

ISSN 0001-172X



9 770001 172389

SEPTEMBER 2025

BANKWATCH

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF NGO FORUM ON ADB





WORLD

Closed Doors, Open Funds: The Accountability Crisis in Central Asia's Development Projects	4
The Asian Development Bank's Critical Mining Agenda Should Stop Going in Circles	9
The world needs a new growth mode	12
ADB's nuclear gamble is a dangerous climate detour	15
ADB's Energy Policy rushing toward the wrong side of history	18

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

Climate advocates stage a protest in front of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) headquarters in Mandaluyong City on August 14, denouncing the bank's rushed 2025 Energy Policy Review and proposed rollbacks — including support for nuclear energy, fossil fuels, and destructive mining. Photo credit: Santi San Juan | Manila Bulletin

Closed Doors, Open Funds: The Accountability Crisis in Central Asia’s Development Projects

by Shoira Olimova

Development banks are increasingly turning their attention to Central Asia, attracted by political and economic reforms that are opening up markets, which was formerly isolated from global investment. Recent transitions in leadership and policy shifts across the region have created new opportunities for private sector engagement, infrastructure development, and sustainable growth.

Based on the data from Early Warning System, compiled in our [South Caucasus and Central Asia Tracker](#), from January 1, 2020 to March 31, 2025 a total of 2160 projects with investment of 251.6 billion were proposed in the South Caucasus and Central Asia mainly by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

(AIIB), World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC), European Investment Bank (EIB), Green Climate Fund (GCF).

According to data compiled by the [Early Warning System](#), between January 1, 2020, and March 31, 2025, Uzbekistan has emerged as the primary recipient of development finance investment within the Central Asian countries. Over this period, the country accounted for 329 projects, with a total investment volume estimated at approximately \$23.7 billion. Notably, Uzbekistan has attracted a higher concentration of energy-related projects relative to its regional peers. However, these projects also exhibit a greater level of risk, particularly in the energy sector, distinguishing Uzbekistan from other countries in the region.

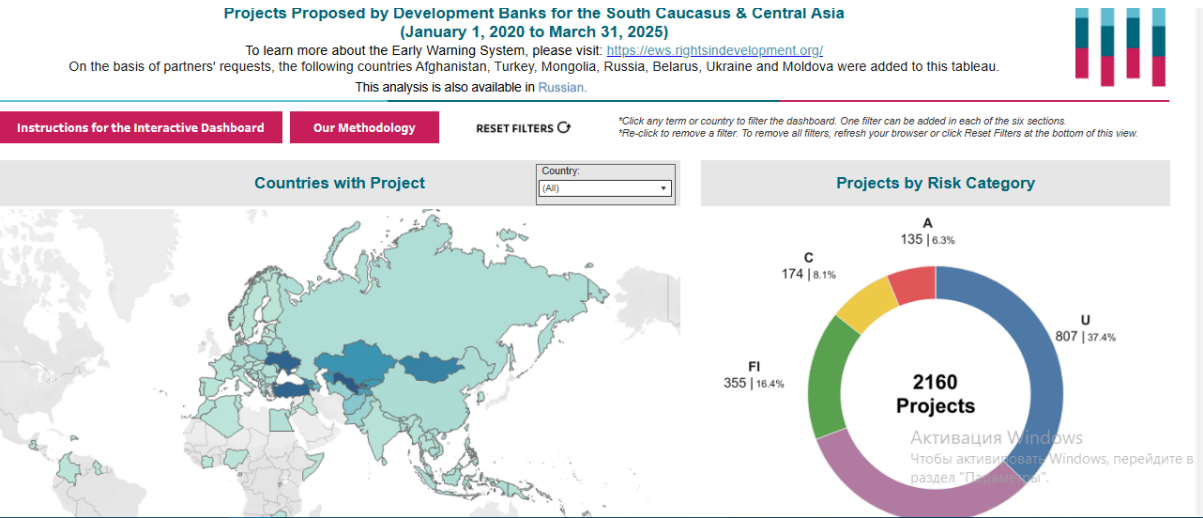


Table 1. Energy investment data for Central Asia: January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2025

COUNTRY	# OF PROJECTS	INVESTMENT AMOUNT	Financed sectors	Risk category
Uzbekistan	317	US\$23,7 billion	Finance and Energy, Industry, Government Reform	A (40), B (92), FI (46)
Kazakhstan	194	US\$14.6 billion	Finance, Energy, Industry & Trade, TA, Transport	A (10), B (51), FI (28)
Tajikistan	158	US\$ 3,8 billion	Finance, TA, Law and Reform, Agriculture and Industry, Energy, Education & Health	A (6), B (33), FI (21)
Kyrgyzstan	186	US\$6,3 billion	TA, Finance, Government Reform, Water and sanitation, Industry and Trade	A (2), B (47), FI (21)
Turkmenistan	52	US\$785, 4 million	TA, Industry and Trade	A (2), B (13), U (34)

Speaking about financed sectors and the category of risks of the invested projects, as we can see from Table 1, Uzbekistan has more risky projects connected with energy projects in the region. The entire Aktau-Tamdy state reserve with bird Area and key Biodiversity Area has been moved to another area because of [the Zarafshon wind power project \(500 MW\), EBRD-promoted by Masdar company \(Abu Dhabi\) in May 2023](#).

Additionally, many multi-country projects funded by the ADB, EBRD, AIIB, and IFC are focused on sectors such as energy, transport, and industry and trade, and are implemented in Central Asia, European countries, and parts of South Asia.

Most Technical Assistance projects across various sectors are primarily implemented in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile,

investments aimed at government-related reforms and development are largely directed toward Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It is worth noting that projects related to technical assistance and reforms are financed through grant investments.

Central Asia's Shrinking Civic Space: When Development Harms Accountability

Despite the promising rhetoric of openness and international investment, the reality for civil society in Central Asia paints a very different picture. Across the region, community and civil society continue to be sidelined from decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. Instead of fostering transparency, participation, and accountability, the environment for civil society remains largely restrictive, making it difficult, if not dangerous, for

citizens to question projects financed by Development Finance Institutions.

In Central Asia, civil society operates under constant threat: restrictive laws, bureaucratic hurdles, limited access to funding, and fear of repression define their daily reality. Building strong civil society networks has become essential, not only to amplify voices for human rights and environmental justice but also to resist increasing government pressure. While some countries in the region have introduced reform narratives, such as Uzbekistan's 2021-2025 "Concept on Development of Civil Society," these initiatives fall short. Major issues like restrictive Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) registration procedures, burdensome reporting obligations, and limitations on free speech remain unaddressed.

Similarly, Tajikistan has intensified repression, [with over 700 NGOs dissolved between May 2022 and August 2023](#), and human rights defenders, including journalists, facing severe intimidation. Kazakhstan restricts peaceful assembly and monitors NGOs receiving foreign funding, while Kyrgyzstan has enacted a "foreign agent" law to further limit NGO activities. Turkmenistan, one of the world's most authoritarian regimes, remains extremely repressive, ranking near the bottom of the [World Press Freedom Index](#). These countries exhibit ongoing efforts to stifle civil society and dissent.

The Development Banks Accountability Gap

One of the starkest illustrations of this repression is the limited number of complaints filed by Central Asian communities to the Development Banks' Accountability Mechanisms. Despite millions of dollars pouring into the region from institutions like the World Bank, ADB, EBRD, and IFC, the actual number of registered grievances remains shockingly low. Referring to [the ADB complaint register archive](#) from 2012 to 2023, only 15 complaints have been registered from Central Asian countries, mainly from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The panel cases of the [Independent Project Accountability Mechanism of EBRD](#) also show only 5 projects submitted in between 2020 to 2024. From their [case registry](#), we learn that recent complaints were connected with the Zarafshon Wind project in Uzbekistan (2024) submitted by Bankwatch and the Indorama Agro Capex Loan (2023) by the Uzbek Forum for Human Rights. Similar to ADB and EBRD, from 2010 to 2024, the World Bank's Inspection Panel has only recorded 8 cases originating from Central Asian countries, primarily linked to projects under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation ([CAREC initiative in Kazakhstan](#)) and support for the construction of the [Rogun Dam](#) in Tajikistan.

Communities and civil society often lack the knowledge and capacity to navigate the application process, conduct thorough research, and submit complaints effectively. Moreover, the lengthy review process for cases acts as a significant deterrent, as communities face uncertainty regarding their safety and security during and after the submission of complaints. In most cases, governments and state-connected companies control project implementation, leaving little space for independent oversight or public participation. Therefore, Development

Finance Institutions and other relevant organizations need to prioritize improving access to information and strengthening outreach efforts. Additionally, the prolonged nature of the complaint process poses significant risks, as activists or civil society involved in submitting complaints may face persecution, including imprisonment, before the process concludes. Below, I included some cases that may give a glimpse of what is happening now in Central Asia.

Case 1: Bishkek's Greenest Ride — Under Threat

In Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, the city's iconic trolleybus — the most environmentally friendly form of public transport — is disappearing. The reason? A \$50 million project funded by ADB aiming at introducing new electric buses under the "[Urban Transport Electrification Project](#)." However, for the grassroots movement Bishkeksmog, the project represents more than just modernization — it symbolizes the reckless dismantling of a sustainable transport system without proper public consultation or transparency. [Investigations by Bishkeksmog](#) revealed inconsistencies and possible violations of international loan agreements between the city, the EBRD, and the ADB. Despite these concerns, the local government prohibited peaceful protests, arrested activists (including the head of Bishkeksmog), and ignored labor rights violations [affecting over 600 trolleybus employees](#). Legal action by Bishkeksmog is ongoing, but negotiations with the banks have proven difficult, with responsibility for the violations being pushed between banks and local authorities.

Case 2: Silencing Critics in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, Development Finance Institutions' investments in the oil and energy sector have become entangled with allegations of corruption and suppression of free speech. A report by a Kazakh CSO partner, "[Civil Society Participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(EITI\)](#)," details a concerning case. Journalist Daniira Adilbekova was sentenced to four years and six months in a high-security prison on October 18, 2024, for allegedly publishing false information about corruption within Kazakhstan's energy sector, specifically targeting Vice Minister of Energy Erlan Akkenzhenov. Her trial was widely condemned for its lack of transparency, highlighting the risks faced by those who challenge government narratives, especially when those narratives involve Development Finance Institution-backed projects.

Case 3: Monitoring Under Threat in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's cotton industry has long been under international scrutiny, especially concerning labor rights. Between 2015 and 2023, Indorama Agro secured financial support totaling approximately \$261 million from several international development institutions—including [\\$75 million from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development \(EBRD\)](#), [\\$171 million from the International Finance Corporation \(IFC\)](#), and [\\$15 million from the Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#)—to advance the cotton sector in Uzbekistan. Yet, activists monitoring these projects, such as the [Uzbek Forum for Human Rights \(UFHR\)](#), face intimidation and threats. In early 2024, a government security officer warned an independent rights monitor involved in the project that their activities were "dangerous" and could lead to criminal charges. Such

threats demonstrate the enormous risks faced by those trying to hold powerful actors accountable, particularly when international finance is involved.

Moving Forward: Reimagining Accountability in Central Asia

Central Asia's experience highlights a troubling disconnect between the promises of international development and the lived experiences of local communities. For Development Finance Institutions, investing in the region without ensuring robust transparency, community engagement, and safe grievance mechanisms is not just negligent — it's complicit in the silencing of civil society.

Moving forward, Development Finance Institutions and international partners must:

- ⦿ Strengthen outreach and access to project information
- ⦿ Simplify and secure grievance mechanisms
- ⦿ Protect community activists and independent monitors
- ⦿ Demand meaningful community participation before project approval
- ⦿ Ensure independent monitoring throughout project cycles.

In a region where raising your voice can mean risking your freedom, the international community must not turn a blind eye. Investment without accountability is not development — it's exploitation. The story of Central Asian CSOs is not simply one of survival against the odds. It is a story of creativity, adaptation, and a profound belief in the possibility of change—even when that change comes slowly, quietly, and in everyday acts of courage. Supporting civil society in Central Asia, therefore, requires more than technical assistance or project-based funding. It calls for recognising and protecting the diverse forms of civic action that exist beyond official structures. It demands flexibility from international donors, respect for local agency, and a long-term commitment to defending the civic space against authoritarian encroachment.

The Asian Development Bank's Critical Mining Agenda Should Stop Going in Circles

Civil society groups have documented the environmental and social costs that are exacted across the lifecycle of "clean energy" technologies.

By Mageswari Sangaralingam and Dwi Sawung

The prevailing narrative is that a low-carbon future is achievable only if we rely on expanded mining – a resource-intensive sector that would provide the minerals needed for the mass and quick deployment of renewable energy solutions. Having been extracted for decades already, nickel, cobalt, and lithium, among others, are now branded as critical minerals for various wind, solar, battery storage, and electric vehicle (EV) applications.

The line that "mining is needed for development" brings back a long history of conflicts with communities and social movements that have compelled international financial institutions like World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) to establish safeguards policies and avoid funding mining activities for decades. For the ADB, it was its entanglement with Marcopper, which unleashed the largest environmental disaster in Philippine history, that stopped the money for mining. At the dawn of clean energy transition, however, those days are gone.

The ADB's recently released board direction for critical mining joins the choir of financial institutions following the WB's Climate Smart Mining (CSM) framework, which centers on four pillars: climate mitigation, climate adaptation, reducing material impacts, and creating market opportunities. The CSM focused on the importance of a circular economy centered on recycling – a convenient copout for environmentally-destructive practices.

The circular economy has been popular in the ADB's portfolios, but it has to be understood that this concept is not just about recycling. It involves a systemic shift, starting with reducing material use first, then redesigning better systems and products, and then reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and finally recycling to keep materials in use for as long as possible. This order of priority ensures the least pressure on resources and the smallest level of carbon emissions. Most importantly, circularity needs to be placed in context. But reducing production is not on the ADB or WB's agenda.

The WB projects demand for critical minerals such as graphite, lithium, and cobalt, could increase by nearly 500 percent by 2050, something that would require intense mining activities on a dying planet. Civil society has documented the environmental and social issues across the lifecycle of “clean energy” technologies – from nickel mining and manufacturing, to the harms to workers in Indonesia and Malaysia, to end-of-life issues in the Philippines. Given those costs, it is unacceptable to see used minerals in landfills. But can recycling offset the impacts of mining as the industry claims it could? The WB itself said that “further extraction will still be required to supply the critical minerals needed to produce these lowcarbon technologies even with large future increases in recycling rates.”

But the ADB seems to be coming down on the side of toxic positivity. Its board paper stated that the region can benefit from recycled critical minerals, which are projected to increase fivefold to \$200

billion by 2050 under current policies. In case the IPCC memo skipped the ADB boardroom, we don’t have until 2050. We need to keep global temperatures at 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030.

Unfortunately, the ADB intends to incorporate this thinking into its Energy Policy, which is currently undergoing a midterm review process. For EV batteries, industry claims rosy recovery rates of almost 90 percent, but currently only about 5 percent of batteries are recycled effectively globally. Too many factors affect the success of recycling for critical minerals, from logistical issues to the lack of end-to-end information on battery designs, as well as the lack of profitability for recycled materials, and the lack of technologies that are proven safe. In Asia, the fundamental infrastructure of waste collection is lacking; hence, recycling manufacturers might end up importing EV waste to get secondary raw material for recycled EV batteries, which has happened with lead acid battery recycling in the past.



Destruction of forests and displacement of communities caused by nickel mining in Sulawesi, Indonesia — where corporate and political interests are overriding environmental and human rights. Photo Credit: FERN / Fern.org

This underscores the ambiguous purpose of pushing recycling as the marker of critical mineral circularity: if there are other more sustainable options, why persist with recycling? As pointed out by NGO Forum on ADB, the bank's approach to Critical Minerals to Clean Energy Technologies, which banks on recycling as a key strategy for sustainability, has largely been couched in the language of "economic benefits," the rhetoric of which "often reinforces exploitative practices accompanied by violence and militarization, deepening inequalities and conflict in resource-rich developing nations."

In short, circularity cannot be divorced from the profiteering interests that perpetuate its presence in development strategies concerning waste. Circularity will just embed itself into existing systems that have helped perpetuate the climate crisis, especially in countries that do not have adequate end-of-life policies yet. Without regulated and safe end-of-life policies in place, the most vulnerable people, such as informal e-waste collectors, will be impacted, which adds to the growing list of human rights concerns in the entire value chain of renewable energy technologies.

GAIA, a global movement of environmental justice advocates, says this lax policy environment also leads to the crossborder movement of EV battery waste, which poses problems especially for Global South countries that have historically borne the brunt of managing the waste that Global North countries cannot or refuse to handle or process. Instead of curating increased demands for critical minerals and focusing so closely on recycling, the ADB must first ensure that real energy needs are met through meaningful consultations and collaborations with communities, especially those affected by big ticket projects. It must also adopt a truly holistic approach to managing waste outside the regimes of disposability and profitability. Then the ADB needs to invest in options that rank higher in terms of sustainability.

With EV batteries, for instance, aside from exploring other battery chemistries that rely less on critical minerals, financing can flow into systems that make repurposing a priority. This also requires producers to look at battery designs that rely less on proprietorship, from the actual physical design of parts to the digital infrastructure of battery management systems. By designing batteries with repurposing and not disposability in mind, their lifespan can be increased, easing the demand for critical minerals from the EV sector.

By listening to communities and approaching renewable energy development with real circularity in mind, the ADB's Energy Policy can define what a genuine climate energy solution should look like: people-led and planet-centered.

Originally published at [The Diplomat](#).

The world needs a new growth mode

Rene E. Ofreneo

From June 30 to July 3, 2025, around 15,000 delegates from over 190 countries gathered in Sevilla, Spain to take part in the Fourth International Conference on "Financing for Development" or FfD4. The global summit was a gallant effort of the indefatigable UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, to rebuild the trust of peoples of the world in the 80-year-old United Nations, whose Charter states that member countries should forge "cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character."

In Sevilla, the focus was on what the conference's title declares: financing development. Per estimates by the FfD4 organizers, the world needs to mobilize at least \$4 trillion to finance growth and development in countries lagging behind in meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These are mostly countries in the Global South that have been reeling from rising levels of debt, trade deficits and budget shortfalls. Hence, the popular call for changes in the global financial architecture, one that enables developing countries to avail themselves of investment and financial assistance in order to grow their economies without falling into a debt trap.

The trouble is that the FfD4 failed to spell out what are the needed changes to make the global financial architecture fair and fully supportive of the sustainable development (susdev) needs of countries of the Global South. The FfD4 response,

through a "Sevilla Commitment," was a general call: for cooperating member countries to mobilize more "public and private investments for sustainable development, including actions to strengthen the tax system and domestic resource mobilization." There are also proposed measures to ease the debt burden of developing countries such as lowering the debt service ratio, including "pause clause" during crisis periods. The above Sevilla Commitment, packaged in pro-poor rhetorics of the representatives of the rich countries, is too sweeping and tends to reduce the development problems of the Global South to a simple question of having access to "official development assistance" (ODA) and foreign investments, which the writers of the Commitment imply can only come from the rich countries of the Global North. The call does not say where these ODA and investments should go and how these shall be managed.

The truth is that there is nothing new in the call for the mobilization of more funds and investments for susdev, including domestic resource mobilization. This is what the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the other multilateral and bilateral financial institutions have been articulating openly for over half a century. In fact, the WB and the ADB were the first to use—in the 1970s—the term "development finance," understood to mean lending in support of development for countries in the Global South. Thus, "loans for development" were packaged to cover numerous infra

projects of borrowing country, from “hard” projects such as construction of dams and bridges to “soft” ones like upgrading a country’s health and education programs.

The most publicized development project in the 1970s was the Green Revolution (GR), which the WB and ADB, together with the Rockefeller Foundation and the bilaterals such as USAID and JICA, proclaimed as the solution to Asia’s hunger problem. And yet, hunger has not disappeared since. It has remained an obstinate reality in Asia, especially in the Philippines where the IRRI’s high-yielding rice (HYV) technology was originally developed.

Why the failure of the GR program to wipe out hunger? The answer is in the simplistic focusing of the program on the distribution of the HYV seeds and the propagation of the needed inputs, mainly fertilizer and chemicals produced by the “cooperating” agribusiness multinationals (MNCs). The packaging of the program failed to consider that in

building a country’s capacity to feed its people, the government of the borrowing country and its cooperating lenders should be able to craft an integrated agricultural transformation program that is able to address the manifold problems bedeviling the agri sector such as land tenure issues, availability of farm loans, stability of farm gate prices, affordability of farm inputs, break-up of trading monopolies, skills and knowledge upgrading of HYV adopters, and respect of the basic human and labor rights of farmers and farm workers.

Ironically, in the Philippines, the GR, launched by the martial-law government of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. as “Masagana 99,” was subverted by the multilateral aid givers themselves. This happened in the 1980s when they imposed policy conditionalities on the debt-hungry Philippines, which was then trying to secure new loans in order to stave off a debt-driven financial-economic crisis and service maturing old loans. One of the conditionalities was “agricultural deregulation,” which hit the agricultural

Experts discussing the future of development financing at the “Financing for Development” conference — what comes next for global aid and investment? Photo Credit: IDS (Institute of Development Studies)



sector big time because government farm credit subsidies and price support to palay harvests were withdrawn at a time when prices of inputs were rapidly rising. Agricultural deregulation means full opening up of the agri sector to the “free market” and to those who dominate this market, i.e., big traders, big importers, big lenders and big input producers/distributors.

Agricultural deregulation happens to be part of a bigger neo-liberal policy package aimed at fostering global market integration through “free market” programs that include privatization of government services (cutting off the “visible hand” of the government), deregulation of various sectors of the economy, and liberalization of trade and investment regimes (opening up the economy to foreign trade and foreign investors). This set of neo-liberal policies, dubbed as the “structural adjustment program” or SAP, has become the main guide of the multilateral/bilateral credit agencies in their lending operations. SAP and the vision of a “borderless” world market underpin the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1994-95 and the formation of scores of “free trade agreements” in various regions of the world. SAP became better known as the Washington Consensus.

Thus overall, catalyzing funds and foreign investments for capital-starved countries of the Global South has been on the agenda of the WB, ADB and other multilaterals and bilaterals, including the cooperating MNC partners from the Global North, since the 1980s. A call for such mobilization is not really new. What really matters at this point is to ask: what has been the impact of the growth model propounded by the architects of neo-liberalism in the economies

of the Global South, especially those which have become addicted to foreign borrowings and yet have failed to develop despite the flow of foreign loans and FDI. The Philippines and a number of African and Latin American countries are examples of how the neo-liberal policy agenda, in place from the 1980s to the present, has failed miserably in delivering inclusive and sustainable growth and development.

Yes, some countries from the Global South have performed well. These include South Korea and China, which have become global export champions and economic dynamos. However, these countries succeeded by not adhering to the SAP agenda or Washington Consensus doctrine. This topic deserves a separate discussion.

To conclude, it is abundantly clear that it is too simplistic for the FfD4 organizers of the UN to issue a global call for the stronger mobilization of foreign funds and investments to meet the sustainable development needs of poor countries of the Global South. One must ask first: for what and which way? Secondly, what kind of development model should be pursued by heavily-indebted developing countries to be able to achieve the 17 SDGs?

With the United States, an absentee in the FfD4 summit, now leading the assault against the WTO and the free-trade rules set by Donald Trump’s predecessors, this is a good time to debate the answers to the above questions.

Originally published at [Business Mirror](#).

ADB's nuclear gamble is a dangerous climate detour

By Nazareth Del Pilar and Rayyan Hassan



A newly discovered uranium deposit at India's Jaduguda mines, expected to extend resource life by over 50 years—raising both energy prospects and environmental concerns. Photo Credit: OMMCOM News

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is preparing to walk back one of its most important energy commitments. In 2021, the Bank pledged not to finance nuclear power, recognizing its steep costs, unresolved waste problems, and catastrophic safety risks. Now, in its 2025 Energy Policy Review, the ADB is considering lifting that ban. This reversal risks locking Asia into decades of debt, danger, and delay at a time when the climate clock is ticking.

Nuclear's reputation as a "clean" climate solution collapses the moment you look at the facts. It is slow, prohibitively expensive, and inherently unsafe. Globally, nuclear disasters show why these fears are justified. Fukushima in 2011 displaced over 150,000 people and left parts of Japan uninhabitable for

generations. Scientists warned that such catastrophic accidents could occur every 10-20 years, given the number of reactors worldwide.

In India's uranium mining belt of Jaduguda, Indigenous communities have lived for decades with radiation-linked cancers, congenital disorders, and poisoned lands. The uranium extracted there powers reactors hundreds of kilometers away, yet local people pay the true cost in their bodies and livelihoods.

In Tamil Nadu's Koodankulam, fisherfolk have organized for decades against nuclear reactors that threaten their lives and the seas that sustain them. In Maharashtra's Jaitapur, farmers and fisher communities have resisted one of the world's largest proposed nuclear



The Bataan Nuclear Power Plant in the Philippines — a decades-old symbol of the country's long and controversial debate over nuclear energy. Photo credit: BBC News

complexes, warning of ecological damage and irreversible threats to livelihoods.

The Philippines knows too well the dangers of nuclear energy. The mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant left behind illegitimate debt, environmental damage, and decades of community resistance in a disaster-prone region. Yet, as the country moves to pass a legal framework for nuclear power, it brings back the fears of the residents and anti-nuclear advocates in the country about how costly it would be for the communities and the environment.

Indonesia's plan to build out nuclear power plants in West Kalimantan threatens the region's rich biodiversity and encroachment on Indigenous Peoples' lands. Often viewed as a "game changer" and a thrust to energy transition, building

huge infrastructure projects such as this increases the risks of reprisals, displacement, and serious health hazards to them.

Nuclear's problems are not limited to accidents. The economics is equally dire. Projects routinely cost billions more than planned and take decades to complete. In Asia, where climate action requires rapid, decisive cuts in emissions, pouring scarce resources into projects that may deliver power only in the 2040s is reckless.

Meanwhile, renewable alternatives are already cheaper, faster, and more flexible. Solar and wind with storage can be deployed in months, not decades. They scale to communities, cut energy poverty, and build resilience against climate disasters. Every dollar directed toward nuclear is a dollar stolen from these proven solutions.

The ADB brands itself as Asia's "climate bank." But lifting the nuclear ban would make that claim ring hollow. Nuclear power delays and does not accelerate decarbonization. It diverts public money to a dangerous industry while exposing millions to long-term health and safety risks.

Worse, it undermines the Paris Agreement's goal of rapid, equitable emissions reductions. Asia does not need another false solution. It needs people-centered, decentralized, and renewable energy systems that serve communities rather than sacrifice them. If ADB is serious about its climate commitments, it must resist nuclear lobbying and reaffirm its 2021 commitment.

As ADB prepares to lift its ban, it could steer financing and policy toward a risky nuclear path under the guise of technical assistance across its Developing Member Countries. Nuclear is expensive. Nuclear is dangerous. The reality of Nuclear Energy means making huge sacrifice zones where communities are left to suffer. And nuclear is a derailment of our climate future. ADB must not waste another decade (or another dollar) on this false solution.

Originally published at [BusinessWorld](#).

ADB's Energy Policy rushing toward the wrong side of history

Jason Weiner and Nazareth Del Pilar

Asian Development Bank (ADB) calls itself the “climate bank of Asia and the Pacific.” But with its proposed changes to its Energy Policy, the multilateral lender risks betraying that title. At a time when climate change is hitting the region’s most vulnerable the hardest, ADB appears to be weakening its climate commitments—quietly and dangerously.

As one of the region’s largest infrastructure financiers, ADB holds immense influence over whether the Asia-Pacific meets or misses its global climate targets. What it funds—or fails to—will shape the energy future of millions. In 2021, ADB and its directors committed to revisiting its Energy Policy by 2025 to assess alignment with a just, low-carbon transition. That review, however, is now being rushed—with limited transparency, minimal public input, missing legally required environmental assessments and no analysis or adjustments to reflect ADB’s legal obligations under evolving international climate law.

Since making that commitment, climate science and international law have advanced significantly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and International Energy Agency (IEA) now confirm that new fossil gas projects, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), are incompatible with limiting average global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Recent advisory opinions from three international bodies—the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the Inter-

American Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice—affirm that public banks like ADB, and their member state shareholders when acting at them, must avoid actions and policies that contribute to climate harm, including fossil fuel project financing.

ADB’s current Energy Policy relied on a 2°C interpretation of Paris Agreement alignment. Five years later, that premise is now scientifically and legally obsolete. ADB must re-evaluate its policy in line with the prevailing 1.5°C standard.

So what is ADB actually doing with this long-promised review? Is it reassessing its and its member states’ international legal obligations on climate change? Is it analyzing whether continued financing of LNG and fossil gas is even legally permissible under current climate science and law?

Unfortunately, the answer to those questions is no. Nor is ADB complying with its own commitments to determine whether its financing accelerates the development of a sustainable energy system that supports the low-carbon transition in Asia and the Pacific or aligns with the Paris Agreement, which now clearly requires a 1.5°C threshold.

Again, the answer is no. Instead, ADB is doing the opposite, namely:

- ⦿ Skipping any reassessment of its legal climate obligations;
- ⦿ Rebranding major policy shifts as “minor amendments”;

- ⦿ Violating public participation norms by allowing only 30 days for comment and withholding the full draft text with contemplated amendments;
- ⦿ Rushing Board adoption by moving the anticipated approval date up by three to five months;
- ⦿ Proceeding without any environmental assessments, including Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs), which international law requires for the amendments allowing and setting the framework for ADB to invest in specific high environmental risk energy infrastructure.

This rushed process is more than a technicality. It's a legal and moral failure. One of the most concerning proposed changes is ADB's plan to lift its current ban on financing nuclear energy, which would be a major new approval with serious environmental, safety and equity implications.

Yet ADB has apparently conducted no SEA or equivalent analysis to evaluate these risks; if it has, none has been made publicly available.

This omission violates ADB's and its member states' key obligations under international law, including those related to transboundary harm prevention, environmental impact assessment, human rights and public participation. For instance, no SEA analysis has been released on the risks of nuclear energy, the safeguards required to mitigate them or how nuclear compares to renewables in terms of cost, equity and alignment with a just transition.

Worse, ADB is expanding its Energy Transition Mechanism—originally meant to retire coal—to include oil and gas, risking a backdoor refinancing channel for fossil fuel firms.

The review also seems focused on promoting controversial technologies—like co-firing and other “low-carbon” or “emission-reduction” schemes—rather than achieving real climate alignment. These measures delay real solutions, divert public resources away from proven renewables and could lock countries into stranded assets, debt and decades of emissions.

At a time when science calls for urgent, uncompromising action, ADB's current direction risks pushing the Asia-Pacific further off the 1.5°C pathway.

In sum, this review suffers from both procedural and substantive failures—falling well short of ADB's and its member states' legal obligations on climate change, harm prevention, environmental assessment and public consultation.

Given these failures, ADB must suspend approval of any Energy Policy amendments until it conducts a full, transparent and legally compliant review. Anything less falls short of international law—and the communities it claims to serve.

Originally published at [Asia Times](#).



NGO Forum on ADB
La Residencia Bldg, 114 Maginhawa, Diliman, Quezon City, 1100 Metro Manila
Philippines
www.forum-adb.org