

## **A Call to Boycott the ADB's South Asia Consultation on its Draft Safeguard Policy**

At a time when numerous peoples' struggles are going on in South Asia against forced displacement, land alienation and environmental destruction, and to protect the culture and identity of indigenous peoples and the right to free and prior informed consent in all development projects, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is conducting consultations on a deeply flawed draft of its “safeguard policy statement.” The draft overlooks more than a decade of global campaigns to strengthen national and international social and environmental policies to prevent the disastrous impact of development projects on local communities--especially indigenous peoples—and the general public.

The ADB's draft safeguard policy is not only a step backward from its own existing policies, but it also sabotages on-going efforts by peoples' movements against their own governments' inadequate policies on rehabilitation & resettlement, environment and indigenous and tribal communities.

The new draft collapses three distinct ADB policies on environment, involuntary resettlement and indigenous peoples into a single “statement” of principles that feed into the ADB's much touted country systems approach. In its articulation of “requirements for Borrowers/Clients,” the draft responds to the clamour of the ADB's member countries for ‘investment at all costs.’ It betrays communities negatively affected by so called development projects and ignores the rising tide of demands by peoples' movements, communities and the public for their governments to be transparent and accountable to their peoples.

The ADB's new “framework approach” is turning back the clock on development lending by taking environmental and social mitigation measures out of project design to please its member governments and facilitate private sector participation. Furthermore, the ADB's impending shift to a “country systems” approach is not going to provide any respite to the project affected communities either, since in many of the ADB's member countries, national safeguard policies are facilitated, funded and supported by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the ADB and the World Bank.

Fraudulent environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and environmental clearances, suppression of information, and gross violations of human and indigenous peoples' rights in ADB supported projects such as Lafarge mining (Meghalaya, India), Phulbari (Bangladesh), STDP in Sri Lanka, Chasma in Pakistan and Melamchi and Kali Gandaki in Nepal amply show the collusion between the ADB and national governments in ignoring and even manipulating safeguard policies. In all these areas, both the governments and the ADB are facing fierce opposition to these projects by local communities and peoples' movements.

Industry, investors, borrowers and clients are given a free run in the ADB's draft safeguard policy, which appears to be more oriented towards safeguarding the interests of

the ADB itself, and its governmental and private sector clients than upholding the rights of local and indigenous communities. A South Asia Consultation on this draft policy, organized and run by the ADB, will not result in a better policy. On the contrary, it will serve to promote the fiction that the ADB is transparent, accountable and inclusive. Participants in such consultation meetings will be manipulated by an agenda and discussion parameters set by the ADB which will not allow for more fundamental questioning of the ADB's internal and external accountability mechanisms and practices.

In solidarity with peoples' movements and community led struggles in South Asia against the ADB, World Bank and their so called developmental programmes, we call upon all our friends and colleagues in struggle to boycott the ADB's forthcoming South Asia Consultation on Draft Safeguard Policy in New Delhi on January 16-17 2008.

The ADB, World Bank and other international financial institutions must be opposed for their anti-people development projects and programmes, and their complete lack of accountability to those negatively affected by these projects. Equally, our governments, who constitute the membership of these institutions, must respect the rights of all peoples residing within their territories and promote genuinely accountable and transparent governance.

In order to achieve this, we need to stand firmly together and work collectively on several fronts. We need to let the ADB and our governments know that we reject their attempts to manipulate and dilute our rights; we need to prepare clear critiques of the draft safeguard policy and the country systems approach and share these with the general public and our national press and media, and; we need to articulate non-negotiable policies and mechanisms that will actually protect and uphold the rights of project affected communities and make both the ADB and our governments genuinely accountable to the people.

Boycotting the ADB's consultation meetings on the deeply flawed draft safeguard policy will be a crucial first step towards collectively formulating a strategy to achieve genuine accountability and good governance on the part of the ADB as well as our governments. We urge you all to join us to make this happen.

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