

## Opening new pathways for accountability in the MENA region

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011, BIC took advantage of more open space for civil society (and increased donor interest) in Egypt and other MENA countries to hold a number of workshops in the MENA region for Egyptian and other regional CSOs. The workshops focused on how civil society can engage with the MDBs and use their influence with governments to push forward various advocacy objectives or raise concerns about specific development projects.

A contact from one of these workshops worked as a lawyer and advocate supporting farmer collectives in specific areas in Egypt, as part of an organization called Egyptian Association for Collective Rights (EACR). BIC contracted with EACR to look into examples of projects in Egypt financed by the World Bank where the resettlement safeguard policy had been triggered. Through this research and through their existing farmer networks, EACR shared with BIC the case of a group of farmers whose crops were being negatively impacted by the construction of a Bank-funded power plant located to the north and west of Giza, Egypt. EACR found that the farmers had raised their concerns with various commercial and agricultural banks, not realizing that they were not reaching the Bank. BIC and EACR were able to help the farmers document their concerns and facilitate a meeting with the Bank office in Cairo to raise them. Unfortunately, the Bank was not immediately responsive to the farmers' concerns and did not provide a satisfactory way to address the issues they were facing. So, EACR and BIC supported the groups to raise a complaint with the Inspection Panel in 2013 detailing their concerns.

While the Inspection Panel complaint did not result in a full investigation of the issues raised, the case was the first filed from Egypt and led to some changes within the Bank Country Office in Egypt. The Country Office realized it needed more capacity to be responsive to issues raised by civil society and communities, as well as capacity to address social safeguards concerns. The Country Office subsequently hired additional staff to be based in that office and cover those issue areas.

The case was also used as an example within the Bank to point out some broader systemic issues. Through this case, the Bank identified a need for additional options to receive and keep track of concerns in a more structured, but less formal process than the Inspection Panel. So, they piloted a project-level grievance mechanism in the North Giza Power Plant case.

The requirement to establish a project-level grievance mechanism later became one of the components of the new Environmental and Social Standard 10 on Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure once the Environmental and Social Framework was approved in 2016. Following this case, discussions with both the Bank and Inspection Panel also indicated their

respective interest in exploring approaches to solving project-related issues and addressing concerns up front in alternative processes to going through lengthy compliance reviews in the Inspection Panel process. While two ways that Bank staff and Inspection Panel tried to put this idea into action — a “pilot approach” to early problem solving at the Inspection Panel, and the Bank management’s Grievance Redress Service or GRS — had some significant issues, the case did factor in to pushing the conversation of the accountability landscape at the institution. The farmers received compensation for the losses of their crops, and had a more open channel to raise future concerns.

While this case was imperfect as far as the results — the farmers were not wholly satisfied with how their concerns were ultimately addressed, the Inspection Panel complaint was not seen through to a full investigation, the project grievance mechanism put in place in the project was far from perfect, etc. — it does show that where BIC has a presence, the tools that BIC can share with civil society groups can reach the people who are facing negative project impacts and can help them to reach the right people to present their concerns. Additionally when the processes to address those concerns fail, BIC can play a role in escalating them to where they can be heard and responded to. Even if the response is not perfect, raising these issues does have a ripple effect in shining light on processes that need to be improved and where there are gaps that need to be filled.