

ACCESS TO INFORMATION POLICY

Annual Report 2019

MAY 2020

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Note:

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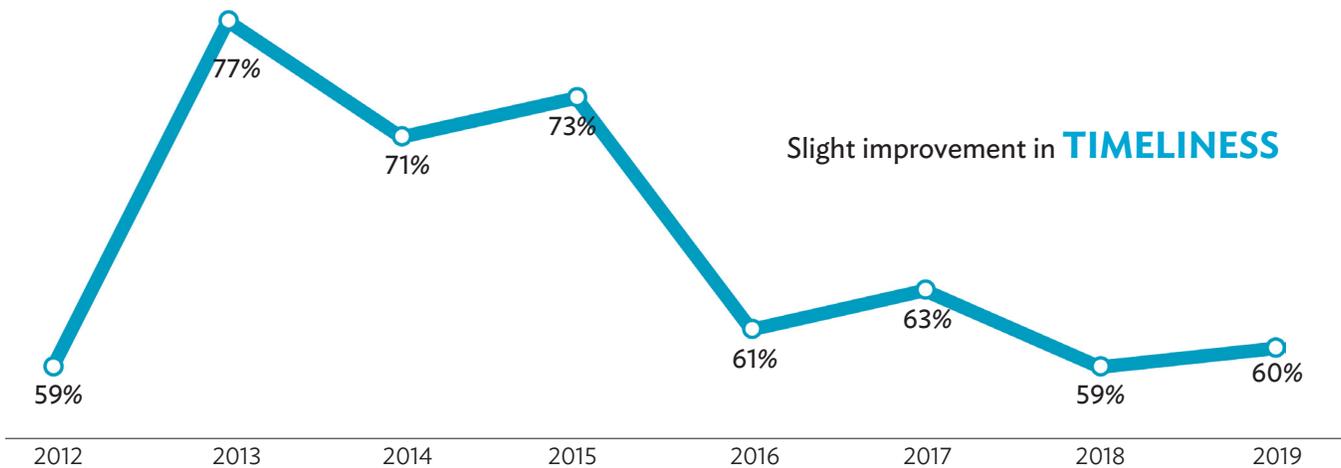
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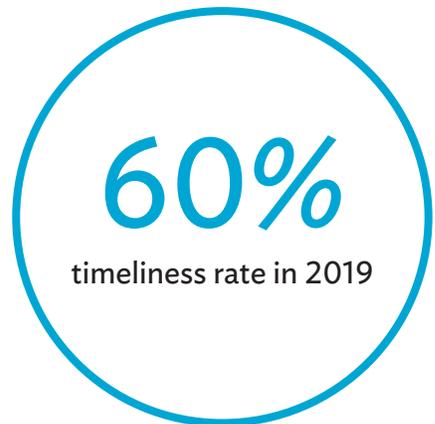
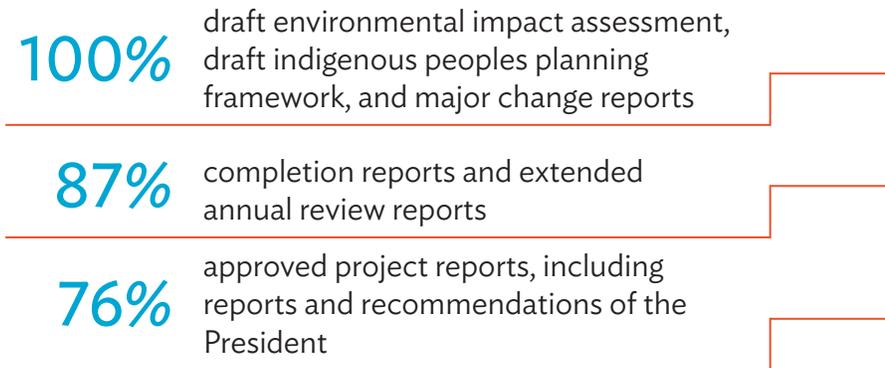
ACCESS TO INFORMATION POLICY 2019

AT A GLANCE

DISCLOSURE RATES FOR SELECTED DOCUMENT TYPES



TIMELINESS RATES FOR SELECTED DOCUMENT TYPES

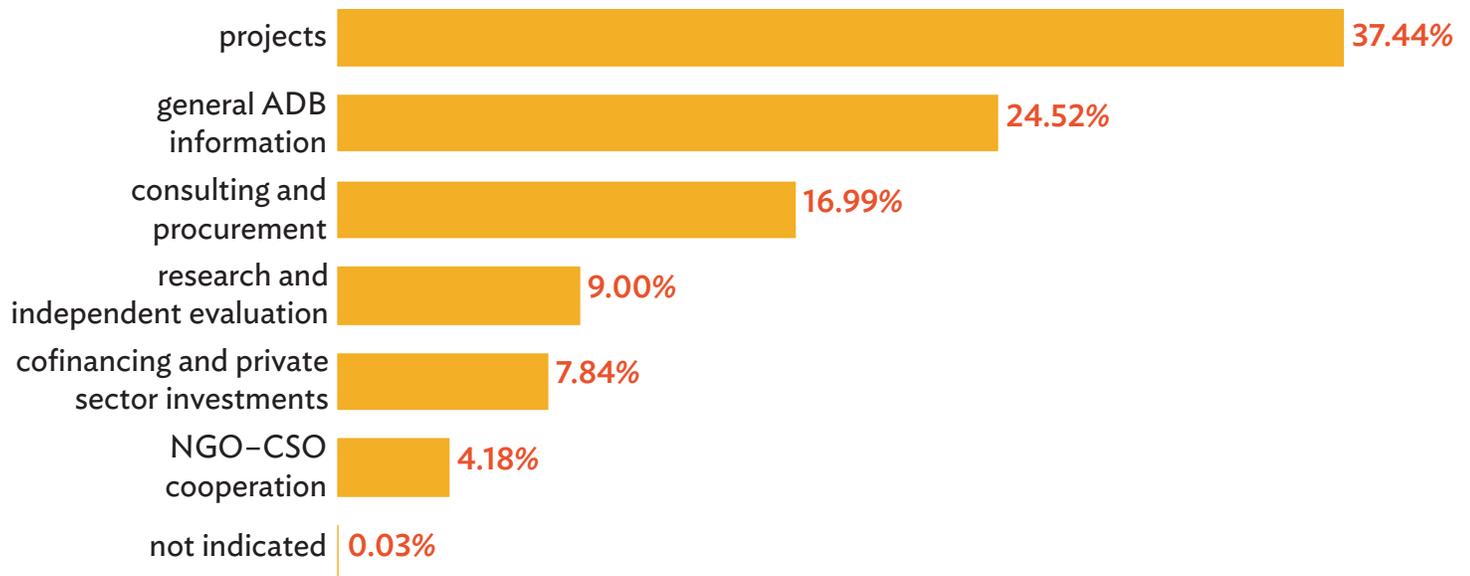


ADB has been monitoring a set of 12 key project document types to assess policy compliance. Because these documents are required to be disclosed within certain time frames, they provide a snapshot of the level and timeliness of ADB's project document disclosure. In 2019, **1,422** of these project documents were required to be disclosed.

TOTAL NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS DISCLOSED



3,413 VALID INFORMATION REQUESTS ON



CAME FROM



44%

private sector



15%

academe and research organizations



8%

government



1%

media



11%

CSOs and NGOs



3%

multilateral organizations and development agencies



18%

others

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIP	Access to Information Policy
COVID-19	coronavirus disease
CPS	country partnership strategy
PCP	Public Communications Policy
TA	technical assistance

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2019 HIGHLIGHTS

4,930 project documents disclosed

451,157 project documents downloaded

91% disclosure rate

3,544 valid information requests

93% response rate to valid information requests

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The new principles-based disclosure policy of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) went into effect on 1 January 2019. The Access to Information Policy (AIP) superseded the Public Communications Policy (PCP) 2011.¹ The AIP's inaugural annual report provides a brief introduction to the policy and assesses ADB's performance from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019.

II. BACKGROUND

2. ADB has long recognized that transparency and accountability are essential to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

3. The bank adopted its first information disclosure policy in 1994 and continually revises its approach to improve effectiveness and reflect changes in ADB business processes as it responds to the changing needs of Asia and the Pacific.

4. In 2005, the Board of Directors approved the PCP, which stipulated that ADB had to conduct a policy review within 5 years. In 2010, ADB reviewed and updated the policy. The revised policy, PCP 2011, guided ADB's commitment to transparency and accountability from April 2012 to December 2018. The PCP 2011 also required ADB to conduct a policy review within 5 years.

5. ADB conducted a 2-year policy review beginning in 2016. The review confirmed that the policy principles and exceptions to disclosure were in line with those of other multilateral development banks. The review also found that principles-based policies were considered best practice for information disclosure.² Based on the findings, ADB drafted a policy focused on principles—largely unchanged from the PCP 2011—with the policy implementation arrangements housed separately.³

6. ADB consulted its Board of Directors and submitted two consultation papers and a working paper for review. After incorporating the Board's comments, ADB submitted a final policy paper for Board approval in September 2018. The Board approved the new policy on 28 September, and it became effective on 1 January 2019. ADB Management approved the implementation arrangements, which became effective on 28 January 2019.

¹ ADB. 2018. [Access to Information Policy](#). Manila; and ADB. 2011. [Public Communications Policy 2011](#). Manila.

² ADB. 2016. [Public Communications Policy Review](#). Manila.

³ The AIP implementation arrangements are housed in ADB's *Operations Manual* to allow Management to update them, as needed, to improve policy effectiveness. Management has not updated them since they went into effect. ADB. 2019. [Access to Information Policy](#). *Operations Manual*. OM L3. Manila.

7. The AIP includes nine principles, led by a new overarching principle of “clear, timely, and appropriate disclosure;” 13 exceptions to disclosure; and general information about external requests and appeals. It ensures that information is available to people affected by its projects and other stakeholders—including women, the poor, and other vulnerable groups—in a form and language they can understand.

8. The section in PCP 2011 on public communications was removed because it differs from disclosure activities, and communication approaches can change rapidly with the emergence of new technology. The section is included in ADB’s External Relations Approach and is accessible through ADB’s access to information website.⁴

9. ADB’s website (www.adb.org) remains the primary medium for disclosure. For stakeholders without access to technology, other means of information dissemination are used that consider literacy levels, geography, infrastructure, and popular mass media for reaching project-affected people.

10. In 2018, ADB began conducting internal and external outreach to ensure a smooth rollout of the AIP. The responsibility for implementing the disclosure policy was also transferred from the Department of Communications to the Office of The Secretary, which was already overseeing Board document management and information classification, effective 1 January 2019. In 2019, ADB redesigned the disclosure webpages based on the plain language principles to be more accessible to those who are less proficient in English.⁵ The website provides information on the AIP, including translations of the policy into 16 languages; information requests with online request forms and e-mail contact forms for staff; the appeals process with e-mail contact forms; annual reports; and the contact information of staff overseeing disclosure.

11. Throughout 2019, ADB conducted awareness-raising and staff training for all operations departments. Awareness-raising and training was also initiated in two resident missions (the People’s Republic of China and Mongolia). Compliance with document disclosure requirements under the AIP has also been incorporated in the project design and management training course that is offered quarterly to staff working in operations departments.

12. To improve the timeliness of disclosure, which has shown a general decline since 2016, ADB increased the number of annual disclosure reminders on ADB’s intranet and enhanced its disclosure systems to automate disclosure procedures for some documents. The system enhancements went into effect in August.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Disclosure

13. Like the previous disclosure policy, the AIP requires a high degree of information disclosure. While most information is disclosed through ADB.org to reach a wide audience, the policy also commits ADB to ensure that relevant information is shared with project-affected people during project design and implementation. ADB is also required to respond to requests for information about its operations and administration in a timely manner.

⁴ ADB. 2019. *ADB Communications Approach*. Manila.

⁵ ADB. [Access to Information Policy](#); and [International Plain Language Federation](#).

1. ADB Policy and Strategy Papers

14. In 2019, ADB's Board of Directors considered five institutional policy papers. Four were disclosed on ADB.org within 14 days of approval or endorsement by the Board, as required by the AIP, and one was withheld because it contained financial information that is exempt from public disclosure. Four of these policies required chair summaries of the Board meeting, and all of them were disclosed. Notable institutional documents posted on ADB.org during the year included (i) the *ADB Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024*, which is the first corporate results framework aligned with Strategy 2030; and (ii) the *Contingent Disaster Financing under Policy-Based Lending in Response to Natural Hazards*, which is a new financing mechanism to support developing member countries in strengthening disaster preparedness and provide quick-disbursing budget support following natural disasters.⁶

Table 1: Web Posting of Selected ADB Project Documents (%)

Project Documents	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 ^a
1. Initial project data sheet	93	95	92	96	97	97	100	96
2. Draft environmental impact assessment (subject to 120-day rule)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
3. Draft environmental assessment and review framework	100	100	95	100	100	95	96	100
4. Draft resettlement framework or plan	100	100	97	10	100	91	100	100
5. Draft indigenous peoples planning framework or plan	100	100	100	100	100	87	95	100
6. Initial poverty and social analysis	48	86	73	83	85	67	97	75
7. Technical assistance report	68	91	90	88	89	75	99	82
8. Report and recommendation of the President, PFR report, grant assistance report, FAST report, investment facility report	93	88	88	90	95	90	95	93
9. Major change report	33	71	100	100	100	100	100	100
10. Progress report on tranche release	100	100	None	100	100	100	100	83
11. Annual audited project financial statement	None	100	100	83	100	100	100	94
12. Completion report or extended annual review report	96	97	97	99	95	100	93	91
OVERALL	84	93	92	93	95	91	98	91

ADB = Asian Development Bank, FAST = Faster Approach to Small Nonsovereign Transactions, PFR = periodic financing request.

^a ADB introduced a change to the methodology for counting the number of documents disclosed during a year. Documents with a disclosure requirement date in the following calendar year were no longer counted in the reporting year's data. Instead, those documents will be included in the following year's data. The disclosure rate would have been 98% using the previous methodology.

Source: Asian Development Bank.

⁶ ADB. 2019. *ADB Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024*. Manila; ADB. 2018. *Strategy 2030: Achieving a Prosperous, Inclusive, Resilient, and Sustainable Asia and the Pacific*. Manila; and ADB. 2019. *Contingent Disaster Financing under Policy-Based Lending in Response to Natural Disasters*. Manila.

2. Country Partnership Strategies and Regional Cooperation Strategies

15. The Board of Directors endorsed eight country partnership strategies (CPSs) in 2019: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Georgia, Nepal, and Uzbekistan. All were disclosed within the prescribed 14-day time frame after the Board's endorsement. If a CPS is translated into a national language, the translated version should be disclosed within 90 calendar days of Board endorsement. The Georgia CPS was translated, and the translation was disclosed within the required time frame.

16. The AIP also requires the disclosure of country or regional operations business plans within 14 days of their circulation to the Board. In 2019, all of the 27 country operations business plans circulated to the Board were disclosed on time as well as the two regional operations business plans prepared during the year.

3. Project Documents

17. ADB discloses information about its projects and operations to ensure that stakeholders are informed early in the project design stage and throughout implementation. In 2019, ADB posted 4,930 project documents on ADB.org, 15% more than in 2018. Project documents were downloaded 451,157 times, 6% more than in 2018.

18. ADB monitors a set of 12 key project document types to assess policy compliance (Table 1). Because these documents are required to be disclosed within certain time frames, they are good indicators of the overall level and timeliness of ADB's project document disclosure.

19. In 2019, 1,422 project documents were required to be disclosed based on the monitored 12 key project document types. As of 31 December, 91% of these were disclosed, down from 98% in 2018 mostly because of methodological changes adopted under the AIP.⁷

20. Of the 1,422 disclosed project documents, 60% were disclosed on time, a slight increase from 2018's 59% compliance—the lowest since 2012. Although the timely disclosure of sovereign documents improved from 62% to 65%, continued delays in the on-time disclosure of nonsovereign documents (down from 34% in 2018 to 17% in 2019) lowered the overall compliance rate.

21. The low timeliness compliance in 2018 was mostly because of delays in disclosing progress reports on tranche releases, project completion reports and extended annual review reports, and technical assistance (TA) reports. ADB's efforts to improve the timeliness of these documents were successful with tranche releases improving from 20% in 2018 to 83% in 2019, project completion reports and extended annual review reports improving from 76% in 2018 to 87% in 2019, and TA reports improving from 38% in 2018 to 57% in 2019.

22. The low timeliness compliance in 2019 (Table 2) mostly stemmed from delays in posting audited project financial statements (48%), initial poverty and social analysis (42%), initial project data sheets (46%), and TA reports (57%).

⁷ For the inaugural AIP annual report, ADB introduced minor changes to the methodology for counting the number of documents disclosed during a year. Documents with a disclosure requirement date in 2019 but not disclosed until early 2020 were not counted toward the 2019 total number of documents disclosed. Further, documents endorsed or approved by the Board during 2019 but with a disclosure requirement date in 2020 will be included in the 2020 data. The disclosure rate would have been 98% using the previous methodology.

23. In addition to the monitored documents, ADB routinely discloses a variety of other project documents and information throughout the project cycle to keep stakeholders informed. These include updates to project data sheets, safeguard documents, and legal agreements.

Table 2: Disclosure Timeliness of Selected ADB Project Documents
(%, as of 31 December)

Project Documents	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1. Initial project data sheet	34	62	44	62	58	58	61	46
2. Draft environmental impact assessment	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
3. Draft environmental assessment and review framework	73	83	86	100	82	84	79	86
4. Draft resettlement framework or plan	98	89	92	98	96	91	88	97
5. Draft indigenous peoples planning framework or plan	100	92	100	92	93	87	86	100
6. Initial poverty and social analysis	25	49	51	63	61	43	41	42
7. Technical assistance report	43	83	75	68	57	45	38	57
8. Report and recommendation of the President, PFR report, grant assistance report, FAST report, investment facility report	47	68	60	72	72	64	63	76
9. Major change report	0	29	67	92	100	0	100	100
10. Progress report on tranche release	71	67	NA	100	50	75	20	83
11. Annual audited project financial statement	NA	67	50	53	24	42	47	48
12. Completion report or extended annual review report	93	94	92	96	89	97	76	87
OVERALL	59	77	71	73	61	63	59	60

ADB = Asian Development Bank, FAST = Faster Approach to Small Nonsovereign Transactions, NA = not applicable, PFR = periodic financing request.

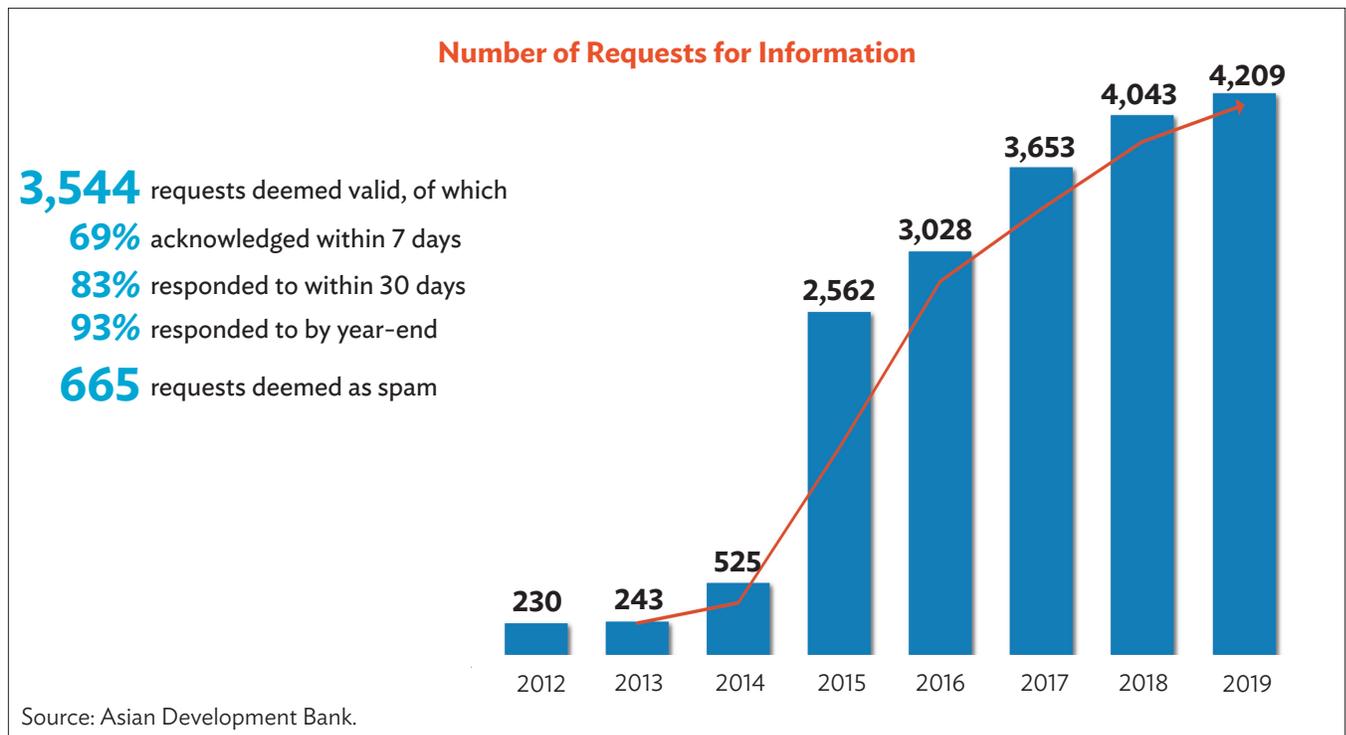
Source: Asian Development Bank.

4. Other Project and Program Information

24. The Independent Evaluation Department produced 25 reports assessing country partnership validations; program and project performances; TA performances; impact, thematic, corporate, and sector-wide evaluations; and other reports. It also produced 55 evaluation reports assessing sovereign project and program completion reports and 11 evaluation reports assessing nonsovereign project and program completion reports known as extended annual review reports. All reports for sovereign project and program completion reports were disclosed on ADB.org within the prescribed time frame. The evaluation reports for nonsovereign project and program completion reports were not disclosed because they contain information that falls under one or more of the AIP's exceptions to disclosure.

B. Requests for Information

25. In 2019, ADB received 4,209 requests for information, an increase from 4,043 in 2018, through the inquiry form on its corporate website. Of these, 3,544 (84%) were deemed valid. ADB acknowledged 69% of the valid requests within the required 7 days and responded to 83% of the valid requests within the required 30 days. ADB responded to 93% of the valid requests by the end of the year (Figure). The greatest number of requests were for project information (1,327 requests, or 37% of the total), and most of the requests came from the private sector. ADB's Access to Information Committee—the first of a two-stage appeals process—did not receive any appeals in 2019 regarding ADB's responses to these information requests.



IV. GOING FORWARD

26. ADB is committed to empowering external stakeholders by providing them with the information they need in time to understand, support, and participate in the bank's development activities. To ensure this, ADB will continue to implement activities to improve its on-time disclosure. For example, it will continue to conduct training for all operations departments, including virtual briefings for staff in headquarters and resident missions, and send disclosure reminders internally.

27. It will also continue to automate disclosure procedures for documents that go to the Board for information or approval to ensure all Board documents are disclosed automatically unless they are classified as *confidential*.

28. One of the reasons cited by staff for disclosure delays is confusion over the correct format of document cover pages. In 2019, 1,095 documents submitted for disclosure—14% of all documents submitted for disclosure—were returned for incorrect cover pages. To help minimize delays, ADB is working

to automate cover pages with all the required project information for these documents. Departments have also designated focal points to monitor disclosure compliance.

29. ADB is also finalizing an e-learning module that explains the principles, exceptions, information requests, and the two-stage appeals process of the AIP; and provides detailed information on disclosure systems and requirements. The module is planned to be available to all staff in the third quarter of 2020.

30. ADB will continue to explore other initiatives to streamline the disclosure of documents and provide advisory support and strengthen staff knowledge and capacity. ADB will monitor any impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis on compliance under the AIP and seek to mitigate any such impact as appropriate.

About the Asian Development Bank

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members —49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.



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