

Introduction

In late 2005 the Asian Development Bank (ADB) commissioned Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) to conduct a multinational survey of opinion leaders and stakeholders. The goal of this research was to assess attitudes toward the role ADB plays and its effectiveness within the development context of the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific region is changing rapidly. The needs of ADB's developing member countries are constantly changing, and the donor environment within which ADB works calls for ADB to be able to adjust to the changing needs of its developing member countries. Hence, ADB needs to be aware of the expectations of its stakeholders within this dynamic regional context. What role should ADB be playing now and in the near to medium term?

To help answer these questions, interviewers spoke with more than 700 opinion leaders in 30 of ADB's member countries to probe their views on ADB's current operations and performance and the best way for ADB to address economic and social development needs in Asia and the Pacific in the future. This is the first study of this scope and breadth commissioned by ADB and ADB hopes the results of the study will serve as a baseline for future efforts to measure perceptions of ADB.

The survey sample consists of individuals who hold senior-level positions in government, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, media, and academia. To qualify for the study, opinion leaders had to describe themselves as at least somewhat knowledgeable about ADB and its activities. These individuals were selected from ADB donor countries both within and outside the Asia-Pacific region and from developing member countries in the five ADB geographic regions—East and Central Asia, Mekong, the Pacific, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.¹

Names of potential respondents were compiled from two sources. PSRAI and individual survey research firms in each country used publicly available material for each of the sectors mentioned above to compile lists of opinion leaders. ADB provided separate lists of opinion leaders. The two lists were combined and duplicate names were removed. From the combined list, opinion leaders were randomly chosen to be contacted. Before fieldwork began, ADB reviewed the combined lists and further refined them based on the survey objectives.

To accommodate the respondents' busy schedules, multiple modes of interviewing were offered. Roughly half of the respondents were interviewed face-to-face, while about a quarter were interviewed over the telephone. The rest responded to the survey questions online or filled out the questionnaire on paper. The interviews were completed between April and June 2006.

¹ These were the regions at the time the survey was conducted. ADB has since changed the regional definitions.

In most countries between 20 and 50 opinion leaders were interviewed for a total of 706 interviews. Regionally, 147 interviews were conducted in South Asia, 111 in East and Central Asia, 105 in Southeast Asia, 94 in Mekong, and 33 in the Pacific. A total of 216 interviews were conducted in donor countries—80 in the Asia Pacific region and 136 in Europe and North America. For the full regional samples, the margin of error is ± 8 percentage points for South Asia, ± 9 for East and Central Asia, ± 10 for Southeast Asia, ± 10 for Mekong, ± 17 for the Pacific, and ± 7 for the donor countries.

Sample size by region

	Number of interviews	Margin of error
South Asia	147	8%
East and Central Asia	111	9
Southeast Asia	105	10
Mekong	94	10
Pacific	33	17
Donor countries	216	7

In the developing member countries, about a third of the interviews were with opinion leaders in government, about 20 percent with the private sector, roughly 15 percent each from multi- and bilateral donor agencies and from civil society organizations, and roughly 10 percent each from media and academia. In donor countries, bilateral donor agencies were a part of the government sample and, to compensate, the proportion of civil society organizations, media, and academia was slightly higher than in the developing countries.

Professional sector

	Developing countries	Donor countries
Government	33%	30%
Private sector	20	19
Multi- and bilateral donor	16	-
Civil society organizations	14	24
Media	10	13
Academia	7	14

Overall, roughly a quarter of the opinion leaders interviewed describe themselves as very knowledgeable about ADB and its activities, with the rest describing themselves as somewhat knowledgeable.³ Two in three say they have a great deal or moderate amount of professional experience working with ADB. About half had been involved in an ADB project, program, or research study within the past three years.

Knowledge level and experience of survey respondents



² The percentages presented in this table and all tables and graphs throughout the rest of this report have been weighted to account for the fact that extra interviews were conducted in many survey countries. The weighting ensures that certain countries and professional sectors are not overrepresented in the sample.

³ Eight in 10 of the opinion leaders interviewed were male. The average age was 48 and most opinion leaders had five or more years of experience working on international development issues (more than half had worked on development issues for more than 10 years).

For the purposes of this study, the opinion leaders who had been involved in an ADB project, program, or research study in the past three years are considered ADB *clients*. In addition to the general questions asked of all respondents, *clients* were asked a special set of questions. These additional questions are more detailed and considered appropriate only for clients. As the chart on the right indicates, the professional make-up of the client group differs somewhat from non-clients. In addition, the clients are more likely to be very knowledgeable about ADB and its activities and have a higher level of professional experience working with ADB.

Clients compared to non-clients

	Clients	Non-clients
▶ Professional sector		
Government	40%	23%
Private sector	22	18
Multi- and bilateral donor	11	11
Civil society organizations	16	19
Media	2	20
Academia	8	10
▶ Knowledge of ADB		
Very knowledgeable	37	18
Somewhat knowledgeable	63	82
▶ Professional experience with ADB		
Great deal/moderate amount	84	50
Small amount/none	16	50

Report outline

The report begins with a short summary of key findings, followed by a detailed discussion of the survey results divided into five sections: (1) General impressions of ADB, (2) ADB priorities, (3) ADB performance, (4) Communications and outreach, and (5) Regional development issues.

The first section reviews opinion leaders' general impressions of ADB's impact and helpfulness and its strengths and weaknesses. In addition, this section includes an examination of some of ADB's key organizational attributes.

The second section details opinion leaders' perceptions of what ADB's current priorities are and their opinions of what ADB's priorities should be. This section also includes an in-depth look at attitudes toward ADB partnerships with the private sector.

The third section presents opinion leaders' ratings of ADB performance in helping reduce poverty in Asia and the Pacific and nine key operational areas highlighted in the survey.

The fourth section reports on opinion leaders' views of how well ADB's communications and outreach efforts are working and what sources opinion leaders turn to for information about ADB.

Finally, the fifth section puts the assessment of ADB's operations and performance into context, discussing opinion leaders' thoughts on foreign assistance and development issues in their region in general.

Key findings

ADB considered effective and largely successful

- Across ADB member countries, opinion leaders agree that ADB has had a positive impact on the way things are going in the countries ADB serves and that ADB strives to meet country development goals and objectives. ADB *clients*—opinion leaders with some involvement in an ADB program, project, or research study in the past three years—are particularly positive about ADB’s impact and helpfulness. As a valued asset, ADB earns slightly higher marks for being effective than other leading multilateral development assistance organizations. At the same time, opinion leaders make it clear that ADB has room for improvement. Opinion leaders often describe ADB as “somewhat” rather than “very” useful or helpful, and a notable share of opinion leaders rate ADB’s performance in various sectors as “average” rather than “excellent” or “good.”

Recognized for financial and human resource strengths

- ADB’s financial assets and knowledge-related services are two of its main strengths, according to opinion leaders. ADB receives favorable marks for its financial capacity—loans, grants, and other financial assistance—as well as its institutional capacity—professional knowledge and expertise of ADB staff, coordination of development efforts, technical expertise and research.
- Many of ADB’s achievements are attributed to its talented staff. According to ADB clients, the staff is considered not only technically skilled and knowledgeable and responsible for providing some of the best research to which opinion leaders refer regularly, but also understanding and empathetic. ADB’s field offices are credited with providing a wide range of quality services.
- ADB is recognized for bringing different partners together and ensuring that development partners and stakeholders work well together and are heard. ADB clients see ADB as helpful because of its ability to bring together different partners, to work effectively with other development organizations, and its effective consultations with different stakeholders.
- Developing countries are often dynamic and their social and economic situations frequently evolve rapidly. Large majorities of opinion leaders acknowledge ADB’s efforts to take these changes into consideration. And they appreciate ADB’s efforts to guard against corrupt practices, as well as ADB’s generally transparent and open way of operating.

Weaknesses identified as procedures, capacity and accountability

- Opinion leaders suggest areas for improvement as well. ADB’s procedures and practices are cumbersome to some opinion leaders who characterize them as bureaucratic, slow, inflexible, and lacking collaboration. Some opinion leaders worry that ADB does not have enough capacity or is spread too thin. Other opportunities for improvement for ADB are related to the extent to which ADB assists people who are adversely affected by ADB projects. A notable minority of opinion leaders believe that ADB does not address the needs of people who have been adversely affected and that the process for filing complaints could be easier. This is also

an area in which ADB activities are not widely known. Many opinion leaders report that they are not knowledgeable enough about ADB's efforts to help adversely affected people to evaluate them.

Poverty reduction requires higher priority

- Opinion leaders associate ADB with poverty reduction, with large majorities agreeing that ADB is currently placing a high or moderate priority on reducing poverty. While many opinion leaders say that ADB is doing an excellent or good job reducing poverty either directly through programs designed to aid low-income populations or indirectly through programs that aim to increase economic growth and develop the private sector, roughly as many opinion leaders say ADB is doing an average job reducing poverty. Perhaps for this reason, even larger majorities in most regions think ADB should place a *high* priority, not just *moderate*, on reducing poverty. Few opinion leaders think that ADB is doing a poor job reducing poverty.

Poverty reduction requires broad-based approach

- Directly and indirectly, ADB aims to improve the welfare of people in the countries it serves. Nine operational areas that ADB considers important to support its ultimate goal of poverty reduction were highlighted in the survey. Opinion leaders think that four of these nine are particularly important to reducing poverty: social services, governance, infrastructure, and the mobilization of resources to stimulate the private sector. The other five operational areas are: development of local capital markets, regional cooperation and economic integration, environmental sustainability, gender equality, and disaster management.
- Across all nine operational areas, a majority of opinion leaders credit ADB with making each operational area a moderate or high priority. But there is somewhat of a gap between the actual and the ideal, with opinion leaders across all regions typically looking for ADB to make each issue more of a priority.
- One of the areas on which many opinion leaders would like ADB to place more priority is private sector growth. A solid majority of ADB clients in each region would like ADB to increase the number of partnerships with the private sector. Many opinion leaders also support a greater role for development agencies in enhancing private sector involvement in social services and infrastructure.

Performance in operational areas above average or average—not often poor

- Opinion leaders are largely positive about ADB's performance in two operational areas—infrastructure development, an area that opinion leaders say is particularly important to poverty reduction, and promoting regional cooperation and economic integration. Broadly speaking, a large majority of opinion leaders think ADB is doing an excellent or good job in these two operational areas.
- In the other operational areas, opinion is more divided. Opinion leaders often split over whether ADB's performance is average, or whether it is good or excellent. The one exception is perception of ADB's performance helping establish disaster management systems. More opinion leaders say ADB does an average job in helping establish disaster management systems

than an excellent or good job. Sizable minorities are also of the opinion that ADB's response to crises and disasters could be quicker.

ADB clients and knowledgeable opinion leaders generally more positive

- ADB *clients*—opinion leaders with some involvement in an ADB program, project, or research study in the past three years—tend to be more positive overall about ADB as an organization, its performance, and its communication efforts. Likewise, opinion leaders who describe themselves as very knowledgeable about ADB tend to be more positive about many aspects of the organization than opinion leaders who describe themselves as somewhat knowledgeable. Professional position also helps shape opinion of ADB. Opinion leaders in the government, in particular, are often more positive about ADB's mission and its programs than those in other sectors, most notably civil society organizations.

Communications somewhat good; publications have some influence

- Opinion leaders give ADB credit for its communications and outreach, including ADB publications. Many opinion leaders, particularly in developing countries, report that ADB publications have a moderate or strong influence on their thinking about development issues. The publications are also easy to understand, engaging, and up-to-speed on development issues. However, sizable minorities of publication users, particularly in donor countries, say the publications have either a small or no influence at all on their thinking about international development issues, and many opinion leaders point out that the publications would be more useful if translated into their native language.
- While opinion leaders are more likely to learn about ADB through print media, opinion leaders also turn to ADB's website for information. Relatively few opinion leaders use the website daily or weekly, but both regular and irregular users report that the website is generally easy to use and understand. At the same time, many website users say the site would be more useful if it provided more information about ADB projects.

Governments take responsibility for development but challenges persist

- Opinion leaders are largely optimistic about the impact their governments are having on the way things are going. And there is agreement among opinion leaders that developing countries support and take responsibility for development efforts, including agreement that the ultimate responsibility for achieving the Millennium Development Goals rests primarily with developing countries. But challenges to development clearly remain. Opinion leaders generally give a positive assessment of foreign development assistance agencies but disagree over how wisely funds are spent and the impact of corruption. And according to opinion leaders, a variety of factors impede development, with poor governance, poor infrastructure, and corruption among the most common concerns.