



# Participatory Development

Stakeholder engagement is a regular part of ADB's operational approach and contributes to better development results

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) believes that consultation and participation with stakeholders in the development process boosts the effectiveness of ADB assistance to help reduce poverty in its developing member countries. ADB recognizes that engaging stakeholders leads to greater support for projects and reduced chances of delays and disruptions later on.

ADB's Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes that, "ensuring that the voice of the poor is heard at all levels of decision making is central to the success of social development efforts."

Consultation and participation in the development process requires time, resources, appropriate incentives, and careful and respectful listening. Public participation supports poverty reduction by creating more effective, equitable, and sustainable activities.

People develop a sense of ownership, pride, and commitment to an activity when they work together to assess their resources and problems; reflect on possible solutions; select criteria for evaluating various options; choose the best course of action; and then formulate and act on plans for initiating, managing, monitoring, and evaluating a shared project, program, or policy change.

Poor and vulnerable citizens discover hope and feel empowered when they are given a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Government, civil society, and private sector organizations build trust and gain capacity as they learn through shared experience.

Development partners and other international organizations coordinate better when they discuss planned activities openly.

Increasingly, ADB is judged by its ability to deliver on project quality and development results. Early investments of time, energy, and resources in consultation and participation have proven to increase the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of ADB's development activities.

In recognition of this, ADB ensures that stakeholder consultation and participation occur from the earliest stages of strategy and project formulation. This helps increase stakeholder support for assistance and reduces challenges during implementation.

## The Participatory Process

The four levels of consultation and participation at which ADB works to engage stakeholders in its operations are information sharing, consultation, collaborative decision making, and empowerment. Information sharing ensures that information about an intended ADB-supported project, program, or strategy is properly disseminated. Consultation seeks stakeholder input on proposed or ongoing activities. In collaborative decision making, ADB engages groups to jointly make decisions about development activities and resources that affect them. Empowerment is a deeper level of participation where beneficiaries and other key groups initiate action for more control over development decisions and resources.

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Although all ADB-financed projects benefit from consultation and participation, those aimed at poverty reduction through livelihood development, and improvements in educational and health outcomes, as well as those targeting ethnic minorities, agriculture and rural development, local governance, and involuntary resettlement, are particularly well-suited to it. Likewise, ADB's experience with infrastructure projects shows that actively involving communities helps avoid problems and improves project design and implementation.

### How It Works

In April 2006, ADB published a resource guide<sup>1</sup> for ADB staff to improve consistency and quality in the application of participatory methods to projects, country partnership strategies (CPSs), and sector strategies.

The staff guide recommends that ADB conduct stakeholder analysis before developing a consultation and participation plan. Projects with high social risks—such as restructuring of state-owned enterprises—and those with central objectives to promote participation and empowerment (such as community-driven development projects) warrant deeper levels of consultation and participation.

At the country level, ADB requires stakeholder participation in the thematic and sector assessments that go into the preparation of CPSs. ADB considers this participation essential to achieving a proper understanding of a country's particular development needs. It also helps increase transparency, promote good governance, enhance stakeholder ownership, support country programs, and identify projects responding to demonstrable local needs.

ADB considers the role of civil society essential to promoting participatory development. The vast networks, socially beneficial aims, and grassroots knowledge of civil society organizations help ADB formulate and deliver its pro-poor development assistance more effectively to developing countries in the Asia and Pacific region. ■

## Pioneering New Routes to Participation

### NGO–Government Poverty Alleviation Partnership

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), nongovernment organizations (NGOs) have been involved in a pilot project designed to improve poverty alleviation efforts.\* The PRC has made great strides in reducing absolute poverty over the past 3 decades, but in recent years—despite significant amounts of government funding—there has been a slowdown in the pace of poverty reduction.

Under a technical assistance (TA) project focused on Jiangxi Province, ADB is helping the central and local governments work with NGOs to find innovative solutions to reducing poverty, and to fully involve the poor, women, and other marginalized groups. The TA's main goal is to formulate replicable models and mechanisms for NGO participation in government-funded, village-level poverty alleviation efforts. It also seeks to build a consensus behind a framework for mainstreaming NGOs' role in national poverty reduction. The PRC Government has channeled funds directly to NGOs under the project—the first time this has been done.

In September 2007, an ADB mission visited villages involved in pilot tests under the project. It found that villagers' sense of ownership and participation in poverty reduction programs that involved both NGOs and the local government were strong. Central and local government officials also noted that the project could have a broad impact in transforming the role of government in future poverty alleviation work.

ADB is also assisting the Government to assess international models and policy options for outsourcing public services more broadly to NGOs.

\* For more information, visit [www.adb.org/Documents/PRF/PRC/ta4580-prc.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/PRF/PRC/ta4580-prc.asp)

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<sup>1</sup> Available online, [www.adb.org/Documents/guidelines/strengthening-participation-for-dev/default.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/guidelines/strengthening-participation-for-dev/default.asp)