

African Development Bank

What does it do and how can CSOs engage with it



The African Development Bank group (AfDB) is the main development finance institution in Africa. It supports poverty-reduction and livelihoods programmes and policy reforms (affecting the healthcare system or the level of public debt). Sometimes, projects funded by the AfDB such as mega hydroelectric dams or polluting fertilizer factories end up causing harm to the affected communities and going against the objectives of the Bank.

★ Founded in 1964

📍 Headquarter: Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) + 34 offices and 2 resource centers across Africa

🎯 Mission: to spur sustainable economic development and social progress in Africa, thus contributing to poverty reduction.

🌐 82 member countries: 54 regional and 28 non-regional.

🏛️ The AfDB Group is made up of:

- a parent institution: the African Development Bank (AfDB)
- two lending institutions: the African Development Fund (ADF) and the Nigeria Trust Fund (NTF)

💰 The group provides loans and grants to governments, funds projects and technical assistance programs, and invests in private companies across the African continent.

Why knowing the AfDB and engaging with it is important:

- its operations can directly or indirectly impact you or your community: some projects might contribute to human rights violations, displace you, affect your livelihood, or pollute your territory;
- it is an international organization, that contributes to shaping the global development agenda;
- it is a public institution: it should serve the interests of African peoples;
- it has committed to spur sustainable development, respect human rights, ensure access to information & transparency, and comply with its safeguards. Yet, it sometimes fails to stay true to its commitments: it is crucial to hold it accountable.



Who makes decisions?

Board of governors

Highest decision-making body. Each member country appoints one Governor and one Alternate Governor (generally Ministers of Finance or Economy, Central Bank Governors, or other high-ranking officials).

Board of Directors

Responsible for conducting and approving all the general operations. It comprises 20 members. Executive Directors (EDs) are based at the AfDB headquarters in Abidjan.

President

Elected by the Board of Governors for a five year term, renewable once. In charge of the daily management of the bank, under the direction of the Board of Directors, with the support of a Chief Economist and five Vice Presidents.

The AfDB Member States exercise a voting power proportional to the amount of money they contribute to the bank. As of 2023, the regional members with the highest voting power are Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa, Algeria and Ivory Coast, while the non-regional are the United States, Japan, Germany, Canada and France.



Advocacy tip: Knowing who makes decisions within the AfDB is crucial for your advocacy strategy. Building relationships and alliances with the Executive Directors, especially those relevant for your country or those with the highest voting powers, can help influence the AfDB's decisions.

It is also important to be familiar with the main AfDB policies & mechanisms, such as: the Disclosure and Access to Information Policy, the CSO Engagement Framework and the CSO committee, the Integrated Safeguards System, the Independent Recourse Mechanism, and the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Policy.

How can civil society engage with the AfDB?

- **Project level:** monitor projects to compare between commitments on paper and in reality; engage with project-affected communities; share findings with relevant government staff and AfDB project team staff.
 - **Country level:** engage with the country offices; advocate at the national level; participate in consultations throughout project cycles; join stakeholder engagement processes around country and sectoral strategies; engage during the civil society open days organized by the country offices; conduct research; engage with CSOs coalitions working on development finance.
 - **Regional level:** participate during the AfDB CSO fora, policy reviews, Annual Meetings.
 - **International level:** engage with international governments such as USA, UK, Norway etc and Executive Directors in those international fora where the AfDB participates.
- ▶ To engage with civil society, the AfDB has developed two instruments: the Civil Society Engagement Framework & the Civil Society Committee.



When rights are violated: the Independent Recourse Mechanism

The Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) was established in 2004 to ensure the AfDB **complies with its own policies and procedures** during the design and implementation of its projects. It provides people adversely affected by AfDB projects an avenue to **submit their complaints**, hold the bank accountable, and demand access to remedy.

The IRM has three main functions:

1. Problem-Solving (Mediation).
2. Compliance Review (Investigation)
3. Advisory Services (Internal Learning),

In many contexts, human rights defenders and community members raising concerns around development projects risk facing **reprisals**: they might be attacked as a result of their opposition to a project, or simply for raising their concerns. For this reason, the complainants can request to keep their identities confidential. Remember that, in case of reprisals, you can engage with the IRM but also directly with the Bank management staff.

Two key policies: the DAI and the ISS

Under the **Disclosure and Access to Information Policy (DAI)** policy, all information held by the AfDB should be made public, unless it is on a list of exceptions and there is a compelling reason for confidentiality. Project information, including information about environmental and social risks, can be found on the AfDB's project portal. Any information on the AfDB's operations can be requested through the DAI Request Form.

Safeguard policies (ISS) serve as an important "foot in the door" for those seeking to hold the AfDB accountable. Safeguards are rules and policies that aim to identify and mitigate risks in the context of the activities supported by the bank, and ultimately prevent environmental and social harms from occurring. The AfDB is currently updating its Integrated Safeguards System (ISS).

To hold the AfDB accountable, apart from engaging in advocacy activities and filing complaints to the IRM, CSOs and project-affected people can adopt a variety of strategies:

- **Media and social media campaigns:**

The bank is careful to keep a good reputation: put pressure through social media or get investigative journalists to publish stories about the AfDB.

- **Lobby parliamentarians and promoting oversight:**

A large sum of official development aid is spent by development banks: a better parliamentary oversight adds to the pressure on the bank to act.

- **Appeal to UN bodies and regional entities, such as the African Commission on Human and People's rights**

Engaging with UN bodies can lead the UN to look into a specific case or send a Rapporteur to do an investigation. It can also help put pressure.

- **Public protests and acts of civil disobedience**

- **Organize and work within networks**