

PRESS STATEMENT

WE DISTRUST "ONE WORLD TRUST'S" FINDINGS NGO Forum on ADB Statement on the 2007 Global Accountability Report

December 6, 2007, Manila. We are appalled to see the "2007 Global Accountability Report" issued by One World Trust, a UK-based organization that glowingly rates the institutional accountability and transparency of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Report found the Bank to be 100 percent transparent as well as 81 percent accountable.

The NGO Forum on ADB vehemently disagrees with these findings!

Since 1992, our network members have fought the long struggle against the malpractices of the Bank in terms of supporting several ill-conceived and poorly implemented programs and projects in Developing Member Countries (DMCs). These projects have displaced thousands of peoples and the further mismanagement of a number of its operations has brought sufferings to displaced communities and Indigenous Peoples groups as well as degradation to the environment and natural resources.

Collectively, our coalition of community-based organizations, national and international NGOs, has consistently pressured the ADB to be more accountable to and responsible for the flawed projects and programs that it has funded over the years. We have consistently called on the Bank to respect and follow its own operational policies concerning the implementation of its activities in DMCs to avoid negative impacts on the affected environment and people. A number of Forum's publications i.e., "Untold Realities", "Development Debacles", and "Snapshots of ADB Disasters" have documented/reported cases wherein the basic rights of affected peoples have been egregiously violated while the state of precious ecosystems have been seriously harmed.

In terms of transparency, specifically concerning disclosure, the ADB has its Public Communication Policy (PCP) that makes several claims on paper. However, local community groups that have been engaging in ADB-funded public and private sector projects have encountered hindrances in getting basic information. For example, our network members working closely with affected communities in projects like the Lafarge Surma Cement Mining in Meghalaya, Northeast India; Phulbari Coal Mining Project in Bangladesh; Southern Transport Development Project in Sri Lanka, Tsunami Reconstruction Project in the Fisheries Sector in Aceh, Indonesia, and Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Azerbaijan among others have experienced several difficulties in getting project-related documents from the ADB's operations department and resident missions. In fact, under the PCP, private sector project-related documents cannot be disclosed to the public. How One World Trust could have possibly rated the ADB as a 100-percent transparent institution is beyond our comprehension.

Although ADB's Accountability Mechanism is an improvement of the previous Inspection Panel Policy, we feel that it has not served its purpose. Except for one case in Indonesia that has been successfully settled/mediated by the Bank, more than 10 other cases/complaints lodged before the Office of Special Project Facilitator have been dropped at the eligibility stage, most of which are purely on technical grounds. This prevents the complainants from elevating their cases before the Compliance Review Panel. Further, the Compliance Review Panel has so far prepared only one report but has yet to settle the two issues that it has been handling since 2003. These are the Southern Transport Development Project in Sri Lanka and Chashma Right Bank Project in Pakistan. Specifically, it was the sheer absence of transparency and manipulation of accountability claim that caused the Chashma claimants to withdraw from their inspection request. The statement of Chashma claimants is still posted on the ADB website.

Likewise, we have been informed by unimpeachable sources inside ADB that the Bank is filling up its strategic high level positions including the Compliance Review Panel Secretary and OED Director General posts in a very non-transparent manner. This practice goes against the Asian Development Fund IX agreement of 2005. A number of Bank officials and staff are very much concerned about the current non-transparent nature of staff hiring. Therefore, we question One World Trust's 81 percent rating of ADB's transparency.

We believe that the Report is not actually anchored on experiences and realities on the ground. Our seasoned campaigners who have lobbied and dialogued with the Bank Management, Board and Staff for years regarding serious and urgent issues that concern its operations in Asia and the Pacific region can attest to how sorely lacking is the ADB in terms of transparency and accountability. Even more damning are the testimonies of project affected communities who have been worn out and manipulated by the ADB's so-called "civil society consultations" on its policies, but still await justice for project-related damages to their lives and livelihoods.

We are gravely disappointed that your Report has given the ADB such an undeserved credit.

We question the credibility and competence of One World Trust in carrying out the entire study. We question the objectivity and inclusiveness of the process and methodology employed by this organization to arrive at such dubious findings. We believe it is incorrect to rate an institution like the ADB without considering its actual practices on the ground and without the inputs of important development actors and stakeholders. Did One World Trust even go out of its way to do actual field visits to communities and places that have been severely impacted by ADB-funded projects? Has One World Trust sufficiently interacted with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that actually represent affected peoples as well as advocate environmental preservation concerning their views on the Bank's accountability and transparency? Did One World Trust largely base its findings on ADB's well-prepared but self-serving paper work? These are but a few of the many questions that beg to be answered and clarified.

As ADB campaigners for more than one and a half decade, we have worked hard to press the Bank to be more transparent and accountable in terms of its operations and decision-making process. The Report made by One World Trust is insulting to the communities that have suffered due to and have long struggled against the poor implementation of ADB policies and projects throughout the Asia and the Pacific region. The Report also trivializes the concerted and collective efforts of CSOs in advocating ADB transparency and accountability.

Again, we voice our serious disagreement and strong protest over this Report! We urge One World Trust to explain to us as soon as possible, its very basis for these highly questionable findings. Similarly, we urge the civil society to remain vigilant in their efforts to make the ADB a truly accountable and transparent institution.

NGO Forum on ADB is an Asian-led network of Civil Society Organizations founded in 1992. Numbering more than 200 groups working in 25 countries, we support each other to amplify our positions on ADB's operations that adversely impact on the environment, natural resources, and local communities. The Forum neither accepts money from the ADB nor is it in any way part of it.