

Open Forum on ADB-NGO Cooperation

Summary of Major Points

13 May 2004

Samda Hall, ICC Jeju, Republic of Korea

1. A total of thirty (30) people attended the meeting, including NGO representatives from Thailand, Japan, New Zealand, and Germany, government officials from Cambodia.
2. NGO Center informed participants that unlike in recent Annual Meetings where NGO participants numbered to 70 to over 100, it is expected that there will be very few NGOs in attendance this year.
3. The participants introduced themselves.
4. NGO Center made a presentation on ADB-Government-NGO cooperation. The main points of the presentation follow:
 - ADB has long realized the benefits of working with NGOs. ADB's policy on cooperation with NGOs was approved in 1987, which pre-dates most of ADB's current social sector policies. The policy was updated in 1998 policy paper that elaborated on NGOs contribution to the effectiveness, sustainability and quality of ADB's development services
 - ADB's intention to work with civil society is firmly embedded in the institution's major strategic plans including ADB's Medium Term Strategy (2001-2005) and the Long-Term Strategic Framework (2001-2005).
 - ADB believes that by working with NGOs, the effectiveness, sustainability and quality of ADB's development services are enhanced. NGOs can help strengthen development through: INNOVATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSIVENESS, PARTICIPATION, SUSTAINABILITY
 - The NGO Center was created in 2001. The Center performs the following main functions:
 - Window for ADB-NGO interaction
 - Regular inform NGOs and ADB
 - Comp medium term action plan
 - Internal training and practical support
 - There are four broad areas for ADB-NGO interaction:
 - Consultation on policies and programs, such as the environment policy and inspection policy revision
 - Project design and implementation, such as the management of coastal resources, strategic environmental framework for GMS, implementation of resettlement plan in Bangladesh. NGOs likewise take part in project monitoring as well as in facilitating consultation activities
 - NGOs interact with ADB in country programming activities
 - ADB supports NGO capacity building, such as legal assistance, training, small grants.
 - ADB's involvement with NGOs (together with government) is now guided by the ADB-Government-NGO Cooperation, A Framework for Action 2003-2005 which

was approved in May 2003. The Framework emphasizes tripartite cooperation. Its 24 action points are grouped according to the five recommendations:

- Strengthening NGO participation in ADB supported activities.
- Enhance transparency and accountability through access to information
- Develop ADB capacity for cooperating with NGOs
- Build NGO capacity and providing institutional support
- Strengthening Government-NGO cooperation

5. Open Forum

Question from participant: Who is designing the projects that you mentioned – ADB itself? Is it possible for NGOs to design projects for funding?

NGO Center: ADB receives many project proposals from NGOs each year, and we carefully consider all of these. However, in most cases the best way to proceed is to course the proposal through the concerned government agency. This will demonstrate that the proposal has government support and fits in with the country's development program. NGOs should keep in mind that for most projects ADB has a competitive system to select the NGO or consultants that will work on the project. In other words, just because you have provided a proposal doesn't necessarily mean that you would be selected to work on the project should the proposal be accepted.

Question from participant: Your presentation was generally inward looking, a self-analysis of ADB. I would like to commend President Chino for taking this initiative. But you also need to be outward looking, to look at NGOs themselves. There is a need for NGO governance. For example, in Cambodia, we request NGOs to complete their balance sheet, but only very few submit them. NGOs are accountable only to their funder. Good NGO governance is necessary for a good partnership.

Question from participant: Most NGOs who come to the Annual Meeting are from those suffering from ADB projects. Most of them are poor and come from the poorest sector of the country. I feel sorry that for this meeting only very few NGOs have come. I came here to discuss issues in my country. But many NGOs did not have the resources to come to Jeju, which is very far and expensive. Many NGOs will not accept support from ADB but ADB should work harder to find a cheaper place for NGOs.

NGO Center: I am very happy you brought that up. Perhaps we fail to adequately publicize the consultations that take place throughout the year. For example, two months ago, we facilitated consultations between 30 NGO representatives from across the region. They met with the Board of Directors, Management, senior staff, project staff, and others, such as staff from our Strategy and Policy Department. It would be impossible to carry on this level of consultation on an Annual Meeting outside of Manila. We hold countless consultations at the country and project levels throughout the year. The main issue is providing a more systematic context to consultations. We feel that three questions are paramount: Are the consultations being held at the right time, at the right place, and with the right people? Contrasting the consultations at ADB headquarters two months ago with the

opportunities for consultation at the Annual Meetings, the single advantage of the Annual Meeting is the presence of the Board of Governors. But it is important that we as an institution continue to strengthen the quality and number of regular opportunities for NGOs and ADB, together with the government, to consult at all levels.

Question from participant: Is it possible that the reason why only few NGOs are participating in this Annual Meeting is that they may be not satisfied with the March consultation meeting.

NGO Center: After we finished consultations last March, we sent out a survey form to participants. Overwhelmingly both sides were satisfied with the consultations held. I don't believe that is the reason.

Question from participant: How happy are you with NGOC relationship with NGOs and the donor communities?

NGO Center: NGOC is part of ADB - we are working closely with a number of donors in our NGO cooperation program. For example, DFID is supporting our small grants program, and DFID and AusAID provided co-financing for the development of our Cooperation Framework.

Question from participant: We have to address the problem of means for NGOs to attend the Annual Meeting. Traveling is very expensive. Let us find some funds for NGOs to attend the Annual Meeting.

Comment from participant: Many NGOs would like to maintain their autonomy and would not accept support from ADB. But ADB could make arrangements that are cheaper for NGOs.

Comment from participant: We should also consider that in some countries, there are problems for NGOs to cooperate with their government.

NGO Center: As mentioned earlier, ADB can consider helping to facilitate government - NGO cooperation if we are asked to do so by both sides, such as in Pakistan. But it is important that we consider the interests of all concerned and not just one side or the other.

Question from participant: We need to think about accountability on the NGO side.

NGO Center: The issue of NGO accountability is an important one. Actually, NGOs are as vocal about this issue as anyone. The Philippines sets a good example for NGO self-governance through a Council run by NGOs to accredit NGOs that is acceptable to both government and NGOs. ADB could consider supporting NGOs and Governments from elsewhere in exploring the Philippine example.