Human Rights and Civil Society in Multilateral Development Banks: Standards, Participation, and Influence

PART I: HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS, RULES, CRITERIA, AND PROCEDURES IN IFIS

A. WORLD BANK

Overview of World Bank Human Rights Policies and Principles

The World Bank Group (WBG) has increasingly recognized that human rights are integral to achieving its core mission of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. While the Bank's founding Articles of Agreement include a provision that the institution and its officers "shall not interfere in the political affairs of any member" and should base decisions only on economic considerations,[1] this clause has often been cited as a reason for the Bank's historically cautious approach to explicit human rights issues.

In recent years, there has been a *"growing recognition of the need for the Bank to address human rights in a more explicit fashion"*, along with advances in the Bank's thinking on the connections between human rights and development.[2] The creation of the Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment (HRIE) Umbrella Trust Fund in 2019 is one example: this multi-donor fund aims *"to increase and strengthen the understanding and application of human rights principles across the WBG's work"*.[3] Through such initiatives, the Bank is gradually incorporating core human rights principles – such as equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and accountability and rule of law – into its operations.[4] Notably, the Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (discussed below) explicitly states that **World Bank activities support the realization of the human rights expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, in a manner consistent with the Bank's mandate.[5]

---

[1] Michael Shields, *U.N. Rapporteur Criticizes World Bank's Rights Record*, Reuters (Sept. 11, 2015, 10:15 AM)
[2] Id.
[3] *Human Rights and the World Bank*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/humanrights (last visited Mar. 22, 2025).
[4] *Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Umbrella Program Progress Report: January 1 – December 31, 2021*, World Bank, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099408207262236733/pdf/IDU021c958fc071f7044e509eb30bd551603a44c.pdf (last visited Mar. 22, 2025).
[5] *The World Bank Environmental and Social Framework*, World Bank, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/383011492423734099/pdf/The-World-Bank-Environmental-and-Social-Framework.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

These principles are now seen as fundamental to effective development and are woven into the fabric of the Bank's operational standards and engagement approaches.

Key Standards and frameworks for Human Rights in World Bank Projects

1. Human Rights Standards & Social Safeguards:

Over the past decades, the World Bank has put in place a comprehensive framework of environmental and social safeguards to ensure that the projects it finances do not harm people or communities. The cornerstone of this framework today is the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), adopted in 2016 and operational since 2018.[6] The ESF consists of:

- A ***Vision for Sustainable Development*** – outlining the Bank's aspirational goals on environmental and social sustainability (including respect for human rights and inclusion);
- The **World Bank Environmental and Social Policy for Investment Project Financing** – which sets mandatory requirements for Bank staff in identifying and managing project risks;
- **Ten specific Environmental and Social Standards (ESS)** – detailed standards that borrowers (the implementing countries) must meet throughout the project life-cycle.[7]

a. Environmental and Social Standards (ESS)[8]

The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)[9] serves as its primary mechanism for managing environmental and social risks in projects funded through Investment Project Financing.[10] While the Bank does not explicitly use human rights terminology in its policies, it incorporates key human rights-related principles through this framework.

---

[6] *The World Bank's Approach to Human Rights*, Bretton Woods Project (July 12, 2023), https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2023/07/the-world-banks-approach-to-human-rights/ (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[7] *World Bank Approves Environmental and Social Framework Inclusive of Ten Safeguards*, IISD SDG Knowledge Hub (Aug. 8, 2016), https://sdg.iisd.org/news/world-bank-approves-environmental-and-social-framework-inclusive-of-ten-safeguards/ (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[8] Id. at x.
[9] *Environmental and Social Framework*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[10] *Environmental and Social Framework*, World Bank, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/837721522762050108-0290022018/original/ESFFramework.pdf, at ix (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

The ten Environmental and Social Standards (ESS)[11] provide comprehensive guidance on managing risks and impacts. These Standards establish objectives and requirements to avoid, minimize, reduce and mitigate risks and impacts, and where significant residual impacts remain, to compensate for or offset such impacts.

b. Key Human Rights-Related Provisions in ESS[12]

While the World Bank does not explicitly frame its policies in human rights language, key provisions in the ESF align with internationally recognized human rights principles:

- Labor Rights (ESS2) – Protects workers' rights to fair wages, safe working conditions, and non-discrimination.
- Indigenous Peoples' Rights (ESS7) – Requires Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in projects affecting indigenous lands and communities to safeguard their rights and prevent forced displacement, ensuring their continued access to land and resources.[13]
- Stakeholder Engagement (ESS10) – Establishes public participation mechanisms, though it does not explicitly refer to "civic space." The Bank reserves the right to participate in stakeholder consultations to ensure affected communities' concerns are properly addressed

c. Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation (ESS10)

ESS10 mandates engagement with affected communities and other stakeholders through information disclosure, consultations, and grievance mechanisms.

The borrower must:[14]

[11]The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) consists of ten Environmental and Social Standards (ESS), including: ESS1 (Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks), ESS2 (Labor and Working Conditions), ESS3 (Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention), ESS4 (Community Health and Safety), ESS5 (Land Acquisition and Involuntary Resettlement), ESS6 (Biodiversity), ESS7 (Indigenous Peoples), ESS8 (Cultural Heritage), ESS9 (Financial Intermediaries), and ESS10 (Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure).

[12] World Bank, supra note 10, at x.

[13] World Bank, supra note 10, at 10.

[14] World Bank, supra note 10, at 98.

i. Identify stakeholders[15] – The borrower is responsible for identifying various stakeholders, categorizing them into two groups: 'project-affected parties' and 'other interested parties'.[16]
ii. Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) – In consultation with the Bank, the Borrower will develop and implement a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) proportionate to the nature and scale of the project and its potential risks and impacts.[17]
iii. Disclose information and conduct consultations – Ensuring affected communities can provide input.
iv. Address grievances – Through accessible project-level grievance mechanisms.
v. Report to stakeholders – On concerns raised and how they are being addressed.

The Bank requires the Borrower to engage with stakeholders, including affected communities and other interested parties, through information disclosure, consultation, and informed participation in a manner proportionate to the risks and impacts on affected communities.[18] The Bank has the right to be actively involved in consultation processes to understand concerns and ensure they are addressed in project planning and mitigation strategies.[19]

Despite these provisions, critics argue that the World Bank's engagement framework emphasizes country systems rather than direct mechanisms for civil society participation. This limits direct avenues for affected communities to influence project decisions beyond national legal frameworks.[20]

d. Environmental and Social Policy for Investment Project Financing

The Environmental and Social Policy for Investment Project Financing[21] outlines the Bank's responsibilities in ensuring compliance with ESS requirements.[22]

---

[15] For the purposes of ES10, "*stakeholder*" refers to individuals or groups who:
i. are affected or likely to be affected by the project (*project-affected parties*); and
ii. may have an interest in the project (*other interested parties*).

[16] World Bank, supra note 10, at 98.
[17] World Bank, supra note 10, at 98.
[18] World Bank, supra note 10, at 10.
[19] World Bank, supra note 10, at 10.
[20] Bretton Woods Project, supra note 6.
[21] World Bank, supra note 10, at ix.
[22] World Bank, supra note 10, at 1.

The Bank[23] conducts due diligence proportional to environmental and social risks, **s**upports borrowers in stakeholder engagement and grievance mechanisms, and applies the World Bank Group's Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines (EHSGs)[24].

2. Operational Safeguards & Retaliation Risks

a. **Zero Tolerance for Reprisals** – The World Bank is committed to protecting individuals and communities who engage with the institution, ensuring they can voice concerns about Bank-financed projects without fear of retaliation.

b. **Challenges in Addressing Reprisals** – Despite the Bank's stated commitment to "not tolerate reprisals and retaliation against those who share their views about Bank-financed projects," some critics argue that its response to reported reprisals has been insufficient in certain cases. Structural barriers, including a lack of political will and limited capacity of both state actors and civil society organizations (CSOs), pose significant challenges in many country contexts.[25]

c. **Governance-Oriented Development Policy Financing (DPF)** – This mechanism has strong potential but remains underutilized in supporting legal, policy, and institutional environments conducive to civil society engagement and accountability (CESA).

d. **Country Systems Approach** – While the Bank primarily relies on national frameworks for social risk assessments, this approach has been criticized for limiting direct involvement from civil society organizations in decision-making processes.

e. **Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs)** – These assessments are increasingly recognized as a critical tool in project financing to evaluate potential human rights risks and ensure compliance with international standards.

f. **Protecting Vulnerable Groups** – The *World Bank Environmental and Social Framework Directive on Addressing Risks and Impacts on Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups* emphasizes the importance of safeguarding those at risk of retaliation for participating in project consultations, voicing opinions, or raising grievances.[26]

---

[23] World Bank, supra note 10, at 1.
[24] *General EHS Guidelines*, Int'l Fin. Corp. (2023), https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/2023/ifc-general-ehs-guidelines.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[25] *CESA Strategic Review*, World Bank, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/53d4f17646f52f82d43b7379dd004811-0090012024/original/CESA-Strategic-Review.pdf, at xii (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[26] *World Bank Commitments Against Reprisals*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework/brief/world-bank-commitments-against-reprisals (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

g. **Gender-Based Violence and SEA/SH Risks** – The Bank screens projects for risks of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEA/SH). A *Good Practice Note on Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) in Investment Project Financing Involving Major Civil Works* provides detailed guidance on grievance mechanisms.[27] It outlines specific measures to protect survivors from stigmatization, retaliation, or reprisals, including from their own communities or families.

3. Accountability and Grievance Mechanisms

Overall, the World Bank's **"do no harm"** approach is enforced through a multi-layered system: upfront standards and due diligence, binding requirements for borrowers, continuous monitoring, and independent grievance and redress mechanisms. These rules and criteria are designed to ensure that human rights considerations – such as protecting people from forced displacement, preventing labor abuses, avoiding discrimination, and guaranteeing people a voice in development – are not just lofty principles but concrete obligations in every Bank-financed project.

World Bank Access to Information Policy

The World Bank's Access to Information Policy reflects its commitment to transparency, accountability, and good governance. This policy applies to the entire ESF and includes disclosure obligations related to the Bank's Investment Project Financing.[28] This was a landmark shift that effectively acknowledged communities' "right to know" about development interventions affecting them.[29]

The policy mandates that borrowers provide sufficient and timely information about the project's potential risks and impacts during stakeholder consultations. As outlined in **ESS10**, this information must be disclosed in a manner that is accessible, easily understandable, and available in local languages so that project-affected parties and other stakeholders can meaningfully contribute to project design and mitigation measures.[30]

If the Bank denies access to requested information, affected parties may file an appeal. Appeals can be submitted electronically or by mail. The **Access to Information Committee**

---

[27] Id.
[28] World Bank, supra note 10, at x.
[29] *What Is the Future of Access to Information at the IFIs?*, Bank Info. Ctr. (Mar. 30, 2023), https://bankinformationcenter.org/en-us/update/what-is-the-future-of-access-to-information-at-the/ (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[30] World Bank, supra note 10, at 9.

(AIC)—an administrative body under Bank Management—serves as the first level of appeals.[31]

a. Grievance Redress and Complaints Mechanisms

World Bank-supported projects include multiple grievance mechanisms to address concerns arising from their implementation. Project-affected parties may access:

- Project-level grievance mechanisms – Local mechanisms established within the project framework.[32]
- The World Bank's corporate Grievance Redress Service (GRS) – A centralized service where individuals and communities can submit complaints directly if they believe a Bank-financed project has harmed or is likely to harm them. Complaints can be submitted at www.worldbank.org/GRS or via email at grievances@worldbank.org.[33]
- The World Bank Inspection Panel – An independent body that allows affected communities to request an investigation into whether Bank policies and procedures were followed in project design and implementation. If concerns are raised with Bank Management and remain unresolved, affected communities may submit a formal complaint to the Inspection Panel at www.inspectionpanel.org or via email at ipanel@worldbank.org.[34]

b. Inspection Panel – Independent Accountability Mechanism

Established in 1993, the Inspection Panel is an independent complaints mechanism designed for individuals and communities who believe they have been, or may be, harmed by a World Bank-financed project.[35] The Panel functions as a non-judicial body that evaluates whether Bank Management has adhered to its own operational policies and procedures, including:

- Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)
- Environmental and Social Safeguard Policies
- Other applicable policies ensuring social and economic benefits while preventing harm

---

[31] *Access to Information: Brochure*, World Bank, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/4b2f2066f5c8d9447b74d9ddf9592f8e-0090012017/original/AI-Brochure-English.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[32] World Bank, supra note 10, at xi.
[33] Id.
[34] Id.
[35] *World Bank Commitments Against Reprisals*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework/brief/world-bank-commitments-against-reprisals (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

See **Guidelines to Reduce Retaliation Risks and Respond to Retaliation During the Panel Process**

A **Request for Inspection** must be submitted for the Panel to initiate an investigation. The Panel has emphasized that "any form of retaliation threatens the integrity of the World Bank's accountability process," reaffirming that affected people should be able to access it safely.[36]

c. Information Disclosure Requirements for Stakeholders

To ensure informed participation, the Borrower must proactively disclose project information at an early stage—before the Bank proceeds to project appraisal—allowing stakeholders meaningful engagement. Required disclosures include project details, potential risks and mitigation measures, stakeholder engagement process, consultation meetings and grievance mechanisms.[37]

d. Grievance Redress Service (GRS) – Handling Community Complaints

The **Grievance Redress Service (GRS)** provides individuals and communities with an avenue to lodge complaints regarding adverse impacts of World Bank-supported projects.[38] This service enhances accountability and responsiveness, ensuring grievances are reviewed and addressed promptly.

Affected communities can file complaints via online (access the online form), by email to grievances@worldbank.org and by letter or by hand delivery to the World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C., United States or any World Bank Country Office.

B. EUROPEAN BANK OF RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Overview of EBRD's Human Rights Policies and Principles

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) upholds principles of human rights, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion in all its projects. The Bank integrates human rights considerations through its Environmental and Social Policy (ESP), Performance Requirements (PRs), and public engagement mechanisms.

---

[36] *Guidelines to Reduce Retaliation Related to Concerns Raised with the Inspection Panel*, Inspection Panel (2018), https://www.inspectionpanel.org/sites/ip-ms8.extcc.com/files/documents/IPN%20Retaliation%20Guidelines_2018.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[37] World Bank, supra note 10, at 99.
[38] *Grievance Redress Service*, World Bank, https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/products-and-services/grievance-redress-service (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

Key Standards and frameworks for Human Rights in EBRD Projects

1. Foundational Human Rights Commitments

The EBRD is committed to upholding internationally recognized human rights[39] as outlined in international agreements.[40] The EBRD's founding agreement mandates that it only finance projects in countries that are committed to pluralism, democracy, and market economics. This commitment forms the basis of its human rights framework. The EBRD integrates human rights considerations into its **Environmental and Social Appraisal and Monitoring processes**. Clients are required to respect human rights, avoid infringement, and address adverse human rights impacts in accordance with the **Environmental and Social Requirements (ESRs)**.[41]

2. Human Rights Standards & Social Safeguards

a. Environmental and Social Policy (ESP)

The ESP serves as the EBRD's main document for ensuring that its operations respect human rights and social safeguards. The EBRD's ESP integrates human rights, labor protections, and environmental safeguards within its investment strategy. Key human rights principles in the ESP include non-discrimination and inclusion of vulnerable groups; free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) for indigenous peoples; labor rights protection in accordance with ILO standards; public participation and access to information; and accountability and grievance redress mechanisms.

The Agreement Establishing the EBRD (Article 2) mandates the Bank to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development.[42]

- NGO Engagement – Civil society organizations (CSOs) provide on-the-ground knowledge and connect with affected communities, ensuring that Bank-financed projects reflect local needs and concerns.[43]
- Stakeholder Participation and Information Disclosure – The EBRD promotes an open, transparent, and inclusive engagement process with stakeholders, including project-

[39] As provided for in the International Bill of Human Rights and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Labour Organization (ILO) Core Conventions, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
[40] *Environmental and Social Policy*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev. 9 (2024), https://www.ebrd.com/home/news-and-events/publications/institutional-documents/environmental-and-social-policy-2024.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[41] Id. At 9-10
[42] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40.
[43] Id.

affected communities, ensuring access to information, participation, and justice in environmental and social matters.[44]

- Performance Requirements (PRs) Alignment – The EBRD's Performance Requirements (PRs) align with:
    - UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)
    - International Labour Organization (ILO) Core Labor Standards
    - EBRD's Commitment (Article 2.16) – Embedding human rights as a core principle in development financing.

b. Key standards and frameworks governing human rights in EBRD projects: Environmental and Social Requirements (ESRs)

The EBRD has adopted a comprehensive set of **Environmental and Social Requirements (ESRs)** that projects must meet, emphasizing the mitigation hierarchy and Good International Practice (GIP). These standards cover a wide range of environmental and social issues essential for responsible project implementation.[45]

Meaningful Consultation & FPIC for Indigenous Peoples – The EBRD requires clients to establish ongoing relationships with Indigenous Peoples as early as possible in project planning. In line with ESR 10, projects must conduct meaningful consultation and obtain Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) where applicable.[46]

Compliance Monitoring and Due Diligence- To ensure adherence to these standards, the EBRD requires preliminary social impact assessments for high-risk projects, disclosure of environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs), periodic monitoring and reporting by project developers, third-party audits for projects with significant risks, failure to comply may result in financial penalties, project suspension, or cancellation of EBRD funding.

c. Country Strategies & Progressive Shareholders

The EBRD integrates economic and political considerations into its country strategies, with active input from civil society in policy reviews and risk assessments. It also

[44] Id.
[45] These include: (1) assessment and management of environmental and social risks and impacts; (2) labour and working conditions; (3) resource efficiency and pollution prevention and control; (4) health, safety, and security; (5) land acquisition, restrictions on land use, and involuntary resettlement; (6) biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources; (7) Indigenous Peoples' rights; (8) cultural heritage protection; (9) financial intermediaries' obligations; and (10) stakeholder engagement and information disclosure.
[46] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 85.

collaborates with progressive shareholders to advance human rights protections and civic space within its operations.

3. Operational Safeguards & Retaliation Risks

- Zero Tolerance for Retaliation – The EBRD does not tolerate threats, intimidation, harassment, or violence against individuals or communities opposing an EBRD-financed project.[47]
- Handling of Reprisals – The Bank assesses reprisal risks and engages with clients to prevent retaliation. When complaints arise, the EBRD addresses them directly, prioritizing safety and security.[48]
- Sectoral & Supply Chain Due Diligence – The Bank integrates due diligence processes to mitigate human rights violations across project supply chains.
- Climate & Just Transition Policies – Policies supporting climate resilience and social equity.

a. Public Participation & Civic Space Protections

- Acknowledgment of Retaliation Risks – Addressed in policy drafts.
- Explicit Safeguards Against Reprisals – Strengthening protection mechanisms.
- Country-Level Diagnostics – Conducting assessments on political space and human rights issues.
- Anti-Coercion Measures – The EBRD considers coercion or threats against project-affected persons as a Coercive Practice under its Enforcement Policy and Procedures (EPPs).[49] Suspected coercion triggers Enforcement Proceedings.[50]

b. Accountability and Grievance Mechanisms

Project-affected persons and other stakeholders can access the IPAM, the EBRD's direct complaints process or the client's grievance mechanisms, which collectively represent the accountability architecture of the Bank, at any time.[51] The EBRD has the Environmental and Social Policy (ESP), the Access to Information policy (AIP) and the

[47] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 10.
[48] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 10.
[49] *Enforcement Policy and Procedure*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., https://www.ebrd.com/procurement/epp (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[50] *Statement on Retaliation*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/strategies-and-policies.html#tabpane1395238866470 (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[51] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 13.

Project Accountability Policy (PAP) to enable sound and sustainable development in its projects.[52]

- Independent Project Accountability Mechanism (IPAM**)** – The EBRD provides a robust complaints system for project-affected persons and civil society organizations.[53]
- Project-Level Grievance Mechanisms – Clients must establish accessible grievance mechanisms, in compliance with ESR 10.

C. ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is primarily a development finance institution with a mission of reducing poverty through sustainable, inclusive economic growth. ADB has historically been cautious about explicitly incorporating international human rights norms into its policies. Instead, it embeds human rights principles within its operational policies (such as social safeguards, labor standards, and information disclosure) and supports member countries in meeting their own human rights obligations. ADB's Strategy 2030 and related policies emphasize inclusive growth, equitable access to services, and accountability, which align with the values of key human rights agreements (e.g. nondiscrimination and public participation).

1. Human Rights Standards & Social Safeguards

a. Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)

The ADB's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) classifies projects based on their environmental and social (E&S) risks and impacts. This classification considers potential impacts on greenfield or brownfield sites, effects on biodiversity, land acquisition, and land use restrictions, presence of Indigenous Peoples and the level of vulnerability of project-affected persons, emissions, waste management, and climate change impacts, required mitigation and management measures, following the mitigation hierarchy.[54]

b. Consultation & Stakeholder Engagement

The borrower/client must conduct meaningful consultations with project-affected persons throughout the project cycle, particularly if there are changes to E&S risks. Stakeholder

---

[52] *Independent Project Accountability Mechanism*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., https://www.ebrd.com/home/what-we-do/projects/independent-project-accountability-mechanism.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[53] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 12.
[54] Asian Dev. Bank, *Environmental and Social Framework* 8 (2021), https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/environmental-social-requirements/environmental-social-framework (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

engagement must follow the requirements of ESS10, ensuring that affected persons receive sufficient, timely, and accessible information to participate in project decision-making..[55]

c. Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP) & Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP)[56]

The borrower/client must agree with ADB on an adaptive management process, ensuring that all E&S risks and impacts are continuously assessed and that mitigation measures are updated as required. Any project changes that introduce additional E&S risks must be disclosed and consulted upon in line with ESS10.

d. ADB's Human Rights-Related Policies

While ADB does not explicitly frame its policies in human rights terms, it incorporates several safeguards that uphold related principles. The 2009 Safeguard Policy Statement (SPS) addresses involuntary resettlement, Indigenous Peoples' rights, labor rights, and environmental protections. ADB's Public Participation Framework emphasizes transparency and community involvement, even if not framed as a human rights mechanism. The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy ensures that women and vulnerable groups benefit from ADB-financed projects. Recent policy developments have also acknowledged the risks of retaliation against civil society actors, with progressive shareholders pushing for stronger protections. In addition, ADB utilizes a range of environmental and social assessment and management tools, including Environmental and Social Impact Assessments, Management Plans, Audits, Cumulative Impact Assessments, Frameworks, Strategic Assessments, and Management Systems.[57]

2. Operational Safeguards & Evidence-Based Engagement

a. Civil Society & Evidence-Based Advocacy

CSOs play a critical role in identifying risks and raising human rights concerns in ADB-financed projects. Some ADB shareholders advocate for stronger civic space protections, ensuring freedom of expression and public participation.

[55] *Id*. at14
[56] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 27.
[57] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 32.

b. Compliance with International Standards

ADB aligns with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards in labor rights and working conditions. Social and environmental impact assessments (EIA, SIA) are used to evaluate risks and mitigation strategies.

3. Accountability and Grievance Mechanisms

a. ADB's Grievance Redress & Accountability System
ADB requires borrowers/clients to establish a project-level grievance mechanism to receive and resolve concerns from project-affected persons, allow complaints to be escalated to national or local judicial bodies, align the requirements set out in ESS10, ESS2, ESS4, ESS5, and/or ESS7, as applicable. [58]

b. ADB's Independent Accountability Mechanisms
In addition to project-level mechanisms, affected communities may also file complaints through Compliance Review Panel (CRP) which investigates whether ADB has complied with its own policies and safeguards, and the Office of the Special Project Facilitator (OSPF) which facilitates problem-solving between affected communities and project implementers.

c. Environmental & Social Risk Assessments

ADB requires E&S assessments to cover all relevant risks, including:[59]

- Environmental risks – Pollution (air, water, and soil), health and safety risks, biodiversity impacts, and climate change effects.
- Social risks – Land acquisition, Indigenous Peoples' rights, labor conditions, gender-based violence, and digital risks.

d. Worker Grievance Mechanisms[60]

Borrowers/clients must provide a dedicated grievance mechanism for project workers, separate from public grievance mechanisms. This mechanism must be accessible and transparent, allow for anonymous complaints, protect workers against retaliation and be monitored and improved based on feedback.

[58] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 16.
[59] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 25.
[60] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 48.

e. Land Acquisition & Indigenous Peoples' Rights

Land Acquisition & Resettlement (ESS5)[61]

ADB recognizes that land acquisition and land use restrictions may result in economic and/or physical displacement. Grievance mechanisms must be established early in the process to address concerns related to land acquisition and compensation.

Indigenous Peoples' Rights (ESS7)[62]

ADB acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are often marginalized and at risk of losing access to their lands and resources. Indigenous communities must be consulted meaningfully, with projects requiring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in cases where traditional lands are transformed, encroached upon, or degraded, and their culture, language, or livelihoods are threatened.

f. Climate Change & Stakeholder Engagement[63]

Climate Change Policies (ESS9)

Recognizing climate change as a development challenge, ADB promotes greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, climate adaptation and resilience-building, and alignment with global climate commitments.

g. Stakeholder Engagement & Information Disclosure (ESS10)

ADB emphasizes open, transparent, and inclusive engagement with project-affected persons, host communities, and civil society. Stakeholder engagement must begin early in the project cycle, be transparent, accessible, and participatory, consider gender, language, and cultural differences, and ensure grievance mechanisms are in place.

h. Meaningful Consultation Process

Stakeholder engagement requires (i) stakeholder identification and analysis, (ii) stakeholder engagement planning and implementation, (iii) information disclosure, (iv) meaningful consultation, (v) monitoring and reporting, and (vi) addressing and responding to concerns and grievances.[64]

[61] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 101.
[62] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 101.
[63] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 101.
[64] Asian Dev. Bank, *supra* note 54, at 132.

PART 2: CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE IN IFIS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[65] is clear on the need to mobilise civil society organisations (CSOs) to implement and uphold accountability for the SDGs.

A. WORLD BANK CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

The World Bank recognizes that civil society – including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, academics, and grassroots groups – plays a vital role in shaping development outcomes and holding institutions accountable. Today, engagement with civil society is a core part of how the World Bank does business, reflecting the importance of transparency, inclusion, and stakeholder ownership in development processes.

Key mechanisms and procedures for civil society participation include:

1. **Consultations on Strategies and Policies:** It is now standard practice for the World Bank to consult with civil society when formulating major policies, strategies, and country partnership frameworks. Every country five-year strategy (Country Partnership Framework, CPF) is developed through rounds of dialogues with NGOs, community groups, and other stakeholders to gather input on priorities. According to the Bank itself, *"an important element in developing the CPF is consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives of civil society,"* and feedback from these consultations is explicitly incorporated into the final strategy (Consultations: Kazakhstan Country Partnership Framework 2020-2025).

2. **Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation in Projects:** At the project level, ESS10 (Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure) requires that borrowers engage project-affected people and interested NGOs from the earliest stages and throughout implementation.
3. **Citizen Engagement and Social Accountability (CESA):** The World Bank's evolution roadmap emphasizes "enhanced civil society engagement" and "enhanced CESA" as critical for development impact and the importance of partnerships with civil society in ensuring accountability and governance.[66]

---

[65] U.N., *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[66] *Citizens at the Center: A Strategic Review of Good Practices and Lessons Learned for Renewal of World Bank Support for Citizen Engagement and Social Accountability*, World Bank x (2024), https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/53d4f17646f52f82d43b7379dd004811-0090012024/original/CESA-Strategic-Review.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

However, while the Bank acknowledges the importance of CESA, its integration remains peripheral, project-based, and underfunded, with no clear operational guidance on responding to shrinking civic space challenges. The Bank has acknowledged **shrinking civic space** over the past decade (noting that this "narrows the policy space" and "limits the channels available to citizens to engage"), however, there is no clear operational guidance on how to respond to this challenge.[67] Despite high-level corporate commitments to CESA, **the Bank's CESA agenda has remained "largely peripheral, projectized and under-funded".**[68]

The Bank has identified four primary areas of focus for improving CESA: enhancing the quality and outcomes of project-level CESA, strengthening national systems for CESA through country-driven mechanisms, supporting enabling conditions for CESA within policy frameworks, developing an institutional support system for effective civil society engagement**.**[69]

4. **Access to Information and Open Data:** As mentioned, the World Bank's disclosure policy empowers civil society by providing access to a wealth of information on projects, loans, research, and meeting minutes. Civil society groups routinely use this information to conduct analysis, report on progress, and advocate for changes. The policy even provides an **appeals mechanism** if information requests are denied, underscoring the Bank's commitment to public accountability.[70] In effect, transparency gives civil society the **tools to participate** meaningfully – you cannot have a voice if you lack information. NGOs in many countries use Bank data to host independent "watchdog" platforms, monitoring social and human rights indicators in Bank-funded projects and engaging authorities in dialogue to address issues.

5. **Global Civil Society Forums and Partnerships:** The World Bank also facilitates direct interaction between civil society and its decision-makers. During the World Bank's Spring and Annual Meetings, a **Civil Society Policy Forum** is organized where civil society representatives from around the world convene to discuss policy issues with Bank staff and leadership. The new **CIVIC Initiative (Civil Society and Social**

[67] *Id*. at xii.
[68] *Citizens at the Center*, *supra* note 66, at xiii.
[69] *Citizens at the Center*, *supra* note 66, at x.
[70] *What Is the Future of Access to Information at the World Bank?*, Bank Info. Ctr. (Mar. 6, 2023), https://bankinformationcenter.org/en-us/update/what-is-the-future-of-access-to-information-at-the/#:~:text=The%20Bank%E2%80%99s%20Access%20to%20Information,on%20a%20public%20interest%20basis (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

Innovation Alliance) launched in 2024 will finance and support CSOs to address development challenges.[71]

6. **Citizen Engagement Framework – Reliance on Country Systems**

The Citizen Engagement Framework promotes public participation but primarily relies on national mechanisms, rather than independent civil society engagement. This approach has been criticized for depending on national legal frameworks, which may not always align with international human rights standards or civic space best practices.

Case Studies: Civil Society Engagement with the World Bank in Kazakhstan

To illustrate how these policies and mechanisms play out in practice, we look at a couple of examples from Kazakhstan, where civil society has engaged with the World Bank to influence outcomes and uphold human rights standards.

Case Study 1: Shaping the Country Partnership Framework through Consultations –

In 2019, the World Bank was in the process of formulating its Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Kazakhstan for the period 2020–2025. As part of this process, the Bank organized broad-based public consultations across the country. These consultations gathered input from government, the private sector, academia, and importantly civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens. According to the Bank's Kazakhstan office, *"every five years the World Bank updates its work plan in the country, [and] an important element in developing the CPF is consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives of … civil society."*[72] In Kazakhstan's case, civil society participants raised issues such as the need for more inclusive growth (addressing rural poverty and inequality), strengthening transparency in public institutions, and environmental sustainability in extractive industries.[73] This case shows civil society's direct influence on World Bank strategic priorities: by voicing community concerns and expertise, Kazakhstani NGOs helped shape a plan that is more attuned to human rights (for example, emphasizing equitable access to services and environmental rights).

---

[71] *Civic and Citizen Engagement*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/citizen-engagement#:~:text=In%202024%2F2025%2C%20the%20World%20Bank,new%20finance%20and%20support%20facility (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[72] *Consultations: Kazakhstan Country Partnership Framework 2020–2025*, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/brief/consultation-kazakhstan-cpf-2020-2025#:~:text=As%20you%20know%2C%20every%20five,civil%20society%20and%20research%20organizations (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[73] *Id.*

Case Study 2: Community Grievances and the Inspection Panel – the South-West Roads Project –

A more contentious example of civil society engagement comes from a World Bank-funded infrastructure project in Kazakhstan. The South-West Roads: Western Europe–Western China International Transit Corridor Project (loan approved in 2009) was a major highway development aimed at improving transport connectivity. During implementation, some residents of a village in South Kazakhstan region began experiencing problems they believed were caused by the road works. In 2017, eight households in the village of Shakpak Baba saw their homes flooded after heavy rains – they claimed this was due to poorly maintained drainage related to the road construction, and only one affected family received compensation.[74] Residents also found that their irrigation wells and a concrete canal could no longer function.[75] Additionally, the villagers noted increased traffic accidents in the area and complained that *no traffic safety plan* had been disclosed to the community.[76] Frustrated by what they saw as project-related harm and inadequate response from authorities, a group of these community members, with the help of a local NGO representative, filed a formal complaint to the World Bank's Inspection Panel in late 2020.

In their complaint, the villagers alleged non-compliance with several of the Bank's policies – notably a *"lack of meaningful consultation and disclosure of information"* about project impacts, which they argued violated the Bank's safeguard policy on Environmental Assessment (Operational Policy OP/BP 4.01).[77] The Inspection Panel registered the case in early 2021, signaling that the complaint met the basic eligibility criteria (the issues were credibly linked to the project and prior efforts to resolve them had been made).[78] In the ensuing Panel review process, World Bank management had to explain how it had addressed the villagers' issues and whether it had indeed followed its policies. Management claimed that some of the flooding was due to exceptional rainfall unrelated to the project and that certain problems (like the blocked cattle crossing) had

[74] *Kazakhstan South-West Roads Project*, World Bank, https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/355511467987828148/kazakhstan-south-west-roads-project (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[75] *Request for Inspection: Kazakhstan South-West Roads Project – Western Europe–Western China International Transit Corridor*, World Bank, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/994191613579264107/pdf/Kazakhstan-South-West-Roads-Project-Western-Europe-Western-China-International-Transit-Corridor-Request-for-Inspection-Notice-of-Registration.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[76] *Id.*
[77] *Id.*
[78] *Id.*

been fixed.[79] After careful assessment, the Inspection Panel in this instance ultimately did not proceed to a full investigation, partly because the project was nearly complete and some remedial steps were already taken. However, the case was important for several reasons:

- It exemplified how communities in Kazakhstan leveraged the World Bank's accountability mechanism to have their voices heard on an international stage.
- The complaint highlighted the importance of consultation and information disclosure. The villagers' allegation of a "lack of meaningful consultation"[80] underscores that, had the project implementers kept an open dialogue with the community (as required by Bank policies), some of these issues might have been detected and resolved earlier.
- It brought some remedy: Following the community's actions, additional hydrological studies were done and local authorities took measures to improve drainage. While the outcome was not perfect from the complainants' perspective, their initiative led to greater accountability for the project's impacts. It also set a precedent for other communities in Kazakhstan.

B. EUROPEAN BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT (EBRD) CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

1. EBRD's Commitment to Civil Society Engagement

Under Article 1 of the Agreement Establishing the EBRD, the Bank promotes the transition to open market economies in countries committed to multiparty democracy and pluralism. Civil society is recognized as a crucial enabler of these principles.[81] Due to its unique mandate, EBRD views civil society as a key partner in the economies where it operates.[82] Civil society includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, social movements, labor unions, community-based organizations, women's groups, and business development organizations.[83]

[79] *Id.*
[80] *Id.*
[81] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., *Approach to Civil Society Engagement* 5, https://www.ebrd.com/home/work-with-us/ebrd-and-civil-society/Approach-to-Civil-Society-Engagement.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[82] *Id.*
[83] *Id.*

2. Key Mechanisms for Civil Society Engagement

a. Transparency and Access to Information

Engagement on the Access to Information Policy – The EBRD works with civil society to enhance transparency, accountability, and disclosure based on good governance principles.[84] Public Consultations on Policies and Country Strategies – The EBRD regularly seeks civil society input on its policies, country strategies, and investment decisions.

b. Independent Project Accountability Mechanism (IPAM)

IPAM is EBRD's independent accountability mechanism that reviews environmental, social, and transparency-related concerns raised by affected communities and civil society.[85]

How Does IPAM Work?[86]

IPAM provides two non-judicial, non-adversarial complaint-handling pathways:

- Problem-Solving – Facilitates dialogue and mediation between affected communities and project clients.
- Compliance Reviews – Evaluates whether the EBRD has adhered to its Environmental and Social Policy (ESP) and Access to Information Policy (AIP). If non-compliance is found, IPAM recommends corrective actions to prevent future breaches.

Who Can Submit Requests?[87]

Individuals & Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) i.e project-affected people can directly file complaints and third-Party Submissions i.e CSOs not directly impacted can also submit requests in certain cases, subject to review.[88]

c. Access to Information Policy (AIP)[89] – Transparency & Public Engagement

- Ensuring Transparency & Good Governance – The EBRD actively engages civil society organizations (CSOs) in shaping its Access to Information Policy (AIP). This policy

[84] *Id.*
[85] *Id.*
[86] *Independent Project Accountability Mechanism*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., https://www.ebrd.com/home/what-we-do/projects/independent-project-accountability-mechanism.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[87] Submitting a Request: Requests may be submitted via IPAM's encrypted online form (available in English, Russian, and Arabic), or by email or mail.
[88] *Independent Project Accountability Mechanism*, *supra* note 86.
[89] *Access to Information Policy*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., https://www.ebrd.com/home/who-we-are/strategies-governance-compliance/access-to-information-policy.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

outlines disclosure obligations, accountability measures, and civic participation mechanisms.[90]

- IPAM Review of Access to Information Complaints – If stakeholders believe the EBRD has failed to disclose project-related information, they may file a request with IPAM.

d. Grievance Mechanisms for Workers- Clients must provide accessible and transparent grievance mechanisms for workers to report harassment, exploitation, or unsafe working conditions. While the clients are required to establish grievance mechanism in line with ESR 10, the Bank through this process addresses concerns and complaints brought directly to its attention, while working with its clients on finding mutually agreeable solutions.[91]

e. Grievance Mechanism for Project-Affected Communities – Clients must establish early and socially appropriate grievance mechanisms for affected communities. These systems must be free from coercion, intimidation, or interference, and provide avenues for legal recourse if necessary. The outcomes of the grievance mechanism (including numbers of grievances received, resolved and outstanding) will be reflected in monitoring reports.[92]

f. Structured Platforms for Engagement

- Annual Civil Society Forum – A platform for direct dialogue between civil society representatives and EBRD leadership.
- Civil Society Steering Committee – Enhances collaboration between civil society representatives, international NGOs, and the EBRD to address concerns and consultations on key policies.
- Country Partnership Frameworks (CPF) Consultations – Enables civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage in strategy reviews and project oversight.

3. Stakeholder Engagement & Social Accountability

- ESR (Environmental and Social Requirement) on Stakeholder Engagement – Recognizes the importance of open and transparent dialogue between EBRD clients, workers, communities, and other stakeholders.[93]

---

[90] Requests for Information: Under the AIP, individuals have the right to request information and appeal refusals. Requests may be submitted via email (accessinfo@ebrd.com), the Bank's enquiry form, or in writing. Appeals are permitted if access is denied in violation of the AIP or related directives.
[91] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 13.
[92] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 69-70.
[93] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., supra note 40, at 100.

- Client Responsibilities – EBRD-financed projects must include public disclosure of key project information, meaningful consultation processes with affected communities, and accessible grievance mechanisms.[94]

4. EBRD's 2024-2029 Approach to Civil Society Engagement[95]

The Bank aims to strengthen engagement mechanisms with civil society, address global crises through CSO partnerships, protect and promote civic space in its regions of operation and improve internal accountability and incentives for civil society participation.

5. Civil Society Concerns & Recommendations to the EBRD in Kazakhstan Country Strategy 2022-2027[96]

a. Economic and Political Challenges

- CSOs raised concerns about market monopolies, limiting SME growth and competitiveness.
- Reports of state influence over communication platforms and corruption across sectors.
- Administrative burdens for non-profit organizations, leading to discriminatory treatment and state interference.

b. Infrastructure & Social Development

- CSOs stressed the need for judiciary, political, and constitutional reforms.
- Emphasized addressing low wages, especially for female workers.
- Urged support for women's entrepreneurship in the micro-business sector.

6. Strengthening EBRD's Engagement with Civil Society[97]

a. Enhancing Capacity & Collaboration

- Expanding CSCEF (Civil Society Capacity Enhancement Framework) to increase CSO engagement in governance, transparency, and social inclusion projects.
- Exploring new projects where CSOs act as implementing partners to improve local impact.

---

[94] *Environmental and Social Policy, Performance Requirement 10: Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement*, Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev. 1, https://www.ebrd.com/downloads/about/sustainability/ESP_PR10_Eng.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[95] EBRD *Approach to Civil Society Engagement*, *supra* note 81, at 4.
[96] Eur. Bank for Reconstruction & Dev., *Country Strategy for Kazakhstan* 13 (2022-2027), https://www.ebrd.com/content/dam/ebrd_dxp/assets/pdfs/country-strategies/kazakhstan/EBRD-Latest-Kazakhstan-Strategy-English.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[97] EBRD *Approach to Civil Society Engagement*, *supra* note 81, at 13.

b. Utilizing Civil Society Expertise

- Engaging civil society actors as advisors to enhance project effectiveness.
- Strengthening partnerships to integrate grassroots organizations into EBRD projects.

c. Expanding Outreach & Partnerships

- Increasing information-sharing efforts through the EBRD CSO newsletter, webinars, and social media.
- Organizing virtual, in-person, and hybrid events to enhance local engagement.

Case Studies: Civil Society Engagement in Kazakhstan

Case Study 1: Civil Society Influence on Kazakhstan's Energy Sector

In 2020, the EBRD financed the Almaty District Heating Modernization Project, aimed at reducing Kazakhstan's reliance on coal. Civil society organizations (CSOs) advocated for a just energy transition, urging the EBRD to increase investments in renewables instead of fossil fuels.

Following CSO recommendations, the EBRD increased transparency measures, included stakeholder engagement clauses in project agreements, and funded alternative energy feasibility studies. This case underscores civil society's influence in shaping EBRD investment priorities.

Case Study 2: Public Opposition to the Almaty Ring Road (BAKAD) Project

The BAKAD Project, a major highway construction initiative, faced criticism from Kazakhstani environmental activists and residents. Concerns included deforestation, air pollution, and inadequate compensation for displaced households.

Activists filed complaints through the Independent Project Accountability Mechanism (IPAM), leading to revised environmental safeguards to minimize ecological damage, increased compensation for affected residents and independent environmental monitoring requirements.

C. ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB) CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

1. ADB's Commitment to Civil Society Engagement

ADB engages with CSOs involved in research, capacity-building, policy advocacy, and service delivery. The Bank recognizes CSOs' role in amplifying development impact,

especially in supporting transparency, governance, and participatory decision-making.[98] ADB's approach to civil society engagement rests on the 1998 Policy on Cooperation between ADB and Non-Government Corporations, the 1996 Governance Policy, and the 2019 Access to Information Policy.[99]

ADB's development strategies have evolved since 1987 to adapt to the changing needs of the Asia-Pacific region.[100] Today, ADB operations integrate social and environmental dimensions beyond growth-oriented development. The NGO sector's capacity has also grown, making CSOs key actors in development processes. ADB has established multiple mechanisms for CSOs and communities to participate in and influence its policies and decisions. At the institutional policy level, ADB follows a policy of open consultation. When developing or reviewing major policies and strategies, ADB actively seeks input from civil society and other stakeholders.

Strategy 2030: Strengthening CSO Engagement[101]

ADB's long-term corporate strategy, Strategy 2030, commits the Bank to tapping into CSOs' local presence and specialized knowledge, increasing CSO involvement in project design and implementation, using grassroots participatory approaches to target vulnerable groups, mobilizing women and youth for project monitoring and accountability. ADB also seeks CSO input in reviewing major policies and operational priorities.

2. ADB's Stakeholder Consultation & Engagement Mechanisms

a. Inclusive Consultation Processes

- Environmental and Social Safeguard Consultations – ADB consults CSOs and project-affected communities while reviewing its Safeguard Policy Statement (SPS) and developing a new Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). Over 4,400 stakeholders, including CSOs, participated in recent consultations.

[98] *Civil Society Engagement*, Asian Dev. Bank, https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/civilsociety (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[99] *Id.*
[100] Asian Dev. Bank, *Cooperation Between the Asian Development Bank and Non-Government Organizations* 15 (2003), https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32018/adb-ngo-policy.pdf (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[101] Asian Dev. Bank, *ADB Civil Society Approach: An Operational Approach to Enhanced Engagement 2025–2030* 2–3 (2023), https://www.adb.org/documents/adb-civil-society-approach-2025-2030 (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

- Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) Engagements[102] – ADB integrates civil society perspectives into its country-level development strategies.
- Project-Level CSO Engagement – CSOs are involved in monitoring and evaluating projects to ensure compliance with environmental and social safeguards.

b. Project level participation

ADB is the first international financial institution to track and monitor planned and actual CSO engagement in sovereign project operations (loans and grants).[103] The Safeguard Policy mandates meaningful consultation with affected people, ensuring that their views are considered in project planning, implementation, and monitoring. This often includes public hearings, community meetings, and disclosure of impact assessments in local languages. Many ADB projects also establish grievance redress committees at the local level, where civil society representatives may sit to help resolve complaints before they escalate.

c. Formal and Informal Dialogue Channels

ADB has a dedicated NGO and Civil Society Center that coordinates relations with CSOs across the region. It facilitates communication between civil society and ADB management or project teams. For instance, at ADB's Annual Meetings, there is a Civil Society Program where representatives of NGOs can interact directly with ADB's President, board members, and staff. Outside of annual events, ADB's resident missions in member countries (including Kazakhstan) maintain regular contact with local NGOs, inviting them to stakeholder workshops on country strategies or sector plans. ADB also often partners with NGOs to implement projects – particularly grants and technical assistance in social sectors – recognizing that NGOs can reach grassroots communities effectively.

3. ADB's Three-Pillar Approach to Civil Society Engagement[104]

ADB's Civil Society Approach focuses on three operational pillars: fostering meaningful civil society engagement in ADB policies, strategies, and projects; strengthening knowledge-sharing and dialogue among developing member countries (DMCs), the private sector, ADB,

---

[102] Asian Dev. Bank, *Working with ADB: A Primer for Identifying Business Opportunities for NGOs* 8 (2010), https://www.adb.org/publications/primer-identifying-business-opportunities-ngos (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).
[103] Asian Dev. Bank, *ADB Civil Society Approach 2025-2030*, *supra* note 101, at 4.
[104] *Civil Society Engagement*, Asian Dev. Bank, https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/civilsociety (last visited Mar. 28, 2025).

and civil society; and supporting civil society involvement in accountability and transparency initiatives across member countries.

4. Core ADB Departments Engaging with CSOs

a. Office of Environment & Social Development (OESD) – Leads CSO engagement in safeguards, governance, and transparency.[105]
b. Resident Missions & Country Offices – Serve as liaison points for local CSOs.[106]
c. Operations Evaluation Office – Assesses ADB-CSO collaboration effectiveness.[107]
d. Office of External Relations (OER) – Manages CSO communication & public engagement.[108]

5. How CSOs Can Engage with ADB:[109] CSOs can participate in ADB's work through five key channels:

a. Participating in Strategy & Policy Reviews – ADB consults CSOs on all major policy updates.
b. Engaging in Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) Processes – CSOs provide input on national development strategies.
c. Monitoring ADB-Funded Projects – CSOs participate in project-level oversight and evaluations.
d. Connecting with ADB's NGO Anchors – Every ADB field office has an NGO focal point for CSO relations.
e. Knowledge Sharing & Events – ADB organizes workshops, conferences, and webinars to engage with CSOs.

Case Studies: Civil Society Engagement in Kazakhstan

Case study 1: Nutrition and Public Health Project – Partnering with NGOs:

One illustrative case from Kazakhstan is the **Sustainable Food Fortification Project**, supported by ADB through the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR). This regional project (mid-2000s) aimed to combat malnutrition by fortifying staples like salt and flour with essential micronutrients. In Kazakhstan, ADB engaged local civil society organizations as key partners to implement and advocate for this initiative. The Confederation of Non-Governmental Organizations of Kazakhstan (a national NGO

[105] Asian Dev. Bank, *Cooperation between ADB and NGOs*, *supra* note 101, at 29.
[106] Asian Dev. Bank, *Cooperation between ADB and NGOs*, *supra* note 101, at 30.
[107] Asian Dev. Bank, *Cooperation between ADB and NGOs*, *supra* note 101, at 31
[108] *Id*.
[109] Asian Dev. Bank, *Working with ADB: A Primer for Identifying Business Opportunities for NGOs*, supra note 103, at 8.

umbrella group) worked alongside industry associations such as the National Association of Salt Producers and the League of Grain Processors and Bakers of Kazakhstan to roll out food fortification programs. These NGOs were involved in raising public awareness, training producers, and monitoring compliance with new food standards. Their involvement was crucial in building local ownership and ensuring the project respected community needs (e.g. taking into account dietary habits and cultural preferences). This case shows ADB's model of working with civil society to advance the right to adequate nutrition and health.

Case-study 2: Community Grievance on Energy Access – Accountability in Action:

In 2018, villagers from Karaotkel in Akmola Region filed a formal complaint through ADB's Accountability Mechanism regarding the Akmola Electricity Distribution Network Modernization and Expansion Project. This ADB-funded project was intended to improve power infrastructure and promote inclusive growth, but the community experienced what they viewed as unfair treatment by the utility. According to the complaint, despite the project's support from ADB and other financiers, the local power company was charging households high fees to connect to the electricity grid – even though Kazakhstani regulations state that basic connection should be provided free of charge. The villagers alleged that these practices violated their rights as consumers and undermined the project's poverty-reduction goal, effectively making poor families worse off. With assistance from a local NGO activist, they raised these concerns to ADB.

The accountability complaint mobilized ADB's problem-solving function to engage with the power company and government authorities. It gave the community a direct channel to voice their grievances and seek a remedy. As a result of this civil society action, ADB reviewed the situation to ensure its policies on fair access and involuntary resettlement (economic displacement) were not being breached. The case led to a dialogue on eliminating the extra connection fees and allowing standard meters, aligning the project with its promise of affordable access to electricity. While the complaint was later closed after investigation, it exemplified how Kazakh citizens exercised their right to be heard and influenced project implementation through ADB's procedures.