



STAGE ONE: The Vision (1966–2004)

An institution that learns before it teaches

1967



Technical assistance begins.

ADB's first technical assistance (TA) project, the Asian Agricultural Survey, launched.



1980s

Knowledge evolves alongside lending. Projects become entry points for influencing DMC reforms; knowledge sharing became even more important.



1990s

ADB shifts to country strategies and regional initiatives.

ADB introduced a country focus to its operations. ADB Institute established in 1996.



2002

Strengthening ADB's ability to learn from past experience. Regional and Sustainable Development Department established as ADB's center for knowledge sharing.



2004

A new Knowledge Framework.

The framework guides ADB's transition into a knowledge-based organization.



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Technical assistance (TA) operations aim to improve the capabilities of ADB’s developing member countries (DMCs) to formulate, design, implement, and operate development projects and sector lending. TA comes in many forms, including sector studies, surveys, workshops, seminars, and training. The first recorded TA was the Asian Agricultural Survey launched in 1967. This was the basis of a plan of action to address agricultural problems in the region, and it demonstrated the use of TA as the primary platform for providing knowledge assistance to DMCs.

ADB’s role as a knowledge expert has evolved alongside its role as a lender. During the 1980s, the bank evolved from supporting projects on a case-by-case basis to implementing projects as an entry point for influencing sector policy reforms in the DMCs. ADB then went on to introduce a country focus to its operations in the 1990s. At around this time, ADB also started to develop country strategies and to work under regional initiatives, such as those in the Greater Mekong Subregion.³ Internally, the ADB Institute (ADBI) was established in 1996 to broaden the reach of ADB’s evidence-based policy work (see page 18 for details.)

As the bank’s focus evolved, from project to sector, then to country and region, a growing need for bespoke knowledge solutions became clear. However, as ADB grew, it inevitably became bigger and more complex. An unintended consequence of this was that corporate culture became more impersonal. It became increasingly difficult to have spontaneous interactions with colleagues that could foster innovation, debate, and knowledge sharing. At the same time, there was no system in place to capture,

store, share, and reuse knowledge. Clearly, the bank needed to strengthen its knowledge management to sustain its growth.

The process of strengthening knowledge management unfolded organically, and as a result it took time. It was more than 3 decades after its creation that ADB formally set out its aim of becoming a knowledge institution, with the launch of the Long-Term Strategic Framework, 2001–2015. For ADB to become a learning institution, the framework required it to “develop the capacity to learn quickly from its own operational experiences and those of its development partners, and to disseminate such experience in the form of best practices among DMCs, ADB staff, and the development partners.”⁴ This articulated for the first time the role knowledge would play in ADB’s overarching goal of poverty reduction. It stated ADB’s vision to become a primary source of development knowledge in Asia and the Pacific.⁵ This ability to learn from past experience was evident in 2002 when the Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department (ERCD) introduced the Economic Analysis Retrospectives to improve project quality-at-entry, and assess the quality of the economic analysis of ADB projects.

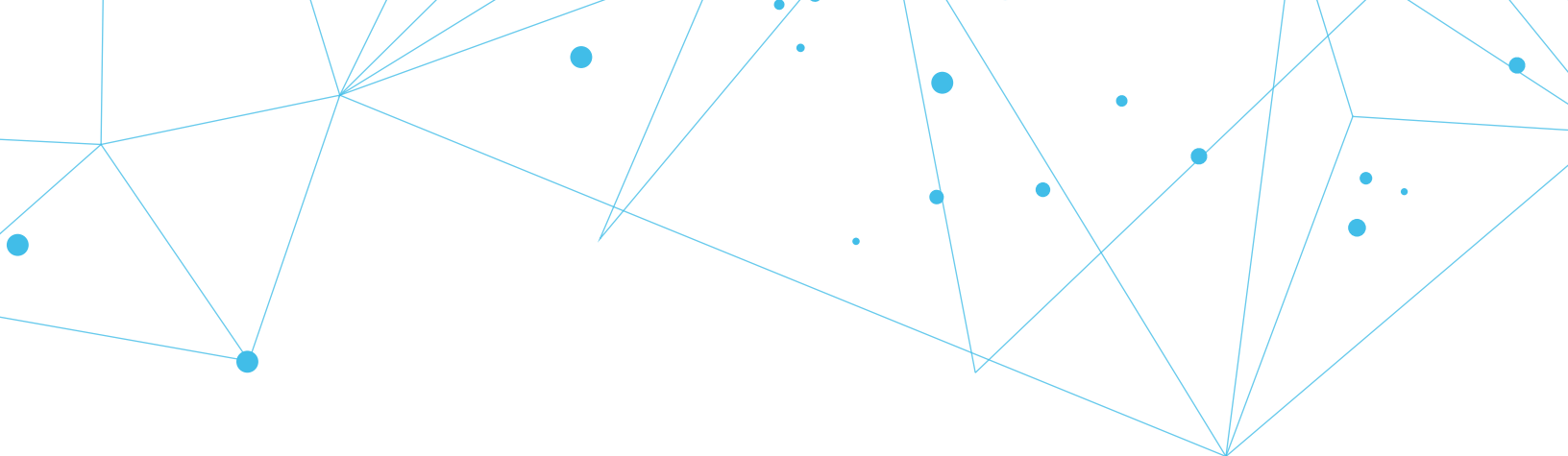
The 2004 Knowledge Management Framework provided direction and guidance for knowledge management, broadly defined as “the way organizations create, capture, enhance, and reuse knowledge to achieve organizational objectives.”⁶ Covering organizational culture, business processes, management systems and information technology (IT) solutions, the framework guided ADB’s transition

³ ADB. 2009. *ADB Reflections and Beyond*. Manila.

⁴ ADB. 2001. *Moving the Poverty Reduction Agenda Forward in Asia and the Pacific: The Long-term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank (2001-2015)*. Manila.

⁵ ADB. 2004. *Enhancing the Fight Against Poverty in Asia and the Pacific*. Manila.

⁶ ADB. 2004. *Knowledge Management in ADB*. Manila.



into a knowledge-based organization until ADB's first knowledge management action plan was formulated in 2009.

With these policies in place, ADB then moved to address specific knowledge management challenges, including organization and leadership, processes, and IT. As an initial step to facilitate the flow of knowledge across different departments, the Regional and Sustainable Development Department (RSDD) had been established in 2002 to be ADB's center for knowledge sharing between sector and thematic networks or committees, two of which originally resided in ERCD. That year, 19 networks were created across 9 sectors and themes. However, it became apparent that they were poorly organized, and dogged by overly restrictive membership, ambiguous responsibilities, hierarchical structures, and inadequate funding. Clearly, senior leadership support was going to be crucial in enabling the culture of genuine knowledge sharing to become embedded in the institution. In 2003, ADB added a fourth senior leadership role, vice-president for Knowledge Management. Since then, this vice-president has overseen the strategic coherence of ADB operations, and coordinates sector and thematic policies for knowledge sharing and learning.

An organization's knowledge management relies on its people, and the organizational reforms were complemented by a new human resource strategy in 2004. This established an ADB-wide competency framework to enhance learning and knowledge

sharing within the bank. Five core competencies were required of staff members and new recruits:

- client orientation,
- achieving results,
- working together,
- learning and knowledge sharing, and
- application of technical knowledge and skills.

Meanwhile, knowledge management infrastructure got a much-needed boost in 2004, with the approval of the second Information Systems and Technology Strategy. This led to the creation of ADB's enterprise-wide repository, the Electronic Storage and Retrieval System (eSTAR).⁷ By 2005, the groundwork had been laid for an expansion of ADB's knowledge management capabilities.



To respond to evolving challenges, ADB must become a learning institution maximizing the use of its vast knowledge and drawing upon resources, skills, and expertise both inside and outside the organization.
Long-Term Strategic Framework of ADB, 2001–2015

⁷ ADB. 2018. *ADB 2030 Digital Agenda: Social Capital Expenditure Requirements for 2019–2030*. Manila