

HISTORY OF ADVOCACY ON ADB

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The people's advocacy on the ADB did not start in the early 1990's. Many an activists have voiced out the need for the Bank to be accountable on its activities. However, it was only in 1992, when a regional formation took on the tasks of monitoring the activities of the Bank. Prior to that, records show that the Environmental Policy Institute, a U.S. based environmental organization, may have been the first NGO which presented itself to be invited to the 21st ADB Annual Meeting on April 1988. During the succeeding year, this organization extended invitation to four other organizations to attend the ADB annual meetings held in China, India, Canada and Hongkong. These organizations are Friends of the Earth-U.S. (FoE-U.S.), Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN), Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI), and the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC).

The 25 NGO representatives which attended the Hongkong ADB Annual Meeting in 1992, bonded together by a common interest to understand better the operations of the Bank in the region and its impact to environment and poverty alleviation, decided to form a loose network that would provide the exchange of information among NGOs. During that time, information from the Bank was very limited. The Bank only provided information to the State and NGO requests for information were always referred back to the State. NGOs have asserted itself as a stakeholder, being taxpayers of the State. It was not an easy task. The Bank towered itself like a Goliath, while the NGOs come like a David. However, the only weapons that NGOs carry with them that moved the Bank to listen, were the concrete case studies of the impact of Bank operations to communities and the environment. The Bank was forced to answer questions, and later, to provide information to NGOs.

In 1993, a year after the Hongkong meeting, the loose network formalized itself as the NGO Working Group on the ADB. The Philippine NGOs composed of the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) and the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, Inc.-Kasama sa Kalikasan/ Friends of the Earth-Philippines, served as the secretariat housed at the LRC-KsK Office. From 20 NGOs in 1992, the network has grown to 112 NGOs coming from 21 countries in 1996. There is an increasing trend in the number of NGOs who are interested to do advocacy work on the ADB.

The Working Group organized the first Asian Regional Consultation on ADB in April 1994. This was participated by 31 NGO representatives. The second and third regional consultations were participated by 42 and 63 NGO representatives respectively. For the

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period 1989 to 1996, thirty-six (36) case studies have been presented to the Bank. The initial task of facilitating information in the region has snowballed into facilitating a regional campaign challenging the Bank's growth-oriented development model and centralized top-down development strategies. The campaign on the ADB is an Asian-led campaign.

Other areas of concern raised by NGOs and community based organizations include:

- issues on the Bank's transparency and accountability;
- access to relevant information in a timely manner;
- public participation in the project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- social and environmental impacts of Bank programs and projects;
- the Bank's private sector lending;
- the Bank's role in regional and sub-regional economic operation.

In 1995, several policies were drafted by the Bank and circulated to NGOs for comments. Some of the NGO recommendations were as follows:

On the information policy

- Documents should be available in the national and/or local language;
- There should be a window to receive direct complaints and comments from the communities;
- The existing information policy should be revised so that it is mandated to play a more proactive role in providing critical and relevant project documents and information to communities from the time the project is conceptualized.

On the inspection function

- The scope of the inspection function needs to be enhanced to permit any legitimate grievance being investigated.

On promoting good governance

- There should be a moratorium for any project that faces great public opposition.

On the policy on Indigenous Peoples

- There should be a moratorium on ongoing projects which violate the rights of indigenous peoples, and which has not gone through the process of consultation with the affected peoples, pending a study of how these projects can be revised as to avoid any destruction to lives and ways of life. Projects which, by nature, are destructive (such as huge dams) should be altogether stopped;
- Project quality should also be evaluated on a project's capacity to genuinely improve the lives of the people;
- There should be a system by which governments and the Bank can be made accountable for damage incurred to lives and property as a result of a project;

- Procedures on project-determination, planning, evaluation and monitoring should be overhauled in a manner that will allow for the participation of the indigenous peoples in proposed project sites;
- The Bank is enjoined to veer away from large-scale projects that have proven to be destructive. The bank should support small-scale projects which are sustainable and cheaper. This includes providing support to projects which seek to develop or discover alternative sources of energy which are environment-friendly. In the field of agriculture, the Bank should support efforts to promote ecologically-sound farming techniques.

On the policy on women

- Women in development program assessment should be done regularly, especially in sectors known to “exclude” women, i.e. infrastructure;
- Project cycle should incorporate gender considerations Gender sensitive checklists must be provided in every stage of the project cycle especially during the planning stage where women’s voice may be heard;

On the population policy

- There should be more literacy program for women (there is a close correlation between fertility and female literacy);
- There should be better access to family planning information and services.

On involuntary resettlement policy

- A comprehensive Resettlement Plan should be in place in every project;
- There should be an expedite review of all projects involving ongoing resettlement programmes and those identified as having violated the Bank’s Policy or have incomplete resettlement plans should be cancelled or rectified immediately;
- The affected peoples should be made direct beneficiaries of all development projects and any consequent resettlement conditions must be an improvement on their conditions prior to the project;
- The policy’s objective to avoid or minimize displacements must also be reflected in the other policies of the Bank.

On the policy for the energy sector

- The Bank should restrict its energy lending to renewable technologies, expansion of natural gas, DSM and supply side efficiencies;
- The Bank needs to undertake policy and operational reforms so that its loan evaluation criteria, management reward structures, and analytical and planning tools are not biased toward conventional power generation technologies and against renewables;
- The establishment of a Renewable Energy Development Fund in DMCs to offer finance to local community-based renewable initiatives should be considered.

On the forestry policy

- The self-rule, self-determination and control over natural forest of the tribal and indigenous people should be recognized;

- Property rights over common property should be recognized;
- The innovations, models and practices of forestry management that the forest communities or the indigenous peoples have developed should be seriously considered;
- Local environment experts and representatives of forest communities who have no bias for the government of the respective country or the Bank should be included in the Bank's regular project monitoring/review;
- The Bank must take all practical measures so that a country receiving its loans does not clear cut its second or third growth forest to make space for commercial afforestation activities;
- The Bank must strictly maintain that industrial and fuelwood plantations should be established only on degraded and uninhabited forests land identified by the local forest communities as suitable for such purposes;

On the agriculture policy

- A regionwide food and agriculture survey highlighting the impact of ADB loan projects for the past three decades and emphasizing the new realities and pressing needs of Asian countries particularly the issues of poverty reduction, food security, sustainability of agriculture, and environmental conservation should be conducted;
- The Bank should formulate a new wholistic policy on agriculture and rural development (particularly addressing sustainability and equity issues) that provides an overarching framework for the sector, within a process of consultation and participation of relevant partners specifically representatives of Asian farmers, peasants, and fisherfolk, people's organizations and NGOs;
- The Bank should increase lending and give priority to agriculture and rural development in line with its thrust in poverty reduction and in view of the worsening food security situation;
- The Bank should examine its support for regional agricultural institutions and programs that promote genetically uniform and high-yielding seed varieties (HYVs);
- The Bank should support agricultural research that adopts a holistic approach to agriculture, addresses parameters of food security and sustainability, recognizes indigenous knowledge systems, and allows the participation of the farmers and communities themselves in the research process;
- The Bank should examine its agricultural loan portfolio to evaluate how past and present projects have impacted on farmers, fisherfolk, and agricultural communities;
- The Bank should ensure that projects incorporate sustainability issues, food security parameters, and equity considerations – in particular to target improving the poor's access to resources, improving incomes, enhancing community participation in decision-making, agrarian and aquatic reform, devolution of powers, and enhancing gender equality.

The Asian campaign came at an opportune time when there was a discussion related to the Bank's doubling of its capital resources or the General Capital Increase (GCI) in 1994, and the replenishment of the Asian Development Fund (ADF VII). There was a general call for the Bank to review its progress in meeting its acknowledged goals and responsibilities before any additional funding is given to the Bank. Thus, the Asian

Development Bank created the Task Force on Improving Project Quality in 1993 to conduct an internal review to improve its standards of performance and enhance the effectiveness of its operations. Four hundred twenty seven (427) projects were post evaluated by the Bank and according to the Bank's Task Force Report on Improving Project Quality, only 60% of the Bank's post-evaluated projects have been rated as generally successful.

The **core strategic interventions** of the Working Group include:

- direct policy advocacy for specific policy changes;
- research grounded on people's experiences regarding the implementation of Bank policies as reflected in the way project loans and technical assistance are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated; and
- direct lobby with the decision makers of the ADB which includes the Board of Governors and the Board of Directors, as well as with Bank Management and Project Officers.

As the network grew in numbers and concerns, the NGO Working Group Secretariat recommended the formation of an International Committee that would facilitate the regional campaign. The NGO Working Group evolved into an institutional organization now known as the NGO FORUM on the ADB.

The interests of the NGOs vary. There are those who would want the abolition of the ADB. If it does not serve its purpose as a development Bank, its existence is being challenged. However, this position could not be taken as the Working Group position since there are communities which still believes that they benefit from the Bank. This is especially true on education and health related projects. There are those who say that we need to reform the Bank and make it more transparent and accountable. Most of the NGOs have taken this position and are still hopeful with the modest successes it has gained over the years. The Bank is hiding on its rhetorics and NGOs are challenged to be more vigilant in its critical collaboration with the Bank. There are NGOs who are only after getting more information on the ADB to familiarize themselves on how to get funding from the Bank or even be implementors of specific Bank projects. These NGOs self-eliminate themselves from the lobby group because of their limited vested interests.

The advocacy has made relative *substantive gains* for the past years:

- Bank cooperation with NGOs have been institutionalized;
- Access to information has improved compared to 1992 when all requests for information have to pass through governments;
- Some projects were not approved because of issues raised by NGOs;
- The environment and social development offices in the Bank has developed;
- The bank shifted its operational focus from project-specific to country-specific;
- The ADB has set a target of 50:50 project mix, meaning at least 50% of the total number of projects should be social and environmental projects. In addition, at least 40% of the total amount loaned should be used for social and environmental projects;

- NGO critiques, suggestions and recommendations on the draft policy documents have been submitted; the Bank consults NGOs for input;
- Increased awareness among NGOs on issues related to the ADB;
- Sharing of NGO experiences and strategies;
- Consolidated community action and facilitated community voices inside the Bank.

What has been done, what we are doing and where we want to take this campaign is the challenge facing present NGO lobby group on the ADB. In all our efforts, I hope that we continue to facilitate bringing the community voices inside the Bank. ■

Reference: NGO-PO Campaign Manual on the ADB for Beginners published by the NGO Working Group on the Asian Development Bank, October 1996