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# Information Policy and Strategy

Asian Development Bank

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# Abbreviations

APEC	-	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
DMC	-	developing member country
NGO	-	nongovernment organization
OER	-	Office of External Relations (formerly known as Information Office)

# Introduction

Since the Bank's establishment more than 30 years ago, and in step with the changing needs of its developing member countries (DMCs), the scope, diversity, and complexity of its operations have grown significantly. Today, the Bank has much more to tell its shareholders and the public in support of its strategic agenda, objectives, programs, and operations.

This expansion in the Bank's activities has coincided with a rapid and all-pervasive information/communications revolution. With advances in technology and the spread and diversification of the channels of communication, the opportunity now exists, as never before, for the Bank to communicate its messages more widely.

In the context of this greatly altered and constantly changing environment, there is a need for a comprehensive review of the Bank's information requirements and objectives to formulate a well-defined Bankwide information policy and strategy. An institution like the Bank requires such a policy and strategy to guide its activities in support of its strategic and operational agenda.

So far, the Bank's information requirements and objectives have remained uncodified. The Articles of Agreement Establishing the Asian Development Bank (the Charter), which explicitly describe the Bank's purpose, operations, organization, etc., make no reference to information policies or procedures as such.<sup>1</sup> Article 39 of the Charter states in part: "The Bank shall transmit to its members an annual report

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<sup>1</sup> Administrative Circular 1.02 (Appendix 1) contains an 11-point listing of principal functions and responsibilities of the Information Office (now known as the Office of External Relations).

containing an audited statement of its accounts and shall publish such report. It shall also transmit quarterly to its members a summary statement of its financial position and a profit and loss statement showing the results of its operations. The Bank may also publish such other reports as it deems desirable in the carrying out of its purpose and functions. Such reports shall be transmitted to the members of the Bank.” This statement does not adequately describe an information policy for the Bank.

A clear articulation of an information policy is required in the context of the Bank’s expanded current and future activities.

# The setting

The bank has changed from a relatively straightforward project lending institution to a complex development agency responding to a wide range of development needs in its DMCs. As the DMCs continue to implement economic reforms; as their needs for infrastructure, human resources, and new technology grow; as investments in environmental protection become more pressing; and as socioeconomic concerns like poverty, education, health and population, water supply and sanitation, and urban development and housing become more urgent, the Bank faces increasing demands on its assistance and services. In response, it has developed new lending modalities, is more involved in policy and macroeconomic issues, and is giving its operations a sharper country focus. Even though the Asian and Pacific region has developed into the fastest growing economic region in the world, the Bank's responsibilities as a catalyst for development—to be supported by financial resources—are expected to continue.

In 1991, the Bank launched strategic planning to guide its operations in its DMCs. Since then, it has adopted a number of initiatives to transform itself into a broad-based development institution with a strong regional perspective.

In support of the Bank's mission, a medium-term strategic agenda have been set for promoting development, resource mobilization, and regional cooperation. The Bank's Medium-Term Strategic Framework incorporates five strategic objectives: promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, improving the status of women, developing human resources (including population planning), and sound management of natural resources and the environment.

The Bank's operations now reflect a stronger country focus. Greater attention is paid to the policy and institutional environment in the borrowing DMCs, their implementation experiences, and each country's commitment to reforms. Crosscutting issues are increasingly addressed in designing Bank activities. At least 50 percent of Bank projects are now expected to address poverty reduction, human resource development, gender issues, and environmental concerns. Sector strategies are being reviewed to conform to new developments. Greater emphasis has been placed on project quality.

Activities to promote regional and subregional cooperation in economic development are growing. These will become increasingly important as the so-called "growth triangles" begin to impact on the region's economic life and as multilateral efforts, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, gather momentum.

At the same time, the Bank has introduced prudential financial policies on loan default and country risk management to improve its reputation as a financially sound, well-managed, and cost-effective institution. The Bank must ensure that its operations and administrative practices are well understood by its member countries and by the broader public.

Clearly, the Bank has a number of new and important messages that should be communicated more widely and effectively under a well-defined, clearly focused information policy. As a regional international finance institution, the Bank should systematically inform its constituencies about the expanding and changing character of its operations in both the public and private sectors. An effective information program should provide vital support to the Bank's work. Such a program can also help change social attitudes with regard to such issues as population and women in development.

The need for continued support for the Bank has led to greater demands from various quarters and interest groups for more information about the Bank and for greater transparency and accountability with regard to its activities. The Bank must be prepared to respond positively to such demands.

Because of budget constraints in donor countries and greater competition for resources required to sustain international finance institutions like the Bank, it is necessary to enhance public awareness in

member countries about what the Bank does and stands for. A greater degree of public awareness and support will underpin the Bank's efforts to mobilize resources for its activities, not only through general capital increases and replenishment of the Asian Development Fund, but also through cofinancing and inducing flows of private capital into the region.

Operating as it does in an environment of changing information technology, the Bank has greater opportunities now to explain its position on various issues of economic policy that affect its DMCs. A clear and more proactive information policy will help the Bank do so more effectively.

While the Information Office of the Bank already disseminates a large amount of information in a number of ways, its activities in the past have been largely reactive in nature. Consequently, the Bank receives much routine coverage in the DMC media, but the level of general awareness of the Bank, especially in developed member countries, remains very low. Even after 32 years of operation, the Bank is not well known in many of its donor countries and is poorly understood in some DMCs. The Bank generates a great deal of information but delivers little by way of message. This constrains support for its activities. This paper emphasizes the need for a more proactive approach to information dissemination about the Bank's strategic goals and operational activities. It describes an information policy and strategy to put that approach into practice.



# Statement of information policy

The Bank's information policy is to support its strategic agenda and objectives. To implement the policy, an information strategy will be developed and updated from time to time. In undertaking its information activities, the Bank will be guided by the following.

- (i) The Bank will promote better awareness and understanding of its activities, strategies, and objectives among the public and policymakers in all its member countries; marshal support for its activities; and fulfill its legal and moral obligations for public accountability.
- (ii) The Bank will operate as an open, accessible institution, and disclose information except when it might be perceived to affect adversely the interests of its member countries or the sponsors of its private sector projects.<sup>2</sup>
- (iii) The Bank will disseminate the issues and challenges of sustainable economic development facing its DMCs and how it is addressing these through its strategic agenda and objectives; at appropriate fora, the Bank will present and support the region's case for continued trade, investments, and assistance.
- (iv) The Bank will help enhance public awareness of development issues and share its experiences over more than 30 years of development work in the Asian and Pacific region.

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<sup>2</sup> A separate policy paper on Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information was circulated to the Board on 18 August 1994 (DOC. R134-94). That paper proposes, among other things, that the Bank should provide the greatest possible degree of transparency and disclosure in all areas of its operations, with few exceptions.

- (v) The Bank will be more proactive in disseminating information, and will utilize all forms and channels of communications available and deemed relevant.<sup>3</sup>
- (vi) The Bank will participate in and support information programs through schools, community fora, and such other activities as may be deemed relevant, to enhance social changes consistent with its strategic agenda and objectives.
- (vii) The Bank will promote its publications through media publicity, marketing, advertisements, exchange programs, and the Depository Library Program.
- (viii) The Bank will monitor and analyze information that has a bearing on its operations and seek to improve the collection, storage, retrieval, and communication of such information within the Bank as an important internal resource.

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3 The Bank will monitor and, where appropriate and cost-effective, adopt new developments in communication technology like satellite and cable television; multimedia technologies; and innovations like electronic magazines and teletext to expand the scope for information penetration.

# Information strategy

The information strategy of the Bank will be governed by the policy described in the previous section. The strategy will be based on the messages the Bank intends to convey, the target audiences, and the modes of delivery it deems relevant to use. The choice of messages, target audiences, and modes of delivery will depend on the Bank's needs at any given time. As such, the strategy will be sufficiently flexible and will be reviewed and amended as necessary to accommodate broader Bank priorities that may change from time to time.

In the medium term, the major objective of the information strategy is to determine how best to support the Bank's strategic and operational agenda. The strategic agenda of promoting development, mobilizing resources, and encouraging regional cooperation have important implications for the Bank's activities. In addition, the key messages of the operational agenda for the 1990s—a sharper country focus, emphasis on crosscutting issues, and increased concern for project quality—need to be conveyed properly and explained to appropriate audiences to generate and maintain support for the Bank's initiatives.

In furthering its information strategy, the Bank will follow a policy of transparency in disclosure of information, as detailed in its Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information policy paper. Efforts will be made to increase disclosure of information, while taking into account countervailing constraints that may arise in carrying out the Bank's operations. There will be a presumption in favor of disclosure, although information received from DMCs on a confidential basis will not be released without express and prior approval of the DMCs concerned.

## Messages

The Bank has many messages to convey. These will be developed and delivered proactively in addition to such routine information as reports on Bank policies, initiatives, projects, operational approvals, and targets; Board and Management decisions; results of research and studies; proceedings of seminars, conferences, workshops, etc.

For the foreseeable future, in support of the Bank's strategic agenda, the priority messages will include the following.

- (i) Fostering economic growth on a sustainable basis in the Asian and Pacific region through the Bank is in the interest of all member countries. Everybody benefits from development, and it is in the self-interest of all member countries to support an institution dedicated to sustainable and mutually beneficial economic development. Growth and economic liberalization create markets and open up opportunities for business, trade, and investment for all. Specifically, Bank lending and technical assistance generate opportunities among all member countries for the procurement of goods and services.
- (ii) The Bank fulfills an essential developmental role. Sustainable economic development is a fundamental need for the Asian and Pacific region because, despite its past strong economic performance, Asia still has three quarters of the world's poor. The Bank, with its clearly defined strategic objectives, helps meet this need. It therefore relies on the full support of its shareholders.
- (iii) The Bank is a catalyst for economic and social change. The Bank, with its considerable experience and intellectual resources, can help develop policies, promote economic reforms, educate, and foster economic and social change. It can also support and complement the efforts of bilateral donors in policy development and aid management.
- (iv) The Bank fosters regional and subregional cooperation. This stimulates sustainable economic growth and creates opportunities for increased trade, investment, and business. It also enhances mutual understanding and improves regional security, thereby promoting international peace and stability.

Although there are many other messages that could be communicated, the principal messages described in the previous paragraph are tailored to the prevailing priorities of the Bank and the resources available.

The Bank will take maximum advantage of a number of existing publicity opportunities to convey its messages. The most important publicity event each year is the Annual Meeting, which brings together government officials, bankers, business people, observers from multi-lateral institutions, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and media persons. This offers a unique and cost-effective opportunity for the Bank to generate publicity.

Other opportunities arise at the time of the launching of the Annual Report and the Asian Development Outlook, major loan signings, press conferences on important developments, annual press tours of Bank projects, and speeches by Management and senior Bank officials at important meetings and seminars. These occasions will be fully exploited to deliver the Bank's messages.

In addition to these, the Bank will strive to find or create other opportunities to explain, convey, and publicize its mission and its strategic and operational agenda.

## **Target audiences**

The Bank recognizes that support from its constituencies is critical to its ability to continue to function as an effective development finance institution. Constituency-building is an essential element of the Bank's information activity. The Bank's member countries (both donors and DMCs) will be the primary target of this activity.

The Bank's messages will be directed at the following target audiences:

- (i) media: print and electronic;<sup>4</sup>
- (ii) governments: key decision makers in member governments, and government agencies and organizations directly involved with development issues;

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<sup>4</sup> Print and electronic media serve both as a target audience and as channels through which other target audiences may be reached.

- (iii) special interest groups: NGOs, both national and international; regional and international trade and economic fora, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and APEC; national and international organizations and bilateral and multilateral aid groups and agencies; and public and community fora;<sup>5</sup>
- (iv) politicians: parliamentarians, members of congress, and legislative aides;
- (v) business, banking, and financial communities, including professional associations, chambers of commerce, and investor groups; and
- (vi) academe: libraries; research institutions; think tanks; academic societies; and schools, colleges, and universities.

## **Modes of delivery**

To deliver its messages effectively, the Bank will use the most convenient, effective, and cost-efficient channels of communication. The choice will depend on the audience to be reached and the level of exposure required.

In general, materials for the print media, such as news releases, articles, feature stories, photographic releases, and institutional advertisements, as well as printed matters, such as annual reports, periodicals, newsletters, background papers, information brochures, books, monographs, studies, and target-oriented publications,<sup>6</sup> will continue to be the primary outlet for information. This is because the print media have a more lasting impact and are more convenient for access.

However, in the medium term and in response to the increasingly wide use of new technology, the Bank will gradually increase its emphasis on the electronic media because of their greater global coverage, immediacy of appeal and round-the-clock operation. These will include:

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5 The issue of populations affected by Bank projects is addressed in the Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information paper, DOC.R134-94, dated 18 August 1994, para. 34.

6 Such as country-specific information brochures.

- (i) video: video news releases, film clips, features and documentaries on the Bank, its activities and the broad range of issues in the Asian and Pacific region, aimed particularly at network television, seminars and conferences, and classrooms;
- (ii) TV press conferences and one-on-one interviews; cultivation of electronic media contacts and teleconferences; and
- (iii) electronic systems: computer diskettes, CD-ROM, electronic mailbox, computer networks, interactive databases, bulletin boards on computer networks, and multimedia systems.

Since personal delivery, though limited in scope, is often more effective in the impact it creates, the Bank will also increasingly utilize the following to further its objectives:

- (i) briefings: tours of Bank projects organized for the media, NGOs, government officials, and other special interest groups; and briefing sessions on Bank activities for specific groups, such as parliamentarians and congressional committees, business people, investors, financial analysts, and other interested groups;
- (ii) conferences, seminars, and workshops on Bank activities, operational strategies, and developmental issues; to increase awareness about the Bank in donor countries, the Bank, wherever possible, will invite leaders in donor countries to speak at its conferences; and
- (iii) speakers' bureaus: speeches by Management and senior staff before selected audiences and at important conferences and seminars in member countries and major capital markets.



# Implementation of the information policy and strategy

The Information Office will be the focal point of all public information activities of the Bank. As such, it will be drawn closely into all aspects of the Bank's operations. It will work with other departments and offices in preparing a detailed action plan to implement the information policy and strategy. A common approach will be formulated in originating, developing, and sustaining appropriate informational programs, campaigns, and activities.

The success of the Bank's information policy and strategy requires the support and involvement of all departments and offices, including regional/resident missions. Authority will be given to heads of departments and offices to respond directly to inquiries in their areas of responsibility. Media training will be arranged for senior Bank staff in consultation with department/office heads; and guidelines on media relations, interview techniques, etc. will be prepared and circulated to all staff.

With regard to media relations, it is necessary to have an official spokesperson to ensure uniformity of Bank views. Given the central role of the Information Office in implementing the Bank's information policy and strategy, the Chief Information Officer, acting on the authority of the President and under the direction of the Vice-President for Finance and Administration, will be designated as the Bank's official spokesperson for the media.

The Information Office, represented by the Chief Information Officer, will be present at all high-level policy and operational

discussions of the Bank to be able to respond quickly to media inquiries or to formulate appropriate information activities.

The responsibility for implementing, coordinating, directing, and updating the Bank's information strategy will rest with the Chief Information Officer, under the direction of the Vice-President for Finance and Administration.

## **Role and functions of the Information Office**

The principal mandate of the Information Office is to help create better understanding of and support for the Bank's mission and activities among its various constituencies. The Office will have the following basic functions.

- (i) Designing, developing and executing programs for media and nonmedia groups: As detailed in the previous section, *programs for the media* will include video features and releases; one-on-one interviews with Management and designated senior staff; coverage of conferences, seminars, and workshops; development of a roster of Bank experts who can be called upon by the media for expert opinions on topics within their expertise; press tours and briefings; and audience-specific articles and feature stories. *Nonmedia programs* will include targeted dissemination of information material; briefing sessions for various audiences; placing of Bank operational data, studies, and news releases on international computer networks; speeches by Management and senior staff at selected fora; public education programs, etc. The Information Office will participate in and contribute to activities and events that help maximize publicity for the Bank during special occasions. These occasions include Annual Meetings, the launching of the Annual Report and the Asian Development Outlook, major loan signings, major conferences and seminars, speeches by Management and senior staff, and press tours.
- (ii) Implementing the Bank's publications program on behalf of the Publications Committee: This will involve facilitating the production and distribution of publications (directly by the Bank itself as well as through external publishers) and the marketing of priced publications through advertisements and commercial

distributors to recover costs to the extent possible. The Information Office will also administer the Bank's Depository Library program. Consideration will be given to establishing public information center(s).

- (iii) Implementing an internal news dissemination service and providing informational support to other departments and offices: Taking into account the Bank's information technology strategy, the internal information service is designed to (a) keep Management and staff fully informed of important news developments, perceptions, and criticisms of the Bank, and major issues that might impact on the Bank's operations; (b) enhance information flows within the Bank on issues, projects, perceptions, and decisions; (c) convey the Bank's vision, values, and priorities to staff members; and (d) improve information links with regional/resident missions. The Information Office will have central responsibility for maintaining an effective internal information service and will develop an appropriate strategy for this purpose.

To capture more accurately the focus of the activities of the Information Office, the name of the Office will be changed to Office of External Relations.

## **Role of other departments and offices**

Heads of departments and offices may respond directly to media inquiries and requests for interviews in their areas of responsibility, in consultation with the Information Office.

Departments and offices will keep the Information Office apprised of their media related activities. They will assist it in responding to information requests from various audience groups. In its role as resource center for the region, the Economics and Development Resource Center will collaborate closely with the Information Office.

Departments and offices will plan and prepare, in close cooperation with the Information Office, special events, such as seminars/conferences and presentations, to take advantage of information opportunities to be derived from such occasions.

## **Role of regional/resident missions**

The regional/resident missions will have greater responsibility for disseminating Bank information and publications in their respective areas, particularly among media persons, government officials, policymakers, diplomatic missions of member countries, and special interest groups. Guidelines will be prepared in consultation with departments and regional/resident missions concerned to specify the scope of this responsibility.

The directors/chiefs of regional/resident missions will be encouraged to respond to inquiries and requests from national and international media and the general public on matters related to their areas of responsibility, to organize media briefings as necessary to fulfill Bank information objectives, and to give media interviews whenever necessary. The regional/resident missions will keep the Chief Information Officer informed of such events, and the Information Office will assist them with their special information needs.

# Implications for the Bank

The adoption of a Bankwide information policy and the implementation of an information strategy will help the Bank in the promotion of its strategic agenda and objectives, as well as improve and better project its image, build up constituencies, enhance public understanding of its role, and generate greater support for its operations and resource mobilization activities.

In implementing the information policy and strategy, the Information Office will be guided by the Bank's stated intention of doing "better with less." However, certain areas, particularly the audiovisual and publications units, will require additional resources. These will include increased staff support and video, lighting and audio equipment for television studio, as well as for certain delivery options such as video programming, briefings, and personal presentations. Certain costs such as facsimile, which will replace mailing, and courier services, as well as subscriptions to electronic information to improve the quality of information for the Bank's internal use, will inevitably increase. As the dissemination of information by electronic communications increases, some mailing costs will decrease.

The information role of other departments and offices is not expected to add appreciably to their workload or to involve additional costs. There may, however, be modest budgetary implications in respect of regional/resident missions.