

**Peer Review Training on Benchmarking National Water Sector Apex Bodies**

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**Keynote Address**

**by:**

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Distinguished guests and participants from national water sector apex bodies in the region, colleagues at the ADB, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I am honored to welcome you to this Peer Review Training on Performance Benchmarking of National Water Sector Apex Bodies, a significant endeavor being the first of its kind to be conducted. ADB is privileged to support this pioneering effort.

**The Role of Apex Bodies:**

ADB recognizes that national water sector apex bodies play an important role in championing national water sector reforms. As members of the apex bodies in your respective countries, you are all at the forefront of the reform process, managing change, with daunting tasks ranging from high level sector coordination, planning and policy formulation towards improved governance in the water sector. But one thing is clear, that these apex bodies are designed to have multisectoral and high-level members who can coordinate the various and oftentimes competing interests of government agencies.

The role of apex bodies may evolve over time consistent with the changing needs of the sector. Initially, its role is to provide the government with a common understanding of the needs of the sector and develop a national water agenda to address these needs. It may have to review policies and legislation particularly on the issues of water resources management, allocation, prioritization in case of conflicts of use, demand management, conservation, and institutional arrangements to effect integrated water resources management. Apex bodies are likewise responsible in ensuring an enabling environment to provide sufficient supply of water at acceptable levels of service for domestic or agricultural use.

No doubt the task is formidable and the challenge, great.

As you all know, ADB has supported the establishment and strengthening of national water sector apex bodies in the region and intends to continue doing that because we recognize your invaluable contribution to the sector.

### **The Objectives of Benchmarking**

Over the years, benchmarking has become an effective tool employed by public agencies and private companies to improve performance. In particular to the public sector, benchmarking is aimed at improving the levels of service provision. It allows for an objective assessment of an organization's performance, identifies potential areas for improvement and facilitates the exchange of experiences and information among similarly situated organizations.

In recognition of the benefits of benchmarking, ADB has supported several activities. In the water sector, we have developed the Water Utilities Data Books and support the efforts of the Southeast Asian Water Utilities Network (SEAWUN) for the benchmarking of water utilities and most recently, the benchmarking of performance of river basin organizations through the Network of River Basin Organizations (NARBO) which ADB has helped establish.

### **The Benefits of Peer Review**

I commend you for your choice of peer review as a modality for benchmarking your organizational performance. ADB believes that this is a more superior mode of benchmarking as it allows for an in-depth self-analysis of an organization's performance, site visit, as well as a meaningful exchange of experiences among organizations, thereby capacitating people in the process. Peer review can likewise be a more cost-efficient way rather than engaging outside consultants, and may therefore be more sustainable for agencies in the long-run.

### **A Certification Program for Peer Reviewers**

You will note that a key component of this benchmarking and peer review process is a certification program to develop "Peer Reviewers". Peer review entails a two-step

process of self-evaluation by the agency to be reviewed and validation by its peers. Since most of us are new to this process, it requires training to build capacity of peers to review and validate the self-assessment conducted.

From ADB's side, we would like to emphasize that to gain credibility for this process of benchmarking through peer review, there must be a criteria for the selection of peer reviewers, and quality standards that will inspire the confidence of the agencies to be reviewed. This is why we invited you as leaders of your organizations who have a broad experience in the water sector, a good understanding of the bigger picture of sector reforms, familiarity with technical water issues and ability to make changes within your organizations.

### **Conclusion**

This first regional training program is being organized in cooperation with the Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippine Accrediting Association for Schools, Colleges and Universities, and with support from the Global Water Partnership Southeast Asia and South Asia. We thank you for your continued support.

Finally, I would like to commend the interest and courage of the Philippine's and Thailand's water sector apex bodies for volunteering to be the pilot cases for this performance benchmarking exercise. The same commendation goes to our colleagues from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka who have expressed interest to be included in a second batch of agencies to be benchmarked through peer review.

We look forward to a successful accreditation of peer reviewers at the end of this four-day training program.

Thank you and congratulations to you all.