



INFOCUS

Communities of Practice

Making ADB-hosted communities of practice an integral part of our operations for better development results

- Challenge:** A key challenge for development is how to establish special methods for identifying, creating, storing, sharing, and using the kind of knowledge that is often unstated.
- Strategy:** As a learning organization, ADB must build communities of practice (CoPs), and leverage them effectively to improve the quality of our operations. To achieve these goals, the value of our CoPs must be continually enhanced through internal and external learning to benefit their members, ADB, and the developing member countries we serve.
- Response:** ADB will enhance the short- and long-term value of CoPs we host. We will also empower them, so they are better able to upgrade their members' and peers' technical skills, promote the exchange of ideas and good practices, link with relevant sector and thematic networks inside and outside ADB, inform ADB operations, and become drivers of change.

“ADB’s communities of practice are at the heart of our knowledge generation and sharing. The experiences, perspectives, and insights their members offer help ADB lend smarter.”

—Olivier Serrat, Principal Knowledge Management Specialist

ADB’s Strategy 2020 meeting the needs of Asia and the Pacific

Strategic Direction

- Inclusive Economic Growth
- Environmentally Sustainable Growth
- Regional Integration

Drivers of Change

- Private Sector
- Good Governance
- Gender Equity
- Knowledge Solutions
- Partnerships

Read more at www.adb.org/Strategy2020/

CoPs are groups comprising people who share a passion for something they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better. The unparalleled ability of CoPs to generate and share knowledge has made them an accepted component of organizational development.

CoPs enhance learning and empower people in their work. Horizontal and nonhierarchical, CoPs are able to cross-link organizational units and organizations. Most are comprised of a core group, and inner and outer circles, with the core group managing the CoP based on an agreed coordination mandate, e.g., shaping sector and thematic agendas, developing staff skills, etc.

The core group serves as a steering committee, maintains a formal structure, and meets throughout the year. The inner circle may contact the core group on demand. And the outer circle embraces interested members, contributors, and interested parties in a loose network—strengthening effectiveness.

Supporting the role of CoPs

Seeing knowledge as a catalyst for change, ADB’s long-term strategic framework for 2008–2020 (Strategy 2020) compels our knowledge service to assess and address developing member country needs to deliver knowledge solutions.

It calls on ADB knowledge to be continuously enriched through internal learning from operational experience and CoPs, and external learning from strategic partnerships.

Knowledge generation and sharing enable ADB-hosted CoPs to

- influence development outcomes by promoting greater and better informed dialogue.
- promote innovative approaches to address specific development challenges.
- develop, capture, and transfer good practices on specific topics by stimulating active sharing of knowledge.
- link diverse groups of practitioners from different disciplines with ADB’s organizational structure.

ADB’s formal communities of practice include

- Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food Security
- Education
- Energy
- Environment
- Financial Sector Development
- Gender and Social Development
- Governance and Public Management
- Health
- Regional Cooperation and Integration
- Transport
- Urban
- Water

- serve as an ongoing learning venue for members (and outside practitioners) who share similar goals, interests, problems, and approaches.
- respond rapidly to individual inquiries from members and ADB audiences, clients, and partners with specific answers.

Reviewing CoP effectiveness

CoPs first began playing an official role at ADB in 2002. Today we host 12 across numerous sectors and themes. Some CoPs are more advanced than others. All are further articulating their precise objectives and outcomes.

A 2009 baseline review of ADB-hosted CoPs revealed they help build relationships and benefit daily work. Areas for improvement were also pointed out.

For instance, outreach must be increased to all members, especially those in resident missions and representative offices. Improvements are also needed in CoP links to country partnership strategies and policy work, as well as in their contribution to achieving better results in projects, and economic and sector work.

In addition, budgets for knowledge sharing and staff development could be increased, and CoP work and mandates should be better aligned with Strategy 2020 priorities.

Improving the effectiveness of ADB-hosted CoPs

Proposals are being considered to make our CoPs more effective. They seek to empower ADB CoPs as drivers of change, improve their ability to exchange ideas and good practices, and upgrade technical skills among CoP members and peers. Proposals include:

Making CoPs more integral. ADB CoPs will need to be integrated in ADB’s business processes. This could require supervisors to fully support member participation—at headquarters, and in resident missions and representative offices. Staff contributions should also be recognized more vigorously in the performance development plan exercise. And CoP chairs should receive sufficient time to perform their functions.

Increasing CoP budgets. CoP budgets will need to be increased based on clear sets of objectives and, most importantly, clear and measurable “outcomes” of improved knowledge management. Increased budgets would be allocated directly and explicitly in proportion to how well practical and tangible knowledge management occurs. Such “output-based financing” would reward those who generate and share useful and usable knowledge. A revision of the current purpose and format of sector and thematic reports would be necessary.

Building external relationships. CoPs should be required to engage more purposefully in external partnerships, especially with regional knowledge hubs. Engaging nonregional knowledge hubs should be considered as well.

Harnessing knowledge expertise. Creation of a knowledge management CoP could be considered to take advantage of the expertise and experience of ADB knowledge management coordinators.

Going forward

To these important ends, ADB CoPs will further clarify their domains and sharpen their functions. They will also look into ways to ensure their long-term success through the use of business plans, and more effective reporting methods—particularly from the perspectives of clients, finance, internal processes, and innovation and learning.

ADB is open-minded about the contributions CoPs can make. Our approach to their business processes is flexible. Opportunities exist for new CoPs to form. And we continue to empower our CoPs for better development results.

ADB Focal Point:
Olivier Serrat
Regional and Sustainable
Development Department

www.adb.org/COPs/

For inquiries, contact
ADB Media Center
mediacenter@adb.org
Tel +63 2 632 5090