

**Consultation on ADB's Draft Public Communications Policy**  
**Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, India**  
**Summary of Participant Recommendations**  
**16 July 2004**

ADB organized a consultation workshop with representatives of NGOs, academe, media, the private sector, and government from southern India. Participants critiqued the draft Public Communications Policy (PCP) in break-out groups comprising individuals from different sectors.

Representatives from 8 civil society organizations attended the opening of the workshop in order to present a statement of protest regarding ADB's performance in information disclosure and accountability, including the manner in which the PCP consultation was organized. They stated their unwillingness to participate in the workshop. See [http://adb.org/Disclosure/first\\_draft/ind-communication-policy.pdf](http://adb.org/Disclosure/first_draft/ind-communication-policy.pdf)

Following is a synthesis of the participants' recommendations. A list of workshop attendees is attached.

**A. Strengths of the Draft Policy**

- ADB's decision to develop a new policy is welcomed.
- The policy's approach is appropriate and comprehensive.
- The communication ADB has had with stakeholders has been minimal, and this policy will help. It enhances ADB's consultative processes and makes such processes more democratic.
- ADB has provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to influence the policy. This exercise seeks to develop sense of ownership among all stakeholders.
- The policy requires more information dissemination during project implementation.
- The need to use local languages has been recognized.

**B. Recommendations for Improvement**

**1. Information on Projects (General)**

- ADB's outreach is inadequate. ADB should see it as its responsibility to provide information about a project in addition to that of the government's. ADB should ensure that communications specialists are employed for each project and that they communicate with the public proactively.
- A structured feedback mechanism is needed. ADB should create or strengthen external relations offices at its Resident Missions. Now it is difficult to get information and the communication structure is seen as closed.
- Each RRP, loan covenant, and project budget should provide for an Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) component. The RRP must specify the human and monetary resources needed, and the mechanism for information and communications. Regular monitoring of the IEC plan must be undertaken. The PCP should call for an independent monitoring mechanism. Otherwise, problems originate in the beginning but are only evident during implementation.
- Normally, all funding agencies are weak on quality supervision. The policy should call for information sharing about the quality of ADB-assisted projects.

## **2. Information for Affected Persons**

- ADB should take responsibility for ensuring that information is provided.
- The relevance of the project should be discussed at the concept stage.
- A communications plan should be provided, with details (date, place, time) of scheduled public consultations.
- All planning documents and feasibility studies should be provided and discussed with stakeholders during fact-finding.
- A public hearing should be held every 3 months, starting from the concept stage. This should be organized by the local implementing authority. Regular monthly meetings should be held with local officials and NGOs to keep them apprised of the project. Normal government mechanisms and offices should be used to disseminate information and coordinate this dialogue. For example, project information centers can be integrated into local government offices. They can display all information and documents related to the project, and provide staff (1/2 day working hours) to disseminate information about the project. The costs would be low as a result.
- Affected persons should also be given the project's evaluative reports and asked to supplement them with their own evaluation.
- All public consultations should be conducted in the local language, providing information found in the various reports, i.e., a translated executive summary.
- A directory of NGOs should be developed for each project, and provided to the affected persons.

## **3. "Two Way" Dialogue**

- Continuous dialogue is needed between the government, project implementation agencies, and the stakeholders. ADB needs to use a grassroots approach rather than a "blue print" approach.
- ADB should be receiving information; the policy fails to address this.

## **4. Grievance Process/Recourse Mechanism**

- The policy should indicate how grievances will be addressed.
- PCP should also indicate that persons who feel that they have been harmed as a result of not receiving information can contact the Special Project Facilitator, as part of the Accountability Mechanism.

## **5. Delivery Mechanisms**

- It is unclear in the policy what "publicly available" means. Posting documents on a web site is inadequate and does not constitute "publicly available." The policy should indicate a mechanism for reaching local media in affected communities and more clearly define the ways in which to reach local communities.
- The policy should suit local conditions, being sensitive to local needs and culture. Localized communications mechanisms should be employed.

## **6. Implementation Arrangements**

- When citizens access the project information offices, they should be able to look at a reference copy of a document without charge. Charges for photocopying may be applied.
- Project documents made publicly available should be valid. ADB should be accountable for what is written in these documents.
- Feedback cells should be developed at the project level to answer citizens' questions. People should not have to write ADB or a government ministry or

department directly. The local government project information office should register their complaints and forward them to the concerned office and ADB's Resident Mission.

- Project staff should develop a directory of NGOs for the project area, categorized by specialization.
- Consider employing state-level liaison officers.
- Participants indicated that project authorities often pass the responsibility for disseminating information to other project authorities. When persons express a concern or request information, the ADB says to ask the government, or the government says to ask another level of government, etc. There should be a focal point for project affected persons, a point of contact for regular dialogue with the communities. There should be a mechanism to ensure that information has been given.

#### **7. Exceptions to Presumed Disclosure/Information That Should Not Be Disclosed**

- If an allegation of corruption is not proven, it should not be shared with anyone. If it is proven, it can be disclosed after an investigation is completed.
- There should be complete secrecy regarding tenders before they are announced, so that there is a level playing field.
- Reports of internal discussions can be withheld.
- The names and other information about people who complain about a project (and who do not want their names to be known) should be protected (they could be harmed or discriminated against).
- Employee and consultant contract details can be withheld, although the terms of reference for consultants should be disclosed.

#### **C. Models/Good Practices**

- The World Bank's project database on its web site provides a good source of information.
- The KUIDFC project has project resource centers in each town (and at the provincial level). Communications specialists conduct community awareness activities. An information advisory committee provides information, obtains feedback, and then communicates the consolidated feedback to the project officers. The resource centers conduct workshops and produce newsletters and other communication materials. The centers are implemented by NGOs, which train communications staff.

#### **D. Other Matters**

- Some participants expressed concern that proper studies may not be done if there is a change of project design. A new feasibility report is necessary in those cases.

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**List of Participants**

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2	Rabi N Acharya Community Development Specialist	Karnataka Urban Development & Coastal Environment Project, Mangalore
3	D. Rajasekhar Prof. Decentralization Unit	ISEC, Bangalore
4	R.S. Deshpande Prof. & Head, Agricultural Department & Rural Transformation Unit	ISEC, Bangalore
5	Abdul Aziz Professor (retd.)	ISEC, Bangalore
6	Prof. Sangita	ISEC, Bangalore
7	Prof. Seetaramu	ISEC, Bangalore
8	C. Kumar Team Leader	DHAN Foundation, Madurai
9	T. Ramappa Secretary	Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Bangalore
10	Harsha D'Souza Convener	NGO Task Force, Mangalore
11	Sunil Ranjith Dayaratna Secretary	Gama Surakeema Sanvidhaniya, Pasan Niwasa, Gelanigama, Bandaragama, Sri Lanka
12	S.A. Athukorale President	United Society for the Protection of Akmeemana, Athu Sevana, Ihalagoda, Akmeemana, Sri Lanka
13	Michael Patrao Senior Journalist	Deccan Herald, Bangalore
14	Thilini	Interpreter

## **ADB**

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