

**National democratization theory and global governance:  
Understanding processes of liberalization in the Asian  
Development Bank**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the International Studies Association Annual Convention  
February 16-20, 2010, New Orleans

## **Abstract**

Contributing to a growing literature on democracy beyond the nation-state, this article draws on aspects of national democratization theory in order to analyse empirical processes rather than normative models of democracy. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has for long been described as a rather closed, unresponsive and unaccountable international organization. In a recent evaluation, however, the Bank was praised for its good practices concerning transparency, participation and accountability. The article examines the role of transnational civil society actors in the processes that seem to have strengthened the democratic credentials of the ADB. An analytical framework highlighting the interaction between hard-liners and soft-liners within the international organization and different types of transnational civil society actors, as well as the importance of political opportunity structures, is applied to the ADB case. The analysis indicates significant divisions within the ADB as well as among civil society actors targeting the Bank. Transnational civil society actors, interacting with soft-liners within the ADB, have contributed to the implementation of reforms, which create political opportunities for further civil society activism. The reform processes are best described as processes of liberalization – rather than democratization.

## **Keywords**

transition theory, democratization, liberalization, transnational civil society, international organizations, Asian Development Bank, political opportunity structures

# **National democratization theory and global governance: Understanding processes of liberalization in the Asian Development Bank?<sup>1</sup>**

The ADB 'is an institution that is now widely recognized as having imposed tremendous sufferings on the peoples of the Asia-Pacific. In the name of development, its projects and programs have destroyed the livelihoods of people, brought about the disintegration of local and indigenous communities, promoted the sharp rise of inequality, deepened poverty, and destabilized the environment. [...] We have had enough of an arrogant institution that is one of the most non-transparent, undemocratic, and unaccountable organizations in existence.'<sup>2</sup>

The ADB has 'transparency policies that meet all current good practice principles [...] and robust transparency systems to support compliance.'<sup>3</sup>

'The ADB has a high quality document guiding engagement with civil society.'<sup>4</sup>

'The ADB's Accountability Mechanism not only has a compliance element but also has a problem-solving function called the consultation phase. The Mechanism's consultation phase is innovative as it focuses on resolving conflict and solving problems rather than issuing a ruling on whether or not the ADB is in compliance. In this way, the consultation phase arguably brings accountability to affected communities more to the centre of the Mechanism.'<sup>5</sup>

## **Introduction**

Problems of democracy beyond the nation-state have emerged as a major theme in contemporary political debate as well as in social science research. International organizations have increasingly been challenged by civil society actors because of their alleged democratic deficits and as a response many organizations have initiated reforms. Empirical studies indicate a general trend toward more transparency and openness to civil society participation, but considerable variation between different international organizations.<sup>6</sup> Yet, most research on democracy and global governance still focus on the development of normative models of democracy suitable for a global context. Less attention has been devoted to understanding and

explaining actual empirical processes of democratization of international organizations and other global governance arrangements. While there are many sophisticated theoretical models of cosmopolitan, discursive and stakeholder democracy beyond the nation-state, there is a lack of theories explaining processes of change in democratic direction on a global level. Comparative democratization research focusing on processes of democratization on the national level offers exactly such theories, but they have so far not had any significant impact on the study of democratization of global governance. This article proposes an analytical framework for studying processes of democratization in global governance that draws on the influential transition theory in comparative democratization studies. Applying this framework to the case of reform processes within the Asian Development Bank (ADB), I assess the utility and limitations of this national democratization theory for research on international organizations.

The ADB, like other regional development banks, have not figured prominently on the reform agenda. However, during recent years the ADB seems to have strengthened its democratic credentials. Previously considered a rather closed, unresponsive and unaccountable organization (compare the initial quotation from 2001), the ADB has in an evaluation from 2007 been put forward as an international organization with comparatively strong democratic credentials (compare the following quotations above). On criteria such as transparency, participation, evaluation and response to complaints, the ADB scored better than most other international governmental as well as nongovernmental organizations included in the study. What appears to be a sudden and unexpected democratization of the ADB is a puzzle worth investigating in more detail. The aim of this article is to account for the changes that have taken place within the ADB. What are the factors behind the processes that seem to have made the ADB more transparent, accountable to stakeholders and open and inclusive in its relationship with civil society actors? Can the processes be understood as a transition from an authoritarian regime in line with the famous theory of O'Donnell & Schmitter?<sup>7</sup>

Attempting to trace these processes, I draw on ADB and NGO documents as well as interviews with key figures within the ADB and civil society organizations (CSOs) interacting with the Bank.<sup>8</sup> The article proceeds in the following way: After this introduction, the research problem is further elaborated through a discussion of democratic deficits in the global governance of development, with specific reference to the ADB. I then outline a framework for analyzing processes of democratization in global governance. This framework

draws on certain aspects of the transition theory outlined by O'Donnell & Schmitter complemented by the concept of political opportunity structures frequently used in social movement studies. Focusing on the role of transnational civil society actors, it highlights the interaction between different types of actors within and outside an international organization and how different political opportunity structures shape the advocacy of civil society groups. The following sections present the empirical analysis. First, civil society engagement with the ADB is analysed in terms of actors negotiating a transition. I then analyze how CSOs try to create and use political opportunity structures within the ADB. In particular I examine the ADB accountability mechanism and public communication policy. Finally, I draw some conclusions and reflect on the limitations of this theoretical framework when applied to international organizations.

### **Democratic deficits in the global governance of development: The ADB in perspective**

The present case study is situated in one of the most contested fields of global governance. Socioeconomic development in a broad sense is, arguably, the field in which we find the most fundamental political tensions and the most frequent and far-reaching civil society demands for democratizing global governance. Broadly, the ideological struggle between proponents of a neo-liberal, corporate dominated, world order and its many diverse civil society critics is at the core of the politics of global governance. The largest transnational corporations, the main international organizations like the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF as well as the most powerful governments in world politics can be seen as the major pillars of the current neo-liberal world order. The injustices and democratic deficits of this system have come under increasing criticism from various transnational civil society actors, ranging from moderate NGOs, proposing modest reforms in global economic governance, to radical activists, aiming at fundamental global transformation.

Multilateral development banks, in particular, have been the target of protests. The mandate of the multilateral development banks, as well as other multilateral organizations, is described in technical and functional terms, implying that they are non-political organizations. However, in practice they are powerful organizations having significant impact on many people's lives and should be seen as political actors.<sup>9</sup> Since the end of the 1980s the agenda of multilateral development organizations has broadened considerably from a previous focus on technical assistance. Concepts like sustainable development, good governance, participation,

gender and indigenous peoples are now central, but the broadening of the development agenda has arguably taken place within the old discourses of modernization, economic growth and technical apolitical knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

In the field of development the World Bank, being the major organization, has received most attention. Based on comparative case studies of interaction between the World Bank, NGOs and grassroots movements, Fox and Brown conclude that ‘the Bank has to a small and uneven but significant degree become more publicly accountable as the result of protest, ongoing public scrutiny, and empowering effect on insider reformists.’<sup>11</sup> The role of CSOs in strengthening the accountability of the World Bank has been relatively thoroughly researched.<sup>12</sup> Here I focus on a multilateral development bank that has received much less scholarly attention; the ADB. Like other regional development banks it performs similar functions to the World Bank, but on a regional level. It provides financial support through low-interest long-term loans and grants and advice concerning development policies to developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Most money go to large infrastructure projects. Traditionally most loans have been directed to the public sector, but in recent years loans to private sector projects have increased. Since the 1990s, the ADB also provides program loans aiming at policy reforms within a specific sector, like water or energy. These loans have often promoted privatization.

Established in 1966, with the Japanese government as a main initiator, the ADB has its headquarters in Manila and 26 field offices in different member countries. The Bank is owned and financed by its 67 member countries, of which 48 are from the region. The highest decision-making body of the ADB is its Board of Governors, consisting mainly of finance ministers from each member country. They meet once a year at the ADB annual meeting. The Board of Governors elects the ADB President for a 5 years term. The President of the ADB has always come from Japan, the most influential country in the Bank. Many other key positions are also held by Japanese nationals. All operational decisions are taken by the 12 people in the Board of Directors, who are primarily officials from member governments’ ministry of finance (or, in the case of several European members, the ministry of foreign affairs). The Board of Directors meets twice a week to make decisions on all loans, guarantees and technical assistance grants.<sup>13</sup> Voting power is determined by the amount of investment in the ADB. This means that the non-borrowing members have more than 60 % of the voting power. Japan and the USA are the largest contributors with almost 13 % of the total votes

each. Like in other multilateral organizations, decision-making typically aims at consensus, but this is a form of consensus that is established on specific power relations.<sup>14</sup> Large borrowers like China and India also have considerable influence as the ADB would lose significant business without their borrowings.

In sharp contrast to the severe criticism against the ADB quoted in the beginning of this article, the 2007 Global Accountability Report gives an image of an international organization with comparatively strong democratic credentials.<sup>15</sup> The ADB received an average score of 81% (see Table 1). This is the same score as the best performing INGO (Christian Aid) included in the assessment and of all 30 organizations evaluated ADB's performance was second only to the UN Development Program (UNDP). The ADB was one of only three organizations that received scores above 70% in all four dimensions. The remaining part of this article analyses and tries to explain the reforms in a democratic direction that led to the ADB receiving such high scores in this evaluation. First, I outline a framework for this analysis.

Table 1. Overall accountability capabilities scores in One World Trust's Global Accountability Report 2007

<b>IGOs</b>	<b>Score %</b>	<b>Rank</b>
UNDP	88	1
<b>ADB</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>2</b>
UNEP	74	3
WFP	70	4
IDB	68	5
Council of Europe	59	6
IsDB	53	7
African Union	40	8
OSCE	30	9
Interpol	22	10
<b>INGOs</b>	<b>Score %</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Christian Aid	81	1
IASB	69	2
International Save the Children Alliance	61	3
Aga Khan Foundation	54	4
Human Rights Watch	52	5
ISO	52	5
MSF International	51	7
Mercy Malaysia	48	8
Greenpeace International	42	9
FIFA	37	10
<b>TNCs</b>	<b>Score %</b>	<b>Rank</b>
GE	65	1
GSK	59	2
TATA Group	57	3
The Coca-Cola Company	56	4
Petrobras	53	5
Suez	47	6
HSBC Holding	41	7
DynCorp International	36	8
PwC International Limited	18	9
Google	17	10

Source: Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, '2007 Global Accountability Report', 7.

### **Actors and political opportunity structures in global governance reform: A framework for analysis**

Writings on transnational civil society are a natural starting point when trying to understand reform processes in international organizations and other global governance arrangements. In order to emphasize the process perspective, I also borrow some elements from research on

processes of democratization within nation-states. Furthermore, I make use of the concept political opportunity structures, frequently used in social movement studies.

Transnational actors in general and NGOs and other civil society actors in particular are often put forward as parts of the solution to the democratic deficits in global governance.<sup>16</sup> Research on transnational civil society has grown tremendously since the 1990s. Here is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the conceptualization of transnational civil society. For the purpose of this study it is sufficient to use the concept in a loose way as an umbrella term covering NGOs, social movements and activist networks operating beyond national borders. Most international organizations have opened up channels for consultation and participation with certain CSOs. Out of 32 global and European governance organizations examined in a recent study, only two (the Bank for International Settlements – BIS – and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO) did not have any form of consultation with civil society actors.<sup>17</sup> However, this does not mean that CSOs typically take part in decision-making within international organizations. In the field of development, CSOs are frequently involved in the implementation of projects, but tend to be excluded from decision-making.<sup>18</sup> Recent research focusing on negotiations between states and non-state actors<sup>19</sup> and ‘NGO diplomacy’<sup>20</sup> have started to examine in what way and under what conditions non-state actors influence world politics. Nevertheless, the consequences of increased civil society engagement with global governance organizations are unclear. According to one of the leading scholars in this field, civil society groups can contribute to a democratization of global governance by engaging in public education, stimulating public debate, connecting citizens to global governance authorities, pressuring global governance arrangements to become more transparent, strengthening accountability through watchdog activities, increasing participation of socially excluded groups and providing recognition and voice for marginalized political identities.<sup>21</sup> The democracy strengthening role of CSOs is a potential that might or might not be fulfilled. CSOs in global as well as national and local contexts are not necessarily pro-democratic, and the democratic credentials of such actors themselves may be questioned.<sup>22</sup>

In order to better understand the possible role of transnational CSOs in processes of democratization of global governance, we can draw on aspects of empirical democratization theory concerned with transitions from authoritarian rule. The influential transition theory, outlined by O’Donnell and Schmitter, highlights agency in processes of democratization and could therefore be useful when analyzing the interaction between transnational CSOs and

other actors. In particular it helps us to open up the ‘black box’ and examine internal processes and politics within international organizations. In this respect transition theory is compatible with constructivist IR theory. Transition theory understands processes of democratization as the outcome of negotiations between certain representatives of the authoritarian regime who are ready to accept some democratic reforms and moderate sections of an often civil society based pro-democracy movement. This implies that we should treat neither the international organization (the authoritarian regime) nor the transnational civil society movement targeting the organization (the pro-democracy movement) as unitary actors. International organizations (and other non-democratic regimes) are typically divided between hard-liners and soft-liners (found among management and staff as well as member states) and the pro-democracy forces typically include moderates as well as radicals.

Hard-liners are convinced that the perpetuation of authoritarian rule is both possible and desirable. They reject all substantial democratic reforms. Soft-liners believe that the authoritarian regime will need some form of democratic legitimation in order to survive. Hence they are prepared to initiate some reforms and negotiate with moderate pro-democracy forces.<sup>23</sup> Splits between hard-liners and soft-liners are considered important for processes of democratization. O’Donnell and Schmitter even claim that ‘there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself’.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of the present study, the important thing is how CSOs conceive of and react to such divisions within the international organization. Civil society itself can be divided into on the one hand moderates who believe that international organizations can and should be reformed and are prepared to negotiate with representatives of these organizations and on the other hand radicals who aim at more far-reaching transformation and prefer outside protest activities instead of inside negotiations. The relationship between outside protestors and inside reformists has been analyzed in the case of the World Bank, although without explicitly drawing on the transition framework.<sup>25</sup>

Transition theory distinguishes between processes of liberalization and democratization. Liberalization refers to ‘the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary and or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties’.<sup>26</sup> This could be applied to cases of multilateral development banks and other international organizations, which establish safeguard policies and accountability mechanisms for the protection of communities and individuals negatively affected by their activities.

Democratization, according to O'Donnell and Schmitter, is linked to citizenship participation. It refers to the extension of the rules and procedures of citizenship to new institutions, people or issues.<sup>27</sup> With no global citizenship, and a plurality of stakeholders depending on the specific issue, this concept is more difficult to translate into a global or transnational context.

Hence, all aspects of the transition theory are not applicable to processes of democratization in global governance. Early transition studies actually played down the role of civil society and claimed that the initial phase of a transition is determined by elite politics (splits within the ruling elite, negotiations and pacts). The 'resurrection of civil society' comes later as a result of the elite led liberalization, it was argued.<sup>28</sup> Judging from results of previous research on the World Bank, civil society mobilization seems to play a more important role in initial phases of reform processes in international organizations.

We should also avoid the teleological assumption of a process that can be divided into different phases which ultimately will result in the establishment of a democratic regime, an aspect of the transition theory that has been frequently criticized.<sup>29</sup> The focus on states and elections in the transition theory is obviously also not applicable to democratization beyond the nation-state. Furthermore, we should avoid neglecting structural features, which is another major reason for criticism against transition theory. For this reason I use the concept of political opportunity structures.

Political opportunity structures (or political opportunities) have been used within social movement studies in order to analyze the relationship between social movements and the formal political sphere. Political opportunities and constraints that condition social movement activities include the degree of openness of the institutionalized political system, the presence of elite allies, and the extent to which the state is prepared to use repression against oppositional movements.<sup>30</sup> These aspects of strategies of political authority and political alignments can easily be related to the distinction between hard-liners and soft-liners. The concept of political opportunity structures have been extended to a transnational context and applied to civil society actors in general – not only social movements. A lack of domestic political opportunities might encourage CSOs to try to take advantage of transnational opportunities instead. Targets as well as elite allies may be found within international organizations. Funding from philanthropic foundations may be available for transnational activism. International regimes and global discourses can be used in campaigns targeting

international organizations. Moreover, the structure of international organizations may shape the strategies of civil society actors.<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, reform processes within international organizations and other forms of global governance should be analyzed with a focus on the activities of transnational civil society actors. In particular, we should pay attention to their interaction with soft-liners and hard-liners within the organization and the political opportunity structures which emerge as a consequence of such interaction and how these opportunities shape future activism. Before we can start the analysis, there is need for a methodological clarification on the assessment of influence. Proving an actor's influence on a specific process or outcome is methodologically very difficult. I will interpret it as an indication of civil society influence on the ADB if I find a) similarities between civil society initiatives and decisions on ADB reforms, and b) testimonies by several ADB officials as well as activists concerning civil society influence on ADB reforms. Moreover, I will apply counterfactual analysis, asking what would likely have been the outcome if there had been no civil society involvement.<sup>32</sup>

### **Civil society engagement with the ADB: Actors negotiating a transition?**

Since the 1990s there has been increased civil society engagement with the ADB, both in the form of cooperation with the Bank and protest activities from the outside. The ADB has developed a number of policies and institutions for interaction with civil society. In this section I sketch the main features of ADB-civil society engagement and try to identify hard-liners and soft-liners within the ADB and radicals and moderates among civil society actors. I also consider to what extent ADB-civil society interaction can be understood as negotiations between insiders and outsiders, as outlined in the transition theory.

Compared to the World Bank and the IMF, the ADB has had a lower profile and not been targeted by transnational social movements and NGOs to the same extent. It was not until the late 1980s that the ADB was challenged by civil society actors. Following the 1997 Asian financial crisis when the ADB took a prominent role in economic recovery, civil society criticism against the Bank further increased. Activists campaigning to reform the ADB have been particularly concerned about: 1) the lack of public participation in ADB projects, 2) the social and environmental impact of projects and the ADB's inadequate accountability for such impact, and 3) the secrecy of the ADB's governing structure and decision-making.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s the ADB saw NGOs mainly as sources of information on local conditions and potential implementers of certain aspects of development projects. Since then, NGO involvement in the ADB's loan and technical assistance activities has increased. In 1997, 27 of 72 loan approvals involved NGOs in some way. In 2009 the ADB claims that more than three quarters of ADB loans feature some kind of civil society involvement.<sup>34</sup> Direct funding of NGO projects, however, is rare. The ADB tends to work directly with governments and project proposals typically pass through public authorities. While ADB engagement with advocacy NGOs has definitely become more frequent, it should be stressed that most ADB interaction with civil society still focuses on NGOs implementing ADB funded projects. According to the ADB's own evaluation, only 3% of CSO engagement with the Bank can be categorized as policy advocacy.<sup>35</sup>

In order to coordinate the ADB's increasing engagement with CSOs the Bank established a new NGO-policy in 1998, replacing the first policy from 1987. In 2001 the ADB established a NGO Center (renamed the NGO and Civil Society Center in 2005) to coordinate its cooperation with civil society actors.<sup>36</sup> However, civil society engagement with the ADB does not only go through the NGO and Civil Society Center. Many departments have daily interaction with NGOs. Consultation with civil society actors regularly takes place in the work of gender advisors, indigenous people specialists, and in the preparation of specific projects.

At least two divisions concerning internal governance policies can be found within the ADB. First there is a split between different member governments. When the ADB has come under pressure from civil society actors to become more accountable and pay attention to issues related to gender, indigenous people, the environment etc., only non-regional donor governments have typically been in favour of change. Most of the Asian governments have viewed the new issues with suspicion.<sup>37</sup> Second, within the ADB, policy departments have generally been in favour of reform whereas project departments have wanted to stick to traditional technical assistance.<sup>38</sup> Both divisions should be seen as general patterns. The actual situation is somewhat more complex and policy positions tend to vary between different issues. In addition to these organizational divisions, there are also many reform-oriented and progressive individuals among the ADB staff who are prepared to cooperate with critical

CSOs. A former ADB staff testifies to the importance of individual initiatives for increasing civil society participation.<sup>39</sup>

Generally speaking, there are three civil society positions towards the ADB (and other international financial institutions - IFIs). First, some CSOs focus on shortcomings of specific projects which they think should be corrected. Second, many CSOs argue that ADB policies should be reformed. This might refer to either substantive development policies or internal governance policies. Third, there are CSOs which believe that the ADB should be abolished. Whereas the first position is a moderate one, it is not concerned with improving the ADB's democratic credentials and hence less relevant from the perspective of this article. The second position represents moderates, whereas the third obviously is a radical position, which does not include a willingness to negotiate with soft-liners within the ADB. However, the difference between radicals and moderates (just as the one between hard-liners and soft-liners) should not be overstated. In civil society advocacy focusing on IFIs the same people who are part of delegations negotiating with Bank staff and directors typically also organize demonstrations.

Much critical civil society engagement with the ADB is coordinated by the NGO forum on ADB, a network of CSOs in Asia and the Pacific. For the NGO Forum, the distinction between (moderate) inside negotiations and (radical) outside protests is not relevant. The Board of the NGO Forum decided to abolish the term 'inside-outside strategy', which activists thought was a false dichotomy. 'If you want to stop a project or policy you do whatever you have to do. It does not matter if you are inside or outside', argues the leader of the NGO Forum on ADB.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the Forum applies a number of inside as well as outside strategies. Activists work closely with certain members of the Board of Directors – different from time to time depending on the issue – to ensure that they use independent judgment in scrutinizing proposals from the management. The Forum also tries to use media to make the ADB aware that it is being watched. Furthermore, Forum activists organize protests inside or outside the Bank and engage in various lobbying activities. They approach different Board members, management and staff depending on issue. Last, but not least, Forum activists try to involve marginalized stakeholders as much as possible. Strategies include both moderate inside activities and radical outside protests.

Splits between hard-liners and soft-liners within the ADB seem to have been provoked by outside protests. The case of civil society protests against the Masinloc Power Plant in the Philippines in the 1990s, for instance, is important as it challenged and changed strategic thinking within the ADB. Japan took a position closer to that of the non-regional donors and this changed the balance of power in favour of the policy departments.<sup>41</sup>

The campaign against the Samut Prakan project in Thailand also initiated a debate between ‘reformers’ and ‘traditionalists’ within the ADB.<sup>42</sup> The May 2000 ADB annual meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was a significant event for ADB-civil society relations. Anti-ADB protests organized by Thai grassroots organizations as well as national and transnational NGOs and the failure of the ADB (and the Thai government) to handle the criticism in a constructive way, provided the impetus for the ADB to reconsider and develop its civil society policies. The anti-ADB campaign in Chiang Mai combined two strategies: the organization of a parallel conference to the ADB conference and demonstrations during the ADB annual meeting. The first strategy can be seen as a moderate one, demonstrating a willingness to negotiate, whereas the second reflects a more radical position. Criticism focused on an ADB-funded wastewater treatment project in the province of Samut Prakan. Protesters complained about the lack of popular participation in the project and there were allegations about corruption.<sup>43</sup> In addition to NGO participation in the official program of the ADB annual meeting, for the first time organizers of the parallel NGO-conference also managed to get ADB officials to come to the NGO conference venue. However, when a network of Thai NGOs and people’s organizations staged demonstrations outside the conference venue, the ADB President refused to meet the protesters, instead sending the ADB NGO-coordinator.<sup>44</sup>

The Samut Prakan project became the first case for the ADB’s inspection function and demonstrated the weaknesses of this mechanism. The Thai government refused to cooperate and when the ADB Inspection Panel came up with a critical report, the majority in the Board of Directors refused to endorse it. Whereas donor countries typically were in favour of endorsing the report, borrowing countries refused to do so. This controversy also led to the resignation of two members of the Inspection Panel from the UK and Australia. Hence this case illuminates not only the combination of moderate and radical civil society strategies, but also the split between soft-liners and hard-liners inside the ADB.

While outside demonstrations and formal meetings might be effective, civil society activists also stress the importance of informal relationships with ADB soft-liners. Leaked documents from the ADB are vital for the advocacy of the NGO Forum. The leader of the Forum claims to get an unofficial e-mail from some staff or Board member about new documents etc. at least every second week. Handling such leaked information requires integrity and credibility of the recipient. These informal relationships are extremely important for the work of the NGO Forum on ADB. Discussing ADB reformers (or soft-liners), the head of the NGO Forum argues that it is important to realize that you engage with humans – not only an organization. This is a much neglected aspect in the CSO world which is used to polemics and dichotomies, he argues.<sup>45</sup>

Views on the extent of civil society influence on ADB policies vary considerably. A former ADB staff who left the Bank in 2002 argues that whereas Western-based NGOs like the Bank Information Center tried to influence the Bank, CSOs from developing countries had little or no role in the formulation of ADB policies. She says ‘I participated in country programming missions for five years and in my view, input from civil society was minimal. Any interaction was in the form of after the fact consultations’.<sup>46</sup> Personally she found interaction with CSOs useful, but she was frustrated by the lack of interest from her managers who focused almost exclusively on governments. According to the head of the ADB’s NGO and Civil Society Center, there has been substantial NGO influence on a number of policies and projects, e.g. the safeguard policies, water policy, and HIV/AIDS projects.<sup>47</sup> According to ADB management, there are NGO and other stakeholder input in all stages of the project cycle and in country programs. NGOs frequently approach not only the NGO Center, but also management and staff on various levels.<sup>48</sup> Influential NGOs mentioned by ADB management and senior staff include the NGO Forum on ADB, Greenpeace, the Bank Information Center, Transparency International, WWF (both as a partner and a critique), as well as a number of local NGOs in different countries.

Whereas the precise civil society influence on specific policies might be hard to prove, it is obvious that pressure from CSOs have had a general impact on ADB reforms. If there had not been any civil society advocacy targeting the Bank, the ADB would not have had any reason to create a ‘NGO and Civil Society Center’ and adopt policies on consultation and participation etc. There is evidence that civil society campaigns have provoked splits within the ADB and strengthened soft-liners, hence enhancing reforms. In order to better understand

such processes we need to consider how civil society activists shape (and are shaped by) political opportunity structures.

### **Creating and using political opportunity structures**

The importance of soft-liners – reform-oriented management and senior staff as well as more junior staff critical of what they perceive to be a lack of support for reforms within the Bank – was highlighted in the previous section. The existence of such ‘elite allies’ within the international organization constitutes a form of political opportunity for civil society activism targeting the ADB. There are also more structural features of the ADB as an organization that may serve as political opportunities for CSOs trying to influence the Bank. In this section I analyze such political opportunity structures, first providing a general overview and then focusing on two specific ADB policies: the accountability mechanism and the public communication policy.

Civil society engagement with the ADB has resulted in the development of a number of organizational features creating opportunities for further CSO interaction with the Bank. One example is the NGO and Civil Society Center and its ‘NGO Cooperation Network’ within the organization, including staff in different departments. In an internal ADB evaluation on the involvement of CSOs in ADB operations, the network of ‘NGO anchors’ in resident missions is highlighted as an important resource ensuring engagement with CSOs at an early stage in the country strategy and programming processes.<sup>49</sup> Hence, there is an increasing number of ADB staff trained to interact with CSOs and this could be seen as creating political opportunities for civil society activism.

CSOs have increasingly been invited to take part in policy deliberations. The ADB now officially acknowledges the important role of CSOs in enhancing accountability, responsiveness and participation.<sup>50</sup> In 2006 the ADB published a ‘Staff Guide on Consultation and Participation’ to strengthen the involvement of civil society organizations in ADB-funded activities. The ADB has consultations with CSOs on a number of specific policies and issues. The annual meetings are one venue for such civil society consultations, but since 2004 there have also been ‘lobby days’ allowing representatives of advocacy NGOs to meet with ADB staff at the ADB headquarters.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the political opportunities different ADB policies and arrangements might offer CSOs, many civil society activists look at ADB policies on civil society participation with suspicion. Rather than being political opportunities for CSOs, many of the policies are seen as a form of containment, providing avenues for ADB controlled civil society engagement.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, there is concern that political opportunities that do exist are poorly institutionalized, mainly depending on the staff responsible for a particular project. Civil society activists also point out that there is a lack of political opportunities for civil society influence on the most important aspects of ADB activities. One example is the Country Strategy and Program which the ADB develops for each of its borrowing countries.

To sum up, CSO advocacy has contributed to the ADB implementing several civil society policies and practices that can be seen as political opportunities for further civil society activism. However, many activists tend to be suspicious about the intentions behind, and actual benefit of, these policies and practices. In addition to these political opportunities directly related to civil society participation, we should consider more general policies related to accountability to stakeholders and transparency.

### *Accountability to stakeholders*

Like the other multilateral development banks, the ADB cannot be subject to any judicial proceedings. No legal action can be taken in a court against the ADB in any of its member countries. Hence it is very difficult to hold the Bank accountable when it violates international declarations or national laws. The ADB's own accountability mechanism is therefore the only way people affected by ADB-projects can hold the Bank accountable, and hence it constitutes an important political opportunity structure.

The accountability mechanism was established in 2003 in order to provide people affected by ADB projects a forum to voice and resolve their problems. It includes a consultation phase and a compliance review phase and replaces the previous Inspection Panel, which was considered less accessible and effective. People who believe they are negatively affected by ADB-sponsored projects can submit complaints in any of the official languages of ADB developing country members to the Office of the Special Project Facilitator. Anonymous complaints are not accepted, but complainants can request that their identities are kept confidential. The Special Project Facilitator reviews the complaint and proposes a problem-

solving method, including consultation with the complainants and ADB staff. After completing this process the Special Project Facilitator writes a report to the President of the ADB who makes the final decision. If complainants are not satisfied with the outcome of this process, complaints can be submitted to the Compliance Review Panel. If the panel considers the complaint eligible and receives authorization from the Board of Directors it conducts a compliance review, in which all stakeholders are consulted. This eventually results in a report from the Compliance Review Panel to the Board of Directors, which makes a final decision on the recommendations in the report.

In March 2009 there had been 16 complaints to the Special Project Facilitator, of which only 6 had been declared eligible. The compliance review panel had only had two cases (and one more found non-eligible). Not only the ADB but also other multilateral development banks have had very few cases submitted to their accountability mechanisms. Some people within the ADB argue that the few cases indicate that there is no need for the Compliance Review Panel, but the secretary of the Panel claims that the number of cases is irrelevant. The important thing is that there is this avenue of complaint in order to hold the ADB accountable.<sup>53</sup>

From the perspective of civil society critics, there have been few complaints using the new accountability mechanism not because of lack of bad projects, but because of the excessively complex process which disempowers those who need it the most. Why spend time and money on a very uncertain process, asks the head of the NGO Forum on ADB.<sup>54</sup> Some affected communities think the accountability mechanism is a waste of time. They prefer to try to stop the project physically on the ground. The accountability mechanism is seen as a tool for the ADB to try to monitor certain standards of operation that it has set for itself. The intent is not really to respond to demands from communities. However, sometimes the process might result in some kind of redress for the affected people as well, argues a civil society activist.<sup>55</sup> Hence, the accountability mechanism can be seen as a political opportunity structure having the potential to empower affected stakeholders irrespective of the ADB's motive for creating it. However, it is a political opportunity structure that still has not been fully utilized by civil society actors.

The NGO Forum on ADB claims to have played an important role in shaping the new accountability mechanism.<sup>56</sup> This is confirmed by a senior ADB staff involved in the

process.<sup>57</sup> He adds that the previous inspection panel did not work well and there were strong demands for greater effectiveness in achieving development results from organizations like the ADB. Shareholders also put pressure on the ADB to strengthen its accountability.

In a 43 pages document dated March 18 2002 a number of CSOs, including the Bank Information Center and the NGO Forum on the ADB, presented a detailed proposal for a new accountability mechanism in the ADB. Criticizing the previous Inspection Function, especially in light of the Samut Prakan case referred to above, the CSOs recommended that a permanent Inspection Panel autonomous from the Board of Directors should be established and suggested a number of ways in which the process could be made more user-friendly.<sup>58</sup> The new ADB accountability mechanism actually has many of the features outlined in this document. Whereas input in the review process of the inspection policy obviously came from many different actors, including state representatives, civil society influence seems obvious too.

### *Transparency*

The ADB's policy on transparency is arguably one of the most important political opportunity structures for CSOs. The ADB's public communications policy is highlighted as a model of good practice in the recent evaluation of international governmental and non-governmental organizations by the One World Trust.<sup>59</sup> The ADB was the only organization scoring 100% on transparency. According to the public communication policy, in effect since September 2005, the Bank should make information proactively available and promptly respond to ad hoc information requests. Transparency is put forward as the rule and a narrow set of conditions for non-disclosure is established. All requests received and denied are listed on the ADB website. A public information and disclosure unit (InfoUnit) within the ADB trains and supports staff in the implementation of the policy. The InfoUnit also makes documents available in several national languages and organizes seminars with stakeholders in ADB member countries, educating government officials about their responsibility to disclose and advising NGOs about their right to access information.<sup>60</sup>

However, civil society actors monitoring the ADB points out that there are still limits to the ADB's transparency. All relevant documents are not disclosed. Many Board documents and private sector documents are not publicly available. Furthermore, most documents are

available only in English, making them inaccessible to most people affected by ADB projects.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the NGO Forum on ADB, evaluating the public communication policy, claims that the Bank's very high response rate to information requests is less impressive as not a single request has come from affected communities. The public disclosure system is electronically driven and hence not accessible to marginalized people. All requests have come from business.<sup>62</sup> It should also be noted that the policy has only been in place a few years. It takes time to get familiarity with and actually practice the policy. This is hard for CSOs, not to mention people actually affected by ADB projects. Therefore, it will take a couple of years before we see CSOs making use of the public communication policy, argues a civil society activist.<sup>63</sup>

Transnational civil society actors played an important role in shaping the new public communication policy for the ADB. The Bank began a review of its information disclosure policy in August 2003 and internal and external consultations were held. ADB staff identified key countries both among developing and donor countries and fourteen workshops were held in different countries. Draft papers were posted on the ADB website. There were substantial input from CSOs and a few universities. In developing the policy, the ADB also looked at good practices of other IFIs. According to ADB staff, CSOs were quite happy with the process.<sup>64</sup>

One of the civil society networks engaged in the process was the Global Transparency Initiative (GTI). Several prominent bank watch organizations – including the Washington based Bank Information Center (BIC), Article 19 in the UK and the Access to Information Network (ATIN) in the Philippines – are linked together in this network. Focusing on promoting openness within the IFIs, the aim is to create political space to debate development models.<sup>65</sup> In October 2004 the GTI sent an advocacy mission to Manila to give input to the policy review. A second mission visited the ADB headquarters in January 2005. GTI members met with high level ADB management and, according to themselves, managed to influence the new policy in significant ways. The new public communication policy, adopted by the ADB Board of Directors in April 2005, is described by the GTI as 'one of the most progressive information disclosure policies adopted by any IFI'.<sup>66</sup> While not meeting all principles demanded by the GTI, the civil society network claims to have influenced ADB policy to include a clear information request process with appropriate response guarantees, a disclosure appeals process, disclosure of more information during project implementation and

related to private-sector projects, country strategies and policy reviews. Claiming to have played a critical role in advancing ADB openness, the GTI is especially proud of the establishment of an internal disclosure appeals process. When comparing GTI demands with the final PCP document, a number of similarities confirm claims about civil society impact.

## **Conclusion**

The ADB is definitely part of a general trend among international organizations of increased civil society participation and accountability to stakeholders – not only shareholders. During recent years a number of important reforms – including policies for more systematic and extensive civil society engagement, a public communication policy making public disclosure the rule, and an innovative accountability mechanism – have been implemented. These reforms are probably not primarily intended to make the ADB more democratic and accountable to people affected by its activities. Rather, they are mechanisms to make the ADB function in a more effective way. Efficiency – not democracy – seems to be the main goal. However, the reforms create political opportunities for civil society actors to increase their influence on the ADB. These opportunities have yet to be fully utilized by CSOs.

In the language of transition theory, these reform processes – like other similar processes within other international organizations – are best understood as liberalization rather than democratization. Reforms are very much about protecting people from negative consequences of ADB projects and arbitrary acts by the Bank or its partners. Policies to increase transparency, participation and accountability could be interpreted as the development of rights protecting stakeholders, which is what liberalization in the context of national regime transitions is all about. Democratization, understood as the extension of the rules and procedures of citizenship, is a more far-reaching process. The reforms under investigation here do hardly lead to ‘rule by the people’ in ADB decision-making. The reform processes within the ADB do not constitute a case of transition from authoritarian rule, in the sense of a process of democratization in line with transition theory. However, a process of liberalization, in transition terminology, has been going on for several years and this is significant as such, even if transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation are not considered to be the most significant issues for the ADB. Economic growth, private sector development, infrastructure projects, and member governments’ interests are still the main features of the

ADB. However, recent governance reforms in the ADB are real and they are likely to have a considerable impact on the future operations of the Bank.

Transnational civil society actors have contributed to the process of liberalization through a mixture of confrontational and more moderate activities pressuring the Bank to implement reforms. There is evidence of civil society influence on the public communication policy and the accountability mechanism as well as on the general policies on civil society participation. Applying counter-factual reasoning, we could ask if it is likely that these reforms would have been implemented if there had not been any civil society activism targeting the ADB. The answer must be no. Without external pressure it is highly unlikely that these reforms would have been on the agenda at all. Individual reformists within the ADB would hardly have had the strength to initiate and push reforms against management and shareholders with little or no interest in transparency, participation and accountability. Before civil society campaigns targeting the ADB gained momentum in the 1990s, such issues were not on the Bank's internal agenda. One might argue that reforms within the World Bank have inspired ADB reforms, but World Bank reforms have been driven by civil society pressure too.

Splits within the ADB have also been important. Some management and staff are genuinely committed to reforms, whereas others still see them as unnecessary and disturbing. ADB management has generally been reactive, rather than proactive, concerning the reforms. Reforms have been pushed by certain donor shareholders whereas other member governments have resisted reforms. There are also staff with a strong interest in and commitment to reforms. Social development staff is naturally committed to participation, whereas finance and infrastructure staff is typically not. Hence, soft-liners within the ADB exist and they do interact with representatives of a civil society movement striving for democratic reform of the ADB. The balance of power between soft-liners and hard-liners within the Bank will determine the future of reforms. Transnational civil society actors play an important role in influencing this balance of power, hence contributing to the reform processes.

The analytical framework of this study - with its focus on transnational civil society actors, divisions and negotiations between actors within the international organization as well as within civil society, and the role of political opportunity structures – has been useful in understanding these processes. In particular, this framework offers a process perspective that is mostly missing in research on democracy and global governance. It focuses our attention to

the diversity of actors and interests within both international organizations and transnational civil society. The analysis of political opportunity structures to some extent makes up for the extreme focus on agency in the original transition theory. Nevertheless, there are severe limitations to this framework. While useful for understanding specific processes from an actor perspective, it has nothing to say about broader power dynamics, such as structural changes in the global capitalist economy, transformation of the inter-state system, and global discourse contestation which are necessary for a fuller understanding of the conditions and prospects for democratization of global governance.

Last, but not least, I argue that the distinction between processes of democratization and liberalization made in the transition theory is useful in the global context too. The processes under investigation here are far from being processes of democratization, but liberalization is an appropriate term. I contend that this is most likely true for most reform processes in global governance. Prospects for genuine democratization resulting in 'rule by the people' in international organizations and other global governance arrangement are bleak. By contrast, processes of liberalization have been going on for quite a while and can be further strengthened. In order not to devalue the concept of democracy, scholars engaged in empirical studies of global governance should pay attention to the distinction between liberalization and democratization and focus on the former concept.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of a broader research program - Transdemos ([www.transdemos.se](http://www.transdemos.se)) - funded by Riksbankens Jubileums fond, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Statement signed by 50 NGOs and people's organizations from the Asia-Pacific region at the ADB annual meeting in Honolulu, May 9, 2001, quoted in Bello and Guttal, 'Honolulu Face-Off'.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, '2007 Global Accountability Report', 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien et al., 'Contesting Global Governance'; Steffek and Nanz, 'Emergent Patterns of Civil Society Participation in Global and European Governance'.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell and Schmitter, 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule'.

<sup>8</sup> 24 semi-structured interviews with current and former ADB staff and management as well as civil society activists targeting the Bank were conducted. Most of these were face-to-face interviews carried out in Manila in March 2009. A few former ADB staff, government officials and civil society activists with experience of the ADB were interviewed in Europe during the winter and spring of 2009. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. One interview was done through e-mail.

<sup>9</sup> Böås and McNeill, 'Multilateral Institutions', 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>11</sup> Fox and Brown, 'Introduction', 2.

<sup>12</sup> Fox and Brown, 'The Struggle for Accountability'; O'Brien et al., 'Contesting Global Governance', chs. 2, 4; Clark, 'The World Bank and Civil Society'; Clark, Fox and Treakle, 'Demanding Accountability'.

<sup>13</sup> Asian Development Bank, <http://www.adb.org>

<sup>14</sup> Böås and McNeill, 'Multilateral Institutions', 8.

<sup>15</sup> The London based organization One World Trust aims at making global governance more accountable. As a part of this endeavour the OWT publishes an annual "Global Accountability Report", assessing accountability credentials of 10 intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), 10 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and 10 transnational corporations (TNCs). These global governance actors are assessed on four dimensions: transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response. Based on interviews and internal documentations from each organization as well as secondary data and expert and stakeholder input, each organization is given a score between 0 and 100 for each of the four accountability dimensions. Preliminary scores are sent to the assessed organizations and external experts for feedback before the final score is determined. For more details see Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, '2007 Global Accountability Report'.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview and assessment of this vision see Bexell, Tallberg and Uhlin, 'Democracy in Global Governance'.

<sup>17</sup> Steffek and Nanz, 'Emergent Patterns of Civil Society Participation in Global and European Governance', 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>19</sup> Saner and Michalun, 'Negotiations Between State Actors and Non-State Actors'.

<sup>20</sup> Betsill and Corell, 'NGO Diplomacy'.

<sup>21</sup> Scholte, 'Civil Society and the Legitimation of Global Governance', 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Uhlin, 'Which Characteristics of Civil Society Organizations Support What Aspects of Democracy?'; Erman and Uhlin, 'Legitimacy Beyond the State?'

<sup>23</sup> O'Donnell and Schmitter, 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule', 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 19.

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- <sup>25</sup> Fox and Brown, 'The Struggle for Accountability'.
- <sup>26</sup> O'Donnell and Schmitter, 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule', 7.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>29</sup> Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm'.
- <sup>30</sup> McAdam, 'Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions', 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Uhlin, 'Globalization, Democratization and Civil Society in Southeast Asia', 159-160; Joachim and Locher, 'Transnational Activism in the EU and the UN'.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf Corell and Betsill, 'Analytical Framework'; Scholte, 'Civil Society and IMF Accountability', 26.
- <sup>33</sup> NGO Forum on ADB and Bank Information Center, 'Unpacking ADB', 4.
- <sup>34</sup> Asian Development Bank, <http://www.adb.org>
- <sup>35</sup> ADB Operations Evaluation Department, 'Special Evaluation Study on the Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in ADB Operations', 19.
- <sup>36</sup> Whereas the ADB has many documents and policies on NGOs, this is not the case concerning other civil society groups. For instance, there has not been much attention to labour unions.
- <sup>37</sup> Böås and McNeill, 'Multilateral Institutions', 76-77.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 94.
- <sup>39</sup> E-mail communication with author.
- <sup>40</sup> Interview, 19 March 2009.
- <sup>41</sup> Böås and McNeill, 'Multilateral Institutions', 93-94.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 125.
- <sup>43</sup> Tadem, 'Thai Social Movements and the Anti-ADB Campaign'.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 385.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview, 19 March 2009.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview, 3 March 2009.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview, 18 March 2009.
- <sup>48</sup> Interviews, 16 and 17 March 2009.
- <sup>49</sup> ADB Operations Evaluation Department, 'Special Evaluation Study on the Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in ADB Operations'.
- <sup>50</sup> Asian Development Bank, <http://www.adb.org>
- <sup>51</sup> Asian Development Bank, 'ADB Cooperation with Civil Society. Annual Report 2005'.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview, 19 March 2009.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview, 17 March 2009.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview, 19 March 2009.
- <sup>55</sup> Interview, 18 March 2009.
- <sup>56</sup> NGO Forum on ADB, <http://www.forum-adb.org>
- <sup>57</sup> Interview, 17 March 2009.
- <sup>58</sup> Bank Information Center et al, 'Strengthening Public Accountability'.
- <sup>59</sup> Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, '2007 Global Accountability Report', 25.
- <sup>60</sup> Asian Development Bank, <http://www.adb.org>
- <sup>61</sup> NGO Forum on ADB and Bank Information Center, 'Unpacking ADB', 47.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview, 19 March 2009.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview, 18 March 2009.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview, 16 March 2009.
- <sup>65</sup> Global Transparency Initiative, <http://www.ifitransparency.org/>
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.

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