

Highlights of the discussion

Project Communications in Conflict Prevention

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This brown bag is part of a how-to series that the DER Project Communication Group regularly conducts for operations staff. This case discussion is different from previous brown bags in that instead of featuring the best communication practices of a selected project, conversations focused on conflict, and the critical role that project communications play in its prevention and resolution.

Project Communications in Conflict Prevention was co-organized with the Office of Special Project Facilitator (OSPF).

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Background on OSPF:

- ADB's Accountability Mechanism has two functions: problem-solving and compliance review. OPSF is the problem solver, directly assisting stakeholders who have been adversely affected by ADB-assisted projects to find solutions to their complaints.

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Consultative dialogue, information sharing and mediation are part of the problem solving approaches used by OPSF.

- Compliance review is the second phase of the Accountability Mechanism. An independent body, the Compliance Review Panel, focuses on whether the direct and material harm alleged by project-affected people are caused by ADB's violations of its operational policies and procedures in formulating, processing or implementing a project.

Complaints to ADB-assisted projects (2004-2014):

- In a period of ten years, there were 23 complaints (40% of entire complaints) deemed eligible by the Accountability Mechanism. Fourteen (14) of the 23 were coursed through the OPSF for problem-solving while nine (9) complaints were elevated for compliance review.
 - Although all complaints are related to communications, only 23 percent specifically mentioned communications or the lack of it as the main factor for grievance. These are:
 - information (17.3%); consultation and participation (14%)
- In terms of sectors, the transport sector (17%) and other municipal infrastructure services (12%) made up the bulk of the complaints.
- Of all the regions, Southeast Asia (14%), Central and West Asia (12%) and South Asia (9%) received the most complaints.
- Of the complaints to the Accountability Mechanism, affected peoples raised the issue of resettlement, compensation and land acquisition the most (32%) and agriculture, natural resources and environment (14.7%)
- It should be noted though that complaints on resettlement, compensation and land acquisition and agriculture, natural resources and environment also contained communication-related implications
- A DER-NGOC study of NGO complaints from 2008 to 2011 found that 55% of concerns were related to insufficient communication and participation. Of the 213 cases filed by NGOs, 117 were about communications.
- The Philippine Management Institute estimated that for every US\$1B spent on a project, US\$135 M is at risk of which US\$75 M (56 percent) is at risk due to ineffective communication (*The High Cost of Low Performance, The Essential Role of Communications*)

The Role of Communications in Project Conflicts: Cambodia, Nepal and Samoa

A. Cambodia railway project

- An NGO filed a complaint on behalf of 155 Cambodia households alleging that:
 - Affected people were not adequately informed about the compensation package and how livelihood cost replacements were calculated (e.g., "post-its" were placed on the doors of their homes with the amounts) – due to mistakes in calculations, they received inadequate compensation
 - They were not fully consulted or informed about the resettlement and relocation – as a result, affected peoples sunk deeper into debt
 - Dysfunctional grievance mechanism
- Case went into compliance review after problem solving by OPSF where ADB was found to have violated its own safeguards procedures and policies

- Consequences to ADB:
 - Reputation hit; negative media coverage
 - Project cost estimated to have tripled (from original US\$84M)
 - Rehabilitation incomplete – from project output of 642 kms. of railway, only 321 kms. were finished
- Communication interventions were incorporated in project design and implementation (i.e., communication strategy developed; consultations with stakeholders held; project promotional materials produced, translated and disseminated, etc.) but missed the following crucial elements:
 - Consultations with stakeholders (especially affected people) are not just checklist activities to simply comply with requirements but adequately cover:
 - Information exchanges beyond providing information about project details
 - Regular and constant two-way communication and genuine dialogue
 - Representation by vulnerable population who will not otherwise voice their sentiments

B. Nepal rural infrastructure project

- A family filed a complaint alleging that:
 - Consultations on voluntary land donation for the project were inadequate
 - Project used a community-driven approach, and maximized the tradition of voluntary land donation for projects benefitting community.
 - Assumptions were made that affected people would likely donate land. Other options such as compensation to affected people were not made clear
 - No land ownership verification
 - Consent of affected peoples to donate their land were coerced
 - NGO was hired to be “third party” to verify that no one was coerced to donate their land. The NGO conducted a campaign to raise the awareness of the community about the project and encourage their participation, which could have influenced their decision to donate their land.
 - Grievances coursed through mechanism were not documented
 - Road construction started before land transfer and consent of community
- Communication interventions such as consultations with affected people and awareness-raising campaigns about the project were conducted, however:
 - assumptions that affected people will most likely donate land for project led to a compromised consultation process – as a result, people were not fully informed of other options for land acquisition and were not able to make informed decisions
 - two-way dialogue (rather than just awareness-raising about project) could have informed affected people about project impact
 - NGO did not have structured process to ensure consent to land donation was based on full, free and informed decision-making

C. Samoa economic use of customary land TA

- Four chiefs raised concerns about the lack of meaningful consultations about the use of customary land (mostly idle) for economic use especially the appropriate mechanisms to ensure flow of benefits to local families
 - Customary land tenure is a social issue involving many different stakeholders with different and sometimes conflicting interests (i.e., Who will the project lease

land from when land is owned by community – 1,000 persons? Who will sign legal contracts? What are the mechanisms to mortgage customary leaseholds?)

- Brief consultations were conducted about the project but:
 - major political and social issues on Samoan culture and land dimensions were missed – which can lead to civil unrest
 - there was no comprehensive communication strategy that would have tailored processes to bring out socio-political issues for dialogue

Lessons Learned:

1. At the earliest possible stage, a comprehensive communication strategy that integrates all safeguard elements will:
 - design consultative activities that go beyond simply providing information about the project to comply with safeguards requirements
 - tailor communication processes to bring out critical issues for dialogue and resolution – especially for projects with multiple players
 - bring in the crucial support of the EA/IA
 - anticipate possibilities for crisis communication
2. From the onset, there has to be buy-in about communication processes by the EA/IA because they own the project
3. Project teams have to be creative in allocating or leveraging funds for communication activities -- because investment in communications will prevent conflict