied-natural-gas-lng-project/>), which is a partner to the project.

The TPDC website publishes its consolidated financial statements issued by the Controller and Auditor General (CAG). The website has audit reports from 2015, with the latest report covering the 2022/2023 fiscal year. These reports provide a wealth of information on the performance of the national oil company, upon which news media and journalists can either extract investigative story ideas or find helpful information for publication and follow-up.

These reviews and discussions highlight a significant trend among EI organisations and institutions. Rather than sharing vital data that would promote access to EII and thus empower news media and journalists to promote EI transparency and allow for informed public

⁵Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, *The Petroleum Act*, art 85.



discourse, they focus on categories of information already accessible in the public domain, such as policies, acts, and regulations. Key pieces of information crucial for understanding the entire landscape of the extractive industry—such as contract specifics, revenue streams, EIA reports, and updates on ongoing projects—are conspicuously absent from their website. This deliberate omission raises serious questions about their commitment to transparency and accountability.

This glaring omission creates a significant barrier to understanding the extractive industry and its intricacies for new media, journalists, and the broader public. Because critical information is often unavailable to the press and the public, it limits journalists' opportunities to investigate and thus curtails public debate. This situation also hinders accurate media reporting on environmental issues, which is vital for creating an informed citizenry. Hence, pushing for more transparency regarding this information is essential to facilitate news media access and public news consumption. By championing transparency, the news media can enhance accountability within the industry and ensure that the public has access to the information necessary to engage in meaningful discussions on the industry's impact on society and the environment.

Why withhold information?

Various studies have documented motives for governments' withholding of EII. These motives include national security (Le Billon, 2015), economic interests and resource control (Ross, 2012), political control and the elimination of dissent (Lang, 2017), and maintaining a competitive advantage (Friedman, 2010). Some motives, such as national security considerations, protection of national economic interests, and protection of the country's leverage in negotiations, are legitimate. Similarly, a body of literature has shown that governments, particularly in developing economies, withhold EII largely due to political control. By controlling access to EII, they can limit public discourse about resource governance, suppress dissent, and obstruct civil society and news media from holding them accountable. Transparent reporting is often perceived as a threat by regimes that fear opposition mobilisation around governance, revenue distribution, and environmental degradation (Lang, 2017).

While these legitimate motives for withholding EII are also applicable to the government in Tanzania, two-pronged reasons stand out for the government's withholding of such information: a culture of secrecy and non-compliance. The culture of secrecy has become part and parcel of the government's operations in the EI, even on matters that are not meant to be secret. For instance, Table 2 above shows that EIA reports are unavailable on all the reviewed websites. These documents are hard to locate like diamonds. Still, they contain useful information for the public.

In 2014, a public discussion erupted in the country, also captured by the news media, when the Norwegian state oil company Statoil (now Equinor) was caught in the centre of a public debate following the leakage of its addendum to the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA). The leak ignited a public debate on the legal framework, particularly contract transparency. The debate centred on whether the country had secured a better deal from the addendum. The media reportage was driven by the 'the contract is bad' narrative, with some commentators claiming that the addendum would have cost Tanzania a staggering USD 55 billion had it

gone through (The Citizen, 2014). The debate would not have been possible if the addendum had not leaked. A poorly negotiated contract can impact the government's revenue from extraction. If such contracts are made public, they will raise alarm and possibly create tension in society.

Non-compliance is another reason why the government withhold EII. Section 16 of the TEITI Act of 2015 specifies the information that should be made public; however, 10 years have passed, and none of the information has been released. Katunzi et al. (2025) note, "A decade-long period is more than adequate for the government to begin releasing this information to the public, thereby enhancing the access of news media and journalists to crucial industry details. The prolonged failure to disclose this information has not only deprived the public of their right to know. However, it has also significantly hampered the news media's ability to fulfil its essential role in overseeing extractive governance" (Katunzi et al., 2025, p. 195).

The practice of withholding information in the extractive industries can have significant repercussions for economies, governance, and societal welfare. Firstly, the lack of transparency fuels corruption, as it creates an environment where mismanagement and illicit practices are less likely to be detected or punished (Transparency International, 2019). Corruption directly impacts economic growth by deterring foreign investment and misallocating resources, resulting in stunted development in resource-rich countries.

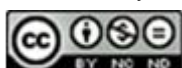
Moreover, withholding information impacts citizens' trust in government institutions. Public scepticism increases when governments are perceived as operating in an opaque manner, leading to public unrest and disillusionment. This can exacerbate social tensions and conflict (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2020). The lack of transparency often leads to environmental degradation. If extractive projects are not held to stringent environmental standards and impacts are not publicly disclosed, it can result in catastrophic consequences for local ecosystems and communities. Studies indicate that a lack of information about extractive operations is tied to increased pollution, biodiversity loss, and community displacement (Bebbington et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the reasons governments withhold information in extractive industries are multifaceted, encompassing national security, economic interests, political control, and the desire to maintain competitive advantage. However, the ramifications of such opaqueness are profoundly detrimental, contributing to corruption, reduced public trust, and environmental degradation. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts to promote transparency and accountability in resource governance, ensuring that the wealth generated from extractive industries serves the broader interests of society.

Towards an informed citizenry and improved EI governance

Since the Tanzania Development Vision (TDV) 2025⁶ states that the country "cherishes good governance and the rule of law in the process of creating wealth and sharing benefits in society and seeks to ensure that its people are empowered with the capacity to hold their leaders and public servants accountable" (TDV 2025:4), protecting the natural resources cannot

⁶The Vision 2025 ends this year and the Government has already published a draft vision for Tanzania 2050, which is currently being discussed.



materialise when the people, including journalists, are not “empowered” with accurate, objective and vital information. Restricting access to EII for key holders within the extractives industry cannot bring this dream to fruition.

The TDV 2050 also includes “effective and efficient management of natural resources” as a guiding principle and mining as a transformative sector. Recognising that the effective and efficient management of the mining sector depends on transparency regarding EII. Based on material evidence, there are five solid grounds for the government entities (and other key stakeholders) to avail EII for an informed populace to emerge and for improved industry governance to thrive:

- **The rights argument:** Several international conventions and legislative frameworks in the country, particularly Article 19 of the UDHR, Article 18 of the Constitution, the Access to Information Act of 2016, and the TEITI Act of 2015, all underscore the importance of access to information in the possession of the the government, including EI information.
- **The intergenerational equity argument:** As extractive resources are non-renewable, their revenues should also benefit future generations as they belong to Tanzania. For this reason, information should be readily available to the current generation of news media and journalists, enabling them to engage meaningfully with the public and government on the judicious use of accrued revenues and their preservation for posterity.
- **Inclusivity argument:** Experience shows that most people residing in areas where resource extraction occurs are impoverished, despite the resources being extracted from their regions. Experience also shows they are less informed (refer to the discussion above). Therefore, ensuring that these people are fully prioritised in the information cycle is necessary as they have a high stake but are less informed.
- **The economic argument:** When vital information on economic opportunities in the EI is available to the public, citizens can be highly involved in the industry’s value chains and contribute to their well-being and the country’s development.
- **The political argument:** The dissemination of objective, trusted, and crucial information enhances transparency and openness, contributing to a peaceful society and strengthening the social contract between citizens and the government. This is likely to ensure a stable political environment.

All these powerful arguments converge into one compelling argument: strengthening access to EI information can foster transparency and accountability in the sector, which in turn can further enhance the sector’s governance and investment.

Kolstad and Wiig (2009). Hamilton (2005) and Bebbington (2010) proffer that transparency can help increase the benefits accrued from EI, minimise corruption, create an enabling environment for security and stable investments in the sector, and reduce tensions among industry stakeholders. Many studies, such as Bainomugisha (2006) and Magelah (2014), have argued that access to information in the EI is one way to deal with the resource curse.

Nonetheless, it is essential to recognise that transparency alone does not effectively curb corruption, maximise the advantages of Extractive Industries (EI), or bolster security. Additional essential factors and capabilities at both institutional and human levels are vital in enabling information processing and ensuring accountability for those engaged in corrupt practices (Kolstad & Wiig, 2009). Subsequently, transparency and associated meaningful results demand advocating for human rights to enhance governance and “[t]ransparency that can be transformative in an environment when freedoms are respected because the combination of the two is what provide[s] accountability” (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 2).

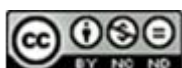
Furthermore, news media’s unbridled access to EII and publication does not automatically lead to enhanced civic engagement or governmental accountability and responsiveness. Several African countries, including Tanzania, also face significant structural and political barriers that constrain governments from producing information for their citizens and the ability of citizens to demand their right to access information. Notable barriers include the institutional resistance to recognising the right to information, a general lack of awareness among citizens regarding their constitutional rights, and, in cases where citizens are informed, a pervasive reluctance to exercise these rights due to fears of reprisals from repressive regimes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The EI in Tanzania holds a significant role in shaping the country’s economic landscape. However, a considerable gap exists in the accessibility of crucial information to the news media, journalists, and the public. Despite publishing reports and establishing a registry to enhance transparency, vital information and data regarding contracts, revenue collection and allocation, and EIA reports remain primarily unavailable. The exclusion of the public and the news media from accessing this information emanates from a lack of transparency and amounts to an *information curse* that impedes accountability and undermines the potential for informed public discourse surrounding the governance of the EI, its economic contributions, and its environmental implications.

Thus, to foster an informed citizenry, the relevant bodies must prioritise the disclosure of information critical to understanding the dynamics of the EI. Increasing collaboration with the news media, enhancing budget allocations for outreach, and ensuring comprehensive website updates would further empower journalists to effectively cover these complex issues, set meaningful agendas, and create public debate. Promoting transparency in the extractive industry fosters improved reporting and public understanding, thereby strengthening governance and policy-making processes. By making crucial information readily available, stakeholders can foster a rich dialogue on extractive resource management and ensure that all Tanzanians share the benefits from these resources. In doing so, the potential for sustainable development and positive socioeconomic impacts in the EI is realisable, leading to a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Notably, this paper introduces a new concept dubbed the ‘information curse’. The discussion surrounding this concept extends beyond the dominant paradigm that views the extractive industry through the lens of the resource curse. It contributes to the theoretical discourse on transparency and accountability by highlighting the critical interplay between governmental transparency, news media engagement, and public awareness regarding EII. It underscores



the notion that adequate provision of EII is necessary to strengthen transparency, encourage public debate, and strengthen accountability in the extractive industry. The persistent lack of EII disclosures reflects a governmental failure to fulfil its obligations and a broader systemic issue where limited access to vital information compromises the news media's capacity to inform the public.

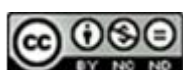
This article presents two sets of recommendations: research-focused and practical-focused recommendations. As this paper has introduced the concept of the information curse, further research can be conducted to dive deeply into the idea, interrogate it, and refine it further. This scholarship is essential to ensuring a thorough discussion of the concept. Additionally, research should establish how the *information curse* has limited the news media's power to oversee industry governance in Tanzania over the years, and more importantly, how it has affected Tanzanians' access to crucial information about the industry.

Furthermore, there is a need to establish a one-stop online portal that captures all extractive information. According to the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), internet subscriptions in the country had reached 48 million by December 2024, with the majority (47,859,272) accessing the internet via mobile wireless (TCRA, 2024). This shift, though primarily an urban phenomenon, remains a potential catch in the dissemination strategy, considering that internet penetration is expected to continue increasing. The government must consider financing the establishment of a comprehensive online portal in which EII will be posted and regularly updated in both English and Kiswahili. The portal should provide information and data dating back to the 1990s. The portal should not be a collection of data and information, but rather be presented in an exceptionally well-packaged and easily accessible manner for an international audience. This proposition is not new. The United States, for example, has an interactive data portal (<https://revenue.data.doi.gov/>), which allows the public to study the use of natural resources on federal lands. Norway has done the same with the government, maintaining a site called Norwegian Petroleum (<https://www.norskipetroleum.no/en/>) under the slogan: "Everything you need to know about Norwegian petroleum activities."

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