

Via email

Robert H. Salamon, Principal Director
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Dear Mr. Salamon,

Please accept the attached paper, "An Analysis of ADB Transparency: Comments for the Ongoing Review," as Bank Information Center's initial input into the ADB's review of Disclosure and Information Policies.

Also enclosed, please find the questionnaire distributed by the Bank to solicit input on the review. Although we have completed the questionnaire, it does not reflect the breath of our recommendations. We refer you to the report mentioned above for our full comments.

Thank you,

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Completed Questionnaire on the Review of ADB's Disclosure and Information Policies

Policy on Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

ADB's policy is to provide the greatest possible degree of transparency and disclosure in all areas of operations, subject to practical and legal constraints.

1. Public Perception of ADB in Implementing the Policy

A. What is your view of ADB regarding access to information? Why? Please provide examples.

The ADB's transparency practices have focused on *whether or not* to disclose certain documents and not on *how* that information is made available to the public. The ADB does not have a comprehensive strategy for disseminating documentation through its offices in borrowing countries nor does it have information centers in all of the countries in which it operates. Without consistent, proactive dissemination of information, project affected peoples are often times not informed about ADB activities in their communities and can therefore not effectively participate in decisions that affect their lives.

B. What is your view of ADB regarding transparency? Why? Please provide examples
We have found that some ADB staff have a tendency toward secrecy, or are somewhat reluctant to disclose information. We believe that often this is a result of ADB staff not being thoroughly familiar with the ADB's Policy on Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information, and therefore are unaware of what they can institutionally disclose.

C. What can ADB do to strengthen public participation and communication with people living in project areas?

The ADB should draft a strategy to create and/or strengthen public information centers. The ADB should make use of existing in-country information dissemination mechanism like radio, newspapers, and other public fora, to proactively announce new projects at the initial stages of development and to ensure that affected communities and journalists are aware that documentation on a given operation or policy has been released. The ADB should develop and implement a translation strategy that includes a list of documents that will be translated into national and local languages without exception and make resources available to translate additional information upon request.

2. Disclosure of Documents to the Public during the Operational Cycle

A. At what stage in the project cycle (identification, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation) would it be most appropriate for ADB to share information? At what stage would the information be most useful to your organization or affected communities in project areas?

Citizens should have access to the information that they need at every stage in a project's development so that they can defend their interests, improve project benefits and avoid potential damage. Access to project information is equally important for public and private sector projects and disclosure requirements should not differ between these two types of operations.

- What kind of information?

The ADB should disclose a basic outline of the project at project identification which can be more than a year before project approval. Throughout project preparation, the ADB should regularly disclose updates that are prepared by staff for ADB Management (e.g. back-to-office reports). The ADB should NOT rely on the disclosure of documents that are specifically designed for public consumption (e.g. Project Profiles). These are often released well into project preparation, do not contain sufficient detail, and are not routinely updated by project staff.

In addition to project updates, the ADB should release all background economic and feasibility studies prepared for the project, including technical blueprints and maps. The ADB should continue to disclose social and environmental impact assessments 120 days prior to Board approval.

The ADB should also disclose (or require borrowing member governments through provisions in loan agreements to disclose) all project related information prior to board approval of a project, particularly documents that would assist citizens in evaluating the potential benefits of a project (such as financial agreements) and documents that outline mitigation measures of adverse impacts (such as draft resettlement plans).

During project implementation, the ADB should develop and disclosure social and environmental monitoring reports that indicate the extent to which social and environmental impacts are being mitigated.

- What do you need the information for?

In order to effectively participate in policy or project design, development, monitoring and evaluation citizens need timely access to complete information. Without such access, civil society is not able to have an informed discussion with the ADB about its projects and policies.

B. Please give examples (if any) where failure to disclose information has decreased program or project effectiveness, or cost time and resources? Why?

The following are brief examples of times when communities (with which BIC has worked) have not been informed about a project, and some of the harm they have suffered:

- ♦ In the Chashma Right Bank Irrigation Project in Pakistan, construction of the project was begun without informing the communities, even though it involved the destruction of some of their farms and crops. More than 19,000 acres of land was acquired for construction of the project; residents were asked to leave their land but were not informed about compensation for lost land and livelihood.
- ♦ In the Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project, the ADB did not proactively provide any information about the project to affected communities, who only became aware of the project after construction began. If this project becomes operational, it stands to have negative environmental effects on a coastal ecosystem to which a community of 60,000 people depend on for their economic livelihood.
- ♦ In the Southern Transport Development Project, although the project executing agency knew by July 1999 about the proposed project, some of the affected persons were not officially informed until February 2001. Others found out by coincidence in April 2001 when a resident of one of the affected communities

asked the Road Development Authority for permission to build a boundary wall and was informed that his house and 77 others would be demolished due to the road construction. Also, for a stretch of a 128 km long road, the ADB only conducted two community consultations, even though over 700 homes stand to be affected.

- C. Have you requested a document/information about a project while it is being designed or implemented? If so, what kind of document/information?

BIC has requested information on various projects throughout the past several years. Often we are interested in getting information about a project that is still in the pipeline stage (prior to board approval).

- Why did you want the document?

Often we have requested documents that our partner organizations in developing member countries have been denied from their in-country ADB office or government executing agency. We also request documents for partners who are not familiar with the types of documents that the ADB produces, and are therefore unsure where to find the information they need.

- From which ADB office did you request the document?

We have requested information from ADB regional department offices. Generally we address our request to the project loan officer. On occasion, we have also requested documents from the public information center (Manila).

- Did you receive it? If not, why not? How long did you wait?

Requests for documents pertaining to projects already approved by the Board are generally addressed and followed-up on by ADB staff within a reasonable time frame. Unfortunately, we have been consistently denied information about projects that have yet to be approved by the Board. Generally we are told that RRP's, and other relevant project documents will not be disclosed until after Board approval of a project.

- D. ADB's Country Strategy and Program (CSP) process requires consultation with external stakeholders, including civil society. What information do you need about the CSP and its process to contribute to your country's strategy and program? When do you need it? To help ensure effective participation in its CSP process, the ADB should post on its web site and in relevant country offices, a schedule of when CSPs will be reviewed. As the review approaches, the ADB should disclose relevant background materials such as CSP evaluations and country economic and social analyses. Draft CSPs should be disclosed and translated into the national language of the country concerned. The ADB should disclose the final draft of the CSP when it is circulated to the Board and no less than 60 days prior to approval.

- E. English is the working language of ADB. However, in your opinion, when would it be most useful for ADB to translate documents into other languages in your country?

- What should be the criteria for translation? (i.e., what kind of documents, at what stage, etc.)

The ADB should learn from the World Bank's recently approved Translation Framework. This framework outlines the World Bank's approach to defining criteria for translation and administering timely translation of Bank documents. In consultation with civil society, the ADB should develop a translation strategy that would define the Bank's

approach to defining criteria for translation and administering timely translation of Bank documents. At a minimum, the strategy should include a list of documents mandatory for translation into national and local languages and adequate funding to translate documents as requested by the public. In the least, it is our recommendation that: institutional documents, such as policies and strategies, should be translated into a range of international languages; basic country documents, such as CSPs and CSP Updates, should be translated into the national languages of that country; project information should be available in national languages and, where necessary, local languages, and; any information used in civil society consultation should be available in the language(s) of the consulted group.

Information Policy and Strategy

ADB's information policy supports its strategic agenda and objectives, and the information strategy is based on the messages ADB intends to convey, the target audiences, and the modes of delivery it deems relevant to use.

- A. How well is ADB known in your country?
- B. Do you think ADB should be doing more to raise its profile in your country? If so, why? And how?
- C. What are the most important channels in your country for ADB to communicate information about its mission, objectives and operations? Print media? Radio/TV? Internet? Community presentations? Others (please specify):

Other Recommendations

What should be done to strengthen the Policy on Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information and the Information Policy and Strategy or make them more relevant?

[For our complete recommendations regarding transparency at the ADB, please see the attached report: "An Analysis of ADB Transparency: Comments for the Ongoing Review."](#)

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