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The Asian Development Bank

Introduction

In this chapter we analyse the oppositional field surrounding ADB and the strategies used by various opposition groups targeting this GGI. We begin with a brief description of the main features of this particular GGI and then turn to an analysis of the oppositional field. The next section contains an analysis of the political opportunity structure providing access and elite allies for some civil society opposition. Then follows a section describing and explaining different inside and outside strategies applied by various opposition actors targeting ADB. Finally, we offer some conclusions from this case study.

Like the EU analysed in the previous chapter, ADB is also a regional organization, but with a broader membership than the EU. ADB is owned and financed by its 67 member countries, of which 48 are from the Asian region. The most influential members are the non-borrowing states, most of which are North American and European. With this broader and more diverse membership, we can assume that the oppositional field is less concentrated than in the case of EU development policies. Whereas the EU covers virtually all issue areas and we had to limit our study to the oppositional field surrounding its policies and practices on development cooperation, all ADB activities are solely focused on the governance of development. Hence, we are interested in the opposition towards this GGI as a whole.

Like the other multilateral development banks, ADB provides financial support through low-interest long-term loans and grants and advice concerning development policies to developing countries. Traditionally most loans have been given to large infrastructure projects. Since the 1990s, ADB also provides programme loans aiming at policy reforms
within a specific sector, like water or energy. Established in 1966, ADB has its headquarters in Manila and 26 field offices in different member countries. Its highest decision-making body is the 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 five-year term. The president has always come from Japan and 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 (ADB 2013a). Voting power is determined by the amount of investment in ADB. This means that the non-borrowing members have more than 60 per cent of the voting power. Japan and the USA are the largest contributors, with almost 13 per cent of the total votes each. Like in most other GGIs, decision making typically aims at consensus, but this is a form of consensus that is established on specific power relations (Bøås and McNeill 2003: 8).

The oppositional field

Like the other multilateral development banks, the ADB has increasingly included NGOs in the implementation of projects. This is a major aspect of the GGI’s civil society engagement. However, project-implementing NGOs often do not voice any criticism against the ADB or try to influence its policies. If they do not show any disagreement with the GGI, they are by definition not part of the oppositional field. But there are also an increasing number of CSOs that actively oppose the ADB and its policies and projects. The oppositional field surrounding ADB has emerged since the late 1980s. One of the first civil society campaigns targeting ADB was carried out in 1988 by the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) and the USA-based Environmental Policy Institute (later Friends of the Earth). In 1989 CSOs began to attend ADB annual meetings. In 1992 representatives of a number of mainly Philippine-based CSOs decided to create a ‘NGO Working Group on ADB’ with a secretariat in Manila. During the following years, the NGO Working Group criticized a number of ADB policies and projects during ADB annual meetings, through letters and other publications and in direct dialogue with ADB management and staff. In 1998–1999 the NGO Working Group was restructured and renamed the NGO Forum on ADB (NGO Forum on ADB 2013c).