

FORUM BRIEFER 01-03

HAVE WE MADE A DENT ON THE ADB?

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Rising protests, stronger demands for transparency and accountability, continuing critique of the ADB's rhetoric and actions, finding alternatives – these themes permeate this year's first issue of BankWatch published by the NGO Forum of the ADB (formerly the NGO Working Group on the ADB). These same concerns have dominated the NGO campaign on the ADB since 1988. The campaign seems to have accomplished so much in thirteen years, and yet on closer reflection -- HAVE WE REALLY MADE A DENT ON THE ADB?

As the poverty-promoting effects of the Asian crisis -- brought about in no small measure by destructive policies of the Bank – have been seemingly 'contained' by the ADB and its cohort institutions the IMF and World Bank, we see the Bank not in the least contrite nor distracted in its rigid pursuit of 'globalizing' the Asia-Pacific region. Trade and investment liberalization and 'facilitation' (TILF) remains a paramount concern of the Bank. A renewed push for privatization, benignly labeled as 'public-private sector partnerships' is the key strategy contained in the Bank's recently-crafted Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS). And poverty reduction? How convenient to hitch on to current bandwagon and lump all the Bank's pet activities under the 'overarching goal' of poverty reduction. Hearts will bleed a little more with the Bank's Annual Report this year focusing on the plight of poor disadvantaged children throughout the region.

Though we may differ in our approach on how to challenge the Bank – some do so discreetly, others protest in the streets, still others prefer to 'engage' and dialogue – ultimately, we are but a small nuisance blip on the Bank's radar screen. The imperative for us will always be to increase our tribe, push the correct button, and hit the Bank where it will matter most – its pockets and its mutually beneficial relations with its international partners and creditors, among others – a thankless task which the NGO Forum attempts to take on, alongside our partner NGOs and local communities all over the region.

* The NGO FORUM ON ADB (FORUM) is a network of diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs), peoples' organizations (POs), community-based organizations and other public interest groups with advocacy and campaigns relating to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Manila-based Secretariat can be reached at: Room 402, 107-A Kalayaan Avenue, Diliman, 1101 Quezon City, Philippines; Telefax: +632 9297987; E-mail: forum@pacific.net.ph. Visit our homepage: www15.brinkster.com/ngoforum.