

Why does the Asian Development Bank need to address disability in its Safeguard Policy Statement?

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is currently undertaking a review of its Safeguards Policy Statement of 2009. This policy establishes mandatory standards and procedures that the borrower/client and the ADB must follow in preparing and implementing Bank-financed projects. Because these policies inform and direct the management of project-related risks, including potential impacts to communities and the environment, it is critical that they address specific risks to marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities. The Safeguards Policy Statement of 2009 has no mention of persons with disabilities, so the review is an important opportunity for the ADB to revise its policies to make them inclusive so that it does not create additional barriers to participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

We recommend that the updated SPS ensures systematic, cross-cutting integration of disability throughout all safeguards requirements. The policy must contain explicit reference to persons with disabilities, examine the disaggregated impact of projects on persons with disabilities, and emphasize the inclusion of persons with disabilities in project benefits, as opposed to a “do no harm” approach. The ADB must focus on going beyond a do no harm approach to one that would encompass access to project benefit, including employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in projects which would also yield a better understanding of the different risks faced by persons with disabilities in the development agenda. The new SPS must require meaningful stakeholder engagement, which is the most effective way to assess the needs of persons with disabilities affected by the project and ensure their full participation throughout the project cycle.

- **Inclusion of persons with disabilities under “vulnerable groups” category wherever mentioned right throughout the Safeguards Policy Statement**, and definition aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This includes the process of identifying individuals, groups, and communities that may be directly and disproportionately affected by the project, and requiring the Borrower to consider diverse cross-sectional groups disadvantaged in Asia as there is no explicit mention in the current SPS of persons with disabilities.
- **Promote non-discrimination and the inclusion of persons with disabilities from the earliest stages of project conceptualization and design, stakeholder engagement and all forms of consultations right throughout the project cycle.** The ADB’s and Borrowers’ responsibility should be to ensure accessible formats for the different physical, sensory, and/or cognitive needs and in open data formats during project preparation and implementation. Strengthening requirements on accessibility and reasonable accommodation will not only prevent adverse impacts but will also guarantee the engagement of persons with disabilities throughout the project cycle.
- **All project documents, including those relevant to the Grievance Redress Mechanism, should add specific references to the accessibility measures/formats that the Borrower should use based on various needs of persons with disabilities.** To effectively meet this objective, the disclosure of information, consultation, attention to and response to complaints and the presentation of information to stakeholders should be designed and developed in formats accessible to all types of disability, whether physical (infrastructure), sensory (visual, auditory -available formats), intellectual (simple language) and psychosocial.

- **There must be explicit reference to groups who might be disproportionately impacted by Bank projects or who might face barriers to project benefits, like persons with disabilities, in binding Bank documents such as the SPS. This must be reflected in the requirements for Social Assessments, Stakeholder Engagement and the Grievance Redress Mechanism in particular to ensure they are binding requirements that must be followed by the Borrower.** While we understand that specific aspects of the operationalization of the safeguards belong in non-binding guidance documents and operation manuals, certain requirements to ensure the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities must be included in a binding document such as the SPS.
- **Assess the unique and differentiated impacts of Bank projects on persons with disabilities** rather than assessing a project's impact on what the Bank is calling "disadvantaged or vulnerable populations" which includes a wide range of groups differently impacted by projects. Assessments and data collection conducted right throughout the project cycle, including social and economic impact assessments undertaken at the earliest stages of project design must include indicators on disability. Currently the SPS requires only gender disaggregation or as stated in the 'Outline of a resettlement action plan' section, "social impact assessment, the census survey, and other studies, with information and/or data disaggregated by gender, vulnerability, and other social groupings". We recommend that data on persons with disabilities be explicitly mentioned right throughout the policy, allowing for data to be collected and disaggregated based on disability as well in order to fully understand the differentiated impacts on different people and groups, as well as build in mitigation measures. By collecting data not only on project impact on persons with disabilities, but going beyond to also identifying barriers they may face to fully participating and benefiting from projects, would enable the ADB and the borrower to address these issues at the project design stage itself. It is equally important to build in these disability indicators into post project evaluations as well in order to understand how the projects impacted them.
- **When disability rights are integrated into the policy right through the project cycle, it allows for budgets to reflect costs to support the full participation of persons with disabilities** - for example support for personal assistance, caregivers, access to assistive technologies, sign language, documents that adjust for various needs, including those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. Furthermore, combined with social and economic impact assessment data that reflects disability extra costs faced by persons with disabilities, such as higher cost to work, expensive maintenance costs for personal assistance, devices, caregivers, transport, would allow for these costs to be included in budgets that may not be otherwise evident.

This report was prepared in collaboration with:



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