

Background

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) launched its Water for All Policy in 2001. The policy defines ADB's priorities, commitments, and strategies for developing Asia's water sector.

Cutting Across Sectors

The Water Policy cuts across many sectors. For example, delivery of clean water supply and sanitation improves health, frees time for education and other income-generating activities, reduces gender inequalities, and protects the environment from degradation. Improving irrigation increases crop production, food security, and income levels. And protecting and managing water resources well helps protect against floods, balance ecosystems, and protect fishing livelihoods.

Investing in water will dramatically reduce poverty in the Asia and Pacific region and help reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The ADB 'Water for All' Policy

There are seven principal elements that drive the ADB's 'Water for All' Policy:

- 1) **To promote a national focus on water sector reform.** Throughout Asia is an urgent need for reform of the water sector. ADB helps countries reform their water sectors through effective national water polices, water laws, strong coordination arrangements between different institutions, and a national water action plan for reform. ADB will also provide support, advice, and training to these countries in setting up and operating these institutions.
- 2) **To foster the integrated management of water resources.** From drinking, cooking, or sanitation to irrigating crops, manufacturing, or tourism, water across Asia has multiple uses, multiple demands on it, and a wide variety of agencies and institutions responsible for it. ADB promotes that water investment projects are based on a comprehensive assessment of the river basin concerned, with a participatory approach. There will be a particular focus on interlinked water investments within river basins.
- 3) **To improve and expand the delivery of water services.** In many parts of Asia, people are simply not receiving water services. About 682 million people—a third of Asia's population—do not have safe drinking water. ADB's goal to make water services efficient, affordable, and sustainable in water supply and sanitation, and irrigation and drainage. To meet this goal, ADB will support autonomous and accountable service providers, private sector participation, public-private partnerships, and promote service access by the poor.
- 4) **Foster the conservation of water and increase system efficiencies.** Globally, water withdrawals have increased by over six times during the last century. In the Asia and Pacific region, water withdrawals are the highest in Central Asia (85%), followed by South Asia (48%), and Mongolia and Northern People's Republic of China (25%). ADB supports appropriate water tariffs, which encourages users to conserve water and allows service providers to recover costs. Cost recovery will lead to increased system maintenance and provide the necessary capital for expanding services to poor consumers. ADB supports the improved regulation of service providers and increased public awareness on water conservation. ADB also supports provisions to ensure that the needs of the poor are met.
- 5) **Promote regional cooperation and increase the mutually beneficial use of shared water resources within and between countries.** Whether it be the Mekong in Southeast Asia, the Syr Darya and Amu Darya in Central Asia, or the Ganges-Brahmaputra river system in India and Bangladesh, many Asian countries share their water. ADB supports regional activities that help countries exchange information about their experiences with water sector reform and the benefits of shared water resources. ADB also supports the creation of sound hydrologic and socio-environmental databases related to transboundary water resources and joint projects between riparian countries.
- 6) **Facilitate the exchange of water sector information and experience.** ADB supports socially inclusive development in the water sector and participation at all levels. In particular, ADB supports water investments that involve public, private, and community partnerships.
- 7) **Improve governance and capacity building.** Many experts view today's water crisis as not so much a crisis of water scarcity but a crisis of governance. At the global scale, there is enough water to provide "water security" for all, but only if there is a change in the way it is managed and developed. ADB prioritizes support of good governance through decentralization, capacity building, and improved monitoring, evaluation, and learning at all levels in the water sector.

Making the Policy Work

ADB's Water for All Policy guides all ADB lending, policy dialogue, and technical assistance in the water sector. ADB is also undertaking reviews to assess how the policy provisions have been integrated into ADB's water operations and have contributed to the vision of attaining Water for All.