

# Safeguards Policy Review: Lessons from Asia

Society and Grassroots Community-World Bank Meeting on Safeguards

12 March 2013, 8:00am to 12:00pm

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## Background

The revision of the World Bank's social and environmental policies, called safeguards, can lead to either weaker or improved standards for minimum rights protection. Civil society, indigenous people and grassroots communities in Asia have equally important roles to play to ensure these protections they have fought for decades are not undermined. Their voices are critical since the resulting policies (or safeguards framework) can affect the future design of development projects, redefine the scope and limits of social and environmental risk assessment and mitigation, and will change the ways peoples' can hold the World Bank accountable

Firm commitment from the Bank not to dilute strong policy provisions and instead expand the application and strengthen the supervision and implementing safeguards requirements becomes more critical than ever for many reasons.

- Countries in Asia are the biggest recipients/borrowers of World Bank's public and private sector lending.<sup>1</sup> While investment loans are spread across a wide range of economic and social services sectors, the energy and mining, transportation and natural resource management sectors remain to have the biggest share combined and these are traditionally the types of infrastructure and extraction projects that have medium to high environmental and social risks. Concerns over human rights violations, environmental and livelihood risks often emerge when safeguards in these projects are weak.
- The share of policy-based and sector program loans in Asia is also beginning to grow, which poses concerns about participation, transparency, accountability and risk assessment since these are generally not covered by the current safeguard policies.
- Asian governments also have other sources of development finance that offer less stringent transaction requirements. It's in part the competition and the struggle to maintain relevance that have driven multilateral lenders, including the World Bank, to consider flexibility in their lending requirements and, to a certain extent, moving towards the greater use of country system and other lending modalities.

As the World Bank consults various sectors on the direction and framework of its safeguards, it must carefully consider the voices of Asian civil society and local communities in shaping the review process, content and policy outcome. They bring on-the ground and comparative knowledge how and why safeguards do not work and how Bank's supported investments create risks or benefits if policies are limited, weak and breached. They also offer viable alternatives when Bank's project assumptions and policy implementation are problematic.

## Objective

This meeting is organized by the Bank Information Center-Asia Program, AKSI and other organizations in Asia. The purpose is to bring the World Bank Consultation Team into this independent forum to have substantive discussion from civil society and grassroots organizations in the region. The meeting will enable people from Asia to articulate weak areas in the policy that should be revised; the lessons the Bank must draw from the implementation of its policies and from the national and international standards and practices; and why and how the Bank must address equally important issues like human rights, climate change, and country systems in the safeguard policies.

This meeting does not intend to come to a resolution of issues with the World Bank representatives but rather to ensure that there are opportunities for those who would want to engage, discuss and debate with the World Bank. It is an exchange of critiques and as well as a discussion of propositions.

## Participants

Between 30 and 40 representatives from civil society, institutes, and grassroots leaders from Southeast Asia and South Asia, and international groups with regional base in the region are expected to participate in this forum. Some of the participants are familiar with and/or have worked on some of the key thematic/sector issues covered by the existing policies, and on the 'new emerging' issues stated by the World Bank (i.e. disability and children's rights, climate change, human rights, land rights, others). Some are exposed to standards other the World Bank's. Some were deeply engaged in ADB safeguards review, others on UN, and other voluntary guidelines, and also on country system.

## PROPOSED AGENDA

March 12		
8:00-9:00	Registration	
9:00-9:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction of Participants</li><li>• Overview and format of the meeting</li></ul>	Facilitator
9:15-9:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brief overview of WB's safeguards review process</li></ul>	World Bank
9:30-11:30 With 15 min. break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation of comments by participants – organized by issue area and Bank's response</li><li>• Bank's response and further discussion</li></ul>	Facilitator
11:30-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Synthesis and Next steps</li></ul>	

<sup>1</sup> In 2012 alone, the World Bank (IBRD and IDA) committed over \$35 billion loans with the largest exposure in Asia (more than 50% covering East Asia and Pacific, South Asia and Central Asia).