

Fostering Better Communication and Participation in Projects

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Enhancing Engagement Processes for Project Success

A concern is a grievance (or issue) about a project received directly by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) through correspondence, or through project activities or systems such as consultations or grievance mechanisms. It may relate to issues such as inadequate disclosure or consultation, noninclusive social development, or inadequate compensation. A single grievance may consist of several concerns.

In July–September 2012, the Department of External Relations and the NGO and Civil Society Center (NGOC) in ADB conducted the study on *Communication and Participation in ADB-Supported Projects: Identifying and Closing Gaps for Project Success*. The study analyzed recent civil society concerns¹ to identify trends. It covered 76 projects (and 213 new, associated concerns) with a total value of \$9.5 billion, two-thirds of which belong in the transport and energy infrastructure sectors. The concerns were drawn from three sources: the 2008–2011 Civil Society Concerns Briefing Papers published by NGOC, the complaints registry of ADB's Office of the Special Project Facilitator, and the compliance review reports and annual reports of ADB's Compliance Review Panel.

The study revealed that 55% of concerns, or 117, were related to inadequate communication and participation,² highlighting the importance of improving these areas. The study examined each concern to determine if it was directly related to disclosure/consultation, as per the taxonomy maintained in the Civil Society Concerns Briefing Papers, but also exercised judgment where it was felt that sufficient communication, stakeholder engagement, and participatory processes could have prevented the incident or project feature of concern to civil society.

The study determined that while most projects have general communication and participation objectives, an enhanced stakeholder analysis and a project communication strategy would generate a more extensive list of communication and participation objectives to better address stakeholder interests and perceptions of problems, leverage strengths, and surmount barriers.³ These essential initial engagement

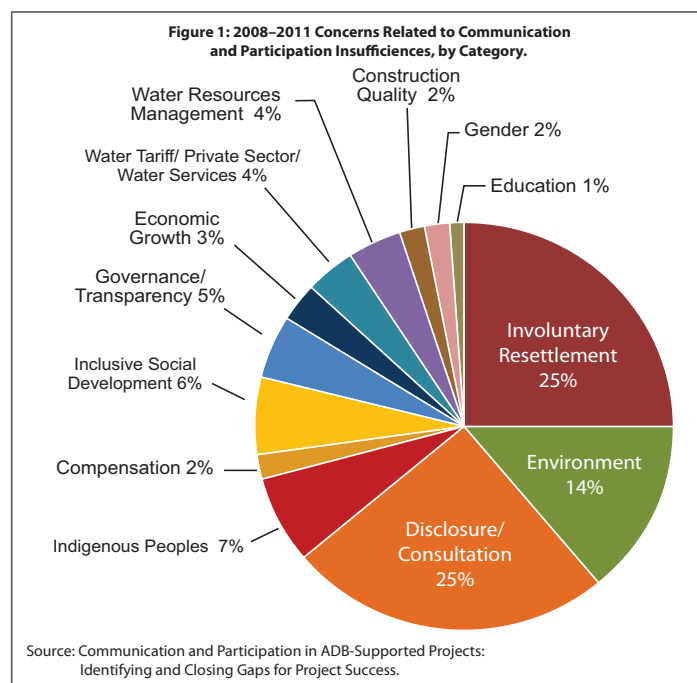
Highlights

- A 2012 Asian Development Bank (ADB) study revealed that 55% of concerns raised by civil society regarding its projects and programs were related to inadequate communication and participation.
- To build greater stakeholder trust, ADB's revised Public Communications Policy calls for more effective communication in project operations.
- Projects can better engage civil society by investing in communication and participation from the start. Effective and planned communication helps avoid concerns, mitigates risks, leads to improved project outcomes, and promotes sustainable benefits to project beneficiaries.

processes will lead to the adequate design of a communication and participation plan for civil society for project implementation and monitoring.

ADB Public Communications Policy

Civil society is increasingly vibrant and influential. It expresses concerns about the impacts of projects on their constituencies. Given that inefficient and/or ineffective projects have costs, which are borne by ADB's borrowers and their stakeholders, the concerns that civil society raises can provide valuable insights into project elements that may need strengthening. Therefore, focusing on communication and participation to allow their views to be heard can mitigate project risks, improve project outcomes, and promote project sustainability.



¹ Based on NGOC's Civil Society Concerns Briefing Papers, concerns can relate to capacity, compensation, construction quality, disclosure/consultation, economic growth, education, environment, gender, governance/transparency, inclusive social development, indigenous peoples, involuntary resettlement, water resources management, and water tariff/private sector/water services. A single project may highlight a grievance with multiple concerns and a single complaint received by the Office of the Special Project Facilitator may consist of a number of concerns.

² Communication is understood as one-way and two-way information sharing and gathering that promotes knowledge, behavior change, participation, and informed decision making among stakeholders; participation is the processes through which stakeholders influence or contribute to designing, implementing, and monitoring a development activity.

³ In the case of a community-based water and sanitation project, for example, communication and participation activities usually originate from a positive perspective where affected people can expect to directly benefit from the project intervention. Stakeholder participation in project design enhances quality and leads to ownership and sustainability. In the case of a transport project, communication and participation can be shaped by a desire to mitigate direct negative impacts to stakeholders as identified by ADB's environmental and social safeguards. These affected people often have no direct project benefits.

Indeed, ADB's Public Communications Policy recognizes that transparency and accountability are essential to development effectiveness. It recognizes the right of stakeholders, including civil society, to seek, access, and impart information about ADB's operations. When adopted in April 2005, the policy was deemed at the forefront of good practices among multilateral development banks: it brought about a major cultural change within ADB such that disclosure became standard operating procedure for all ADB-assisted projects.

Moving forward, ADB is committed to do more to enhance stakeholders' trust and ability to engage in ADB-assisted projects. In 2011, a review of the policy maintained the presumption in favor of disclosure as a fundamental principle. It also made revisions to expand and speed up access to information. Under the revised policy, some important decisions were to (i) clarify the list of exceptions to disclosure, (ii) share more information, (iii) release documents earlier, (iv) create an independent appeals panel, and (v) strengthen project communications.

Given the findings of the study, the revision of the Public Communications Policy was highly relevant and timely. The research highlighted the potential implications of civil society concerns: the quantification of their likely impacts would be a rewarding exercise. Intuitively, they would spring from project delays, time and resources spent for after-the-fact communication and participation planning and activities, time and resources spent on modifying project design, damage to reputation, and poor project outcomes.

Next Steps

Considering the gaps the study identified, certain steps would foster better communication and participation in projects and offset risks before they come to roost:⁴

- Embed monitoring of concerns as a routine management tool within eOps⁵ and develop a protocol for departmental and centralized routine analysis. Institutionalize standardized terminology in project concerns tracking systems.
- Make adjustments to (i) the Project Administration Manual, to include an enhanced stakeholder analysis and detailed communication and participation plans that specify actions, not just strategies; (ii) eOps, to record communication and participation objectives and progress.
- Undertake a cost-benefit analysis study in a few projects to quantify project losses caused by inadequate communication and participation.

⁴ This list is exploratory and noncommittal.

⁵ eOps is an ADB-wide electronic system that helps manage all project-related information and documents and supports ADB's streamlined business processes.

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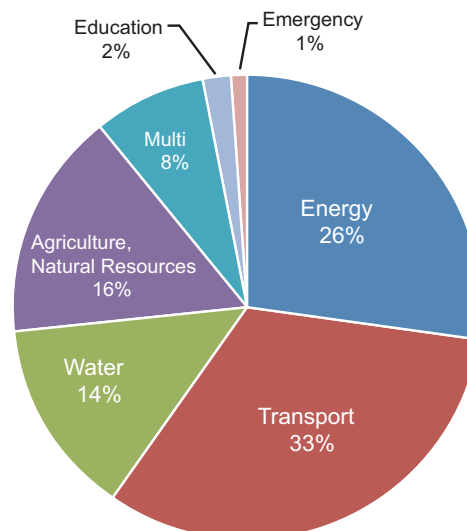
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Figure 2: 2008–2011 Concerns Related to Communication and Participation Insufficiencies, by Sector.



Source: Communication and Participation in ADB-Supported Projects: Identifying and Closing Gaps for Project Success.

- Develop a document template for a combined communication and participation plan.
- Design a system to harvest communication and participation examples and lessons learned.
- Share knowledge of communication and participation methods and tools.
- Identify new methods and tools, e.g., social media, for improved communication and participation.
- Issue tool kits for developing communication and participation plans, beginning with resettlement.
- Work with project implementers to build communication and participation capacity and with ADB-hosted communities of practice to mainstream adequate communication and participation in project design and implementation.

Related Links

- ADB. 2011. *Public Communications Policy 2011: Disclosure and Exchange of Information*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/pcp-2011
- ADB. 2012. *Communication and Participation in ADB-Supported Projects: Identifying and Closing Gaps for Project Success*. Manila. Available on request.