

ADB Response of April 19, 2006, to Freedominfo.org Request

Dear Mr. McIntosh

Please refer to your emails to Ms Ann Quon and Bart Edes on the captioned subject. We apologize for the delay in getting back to you.

You might be aware that the ADB was the first multilateral institution to approve a governance policy in 1995 and its poverty reduction strategy recognizes good governance as one of the three pillars. The policy - *Governance: Sound Development Management*, defines governance as "...the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development." The policy identified four of the basic elements of good governance as accountability, predictability, participation and transparency. You will note that freedom of information (FOI) is central to achieving transparency and strengthening accountability systems in the national contexts.

Under the ADB assisted Access to Justice Program, the Government of Pakistan enacted the FOI law in 2002 and also issued procedures to access information. Further, in supporting devolution reforms, ADB has supported many activities that make the local state more transparent (these include, Pakistan, Indonesia among others). The experience of supporting Pakistan's FOI law demonstrated that it is more important to address the evolution of a national consensus on FOI issue rather than legislation through executive short cut. Involving civil society and other pro-reform constituencies yields lasting results.

Further, we have also encouraged the passage of state level freedom of information law through ADB's support for 'Modernizing Government and Fiscal Reforms' in Kerala, India. One of the policy measures in the program loan concerned the introduction of legislation on the right to information.

You might be interested to note that the service delivery policy development initiatives in Kerala, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan also make the provision of information on the quality, costs and accessibility of services to service users a central feature of service delivery reform/improvement programs.

Some other examples of FOI features in ADB projects are listed below:

- An ongoing regional technical assistance on pro-poor budgets project promotes FOI with respect to budget-making through

civil society collaboration in Indonesia, Marshall Islands and Pakistan.

- ADB support to public resource management programs in India and Pakistan has entailed supporting transparency in budgets, procurement at the subnational levels.
- Indonesia Poor Farmers' Income Improvement Through Innovation Project (2002) : implementation progress and disbursements posted on village bulletin board. Village Project Investment Committee maintains records accessible to the public.
- Pakistan Sindh Rural Development Program. Civil society groups have access to recourse related to governance and legal support component.
- Nepal Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project (2004): Communities in all sub-project areas to be made aware of physical and financial progress of project implementation and will conduct regular participatory community audit.
- Indonesia Rural Infrastructure Support Project. Community implementation organizations to monitor construction of approved project on a daily basis, report the progress to district implementation unit, hold weekly meetings to report physical and financial progress, and maintain a complaints system.

Finally, ADB and the OECD have been jointly supporting the AntiCorruption Initiative for Asia Pacific Region. Through this initiative 25 countries have endorsed the Anticorruption Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific; and the endorsing countries review the progress on the implementation of the Plan. Pillar 3 of the Action plan entails the following:

Access to information

Ensure that the general public and the media have freedom to receive and impart public information and in particular information on corruption matters in accordance with domestic law and in a manner that would not compromise the operational effectiveness of the administration or, in any other way, be detrimental to the interest of governmental agencies and individuals, through:

- Establishment of public reporting requirements for justice and other governmental agencies that include disclosure about efforts to promote integrity and accountability and combat corruption;
- Implementation of measures providing for a meaningful public right of access to appropriate information.

More information on the initiative can be obtained through its website: <http://www1.oecd.org/daf/asiacom/> including specific publications. The publication URL is: <http://www1.oecd.org/daf/asiacom/publications.htm>.

Hope you find this information useful. Please let us know if you require any further clarification[s].

Regards,

Raza

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