

Water for all or for private profit? **Asia-Pacific groups to probe ADB's water policy**

11, November 2005, QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES-WATER rights campaigners and advocates from different Asia-Pacific countries affected by the Asian Development Bank's 2001 "Water-for-All" Policy will be holding a three-day conference here to consolidate critiques and to develop common positions and alternatives on key water issues.

The "Regional Conference on the ADB's Water Policy" on 13 -15 November 2005 at Sulo Hotel marks civil society's response to the ADB-funded water projects. It has been criticized across the region for pursuing the privatization of water services as solutions to ailing public utilities. Full cost recovery measures are also stressed to attract potential investors whose interests lie more in making profits rather than providing affordable service.

Country experiences have shown that this has not worked to reduce poverty. Continuously rising tariffs have, for one, eroded access to water especially for poor communities. Environmental and accountability issues are also well-documented.

"It is important to gather representatives from different Asia-Pacific countries to present their cases-the people's experiences, the impact of the ADB's water projects and gather critiques on the ADB's 2001 Water Policy based on the practical experience," said NGO Forum on ADB executive director Hemantha Withanage.

The Philippines is now being tabled in the ADB review. It has already concluded in-country consultation in India, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan.

The objectives of the in-country consultation and review are as follows: to assess the water policy's implementation performance; identify challenges, investment requirements and opportunities in the water sector; determine its capacities and constraints; and advise the Bank's management if the policy needs to be revised.

Lidy Nacpil, international coordinator of Jubilee South, said that ADB initially failed to include questions pertaining to the issues of affordability and access when it held in-country consultations in Cambodia.

"We caution them (ADB) not to manipulate the outcome of the review in favor of private investors," warned Nacpil.

Nacpil added that the policies of multilateral institutions, like the ADB and the World Bank, which tie people's access to water to their capacity to pay makes a mockery of their so-called "poverty reduction" goals.

Freedom from Debt Coalition president Ana Maria R. Nemenzo supported this, citing the failed water privatization experiences of countries like the Philippines.

"The Manila privatization experience shows as much: a cautionary tale that where water services hinge on profit making, the basic right to water of all individuals, particularly the poor, will always be at risk," she said.

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