

Visit Report

Civil Society Programme for ADB's Annual Meeting

Baku, Azerbaijan, May 01-05, 2015

George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International visited Baku, Azerbaijan on May 01-04, 2015 for the Civil Society Programme (CSP) associated with the 48th Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The theme of the programme was 'Fostering Partnerships for Development'. Cheriyan was one of the speakers in the CSP session on 'Civil Society, Governance and Inclusive Economies: Recent Developments' jointly organised by Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) and Open Government Partnership (OGP). Besides, Cheriyan also attended meetings with various organisations in Mumbai (India) on May 05.

1. Baku, Azerbaijan: An Overview



Azerbaijan is situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It became a part of Soviet Union in 1920 as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and proclaimed its independence in October 1991, before the official dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). It is a Democratic and Secular Republic having a majority of Muslim community. Baku is the capital and largest city of Azerbaijan. Baku is located 28 metres (92 feet) below sea-level, which makes it the lowest lying national capital in the world. About two-thirds of Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas. The region accounts for most of the country's gold, silver, iron, copper, titanium, chromium, manganese, cobalt, molybdenum, complex ore

and antimony. The country's immense natural wealth could be well observed in Baku.

2. Civil Society Programme of ADB

More than 3,000 participants, including State heads, Finance Ministers, central bank Governors, and representatives from the private sector, academe, media, and civil society were expected to attend the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors in the Heydar Aliyev Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan from 02-05 May 2015.

The Non-government Organisation (NGO) and Civil Society Centre (NGOC) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) organised various events, under CSP during the 48th Annual Meeting of the ADB Board



of Governors. Through the Annual Meeting's CSP, ADB engages with the NGOs, labour unions, academia, think-tanks, community-based organisations, and other civil society groups and provides opportunities for dialogue, sharing of knowledge and networking with other CSOs as well as other Annual Meeting participants. The main focus of the year's events was 'Learning from Partners'.

Under the CSP organised there were eleven events comprising five acquaintance sessions entitled 'Learning with Partners', four panel discussions, and a youth debate being jointly organised with the key CSOs. As per the tradition, the CSP started with an hour's Questions and Answering session with the ADB President.

3. Day 1 Proceedings on May 02, 2015

3.1 CSOs and ADB President Takehiko Nakao Getting Together



On May 02, 2015 the CSP started with an interactive meeting of the CSOs with the ADB President Takehiko Nakao. A team of ADB senior staff led by President met the representatives of the CSOs. Chris I Morris, Unit Head, NGO and Civil Society Centre (NGOC) chaired the meeting. He stated that ADB works in partnership with a broad range of CSOs to strengthen its efforts to

reduce poverty. ADB projects include some kind of civil society participation – from planning and design consultations through the project cycle to project implementation and monitoring, over the three quarters. ADB President in his opening address also mentioned that ADB will continue to promote sustainable development and scale-up support for infrastructure, education and health, climate change and other areas. After the President's remarks, the session was open for questions by CSO representatives. On behalf of the panel, Vinay Bhargawa raised the point about institutionalising ADB's engagement with the CSOs. President in his response said, citizen engagement will be mandatory in the entire ADB supported projects and in that context CSO role will be built in. Cheriyan actively participated in the session and interacted with other CSO representatives.

Besides, Cheriyan also participated in the following sessions:

- *Beyond 2015: Role of International Finance Institutions in Post-MDG Development Agenda* jointly organised with the NGO Forum on ADB and
- *From Factory Floor to the Middle Class: Does Labour-intensive Manufacturing Promote Economic Mobility?*

Cheriyan also met Sabina Dewan from Just Jobs Network organisation and appreciated her presentation. Sabina responded very positively and was requested to convey her regards to the Secretary General.

Since Sabina mentioned Just Jobs Network has been consistently doing surveys on internal migration etc., Cheriyan discussed about the possibility of possible collaboration. Sabina added that the matter could be discussed further (Cheriyan to coordinate with Sabina, in this regard).

The afternoon session of May 02, 2015 focussed on the discussions with the moderator and co-panellists as part of preparations for the following day's session and also for networking.

4. Proceedings of Day II on May 03, 2015

4.1 Civil Society, Governance, and Inclusive Economies: Recent Developments

Jointly organised in Partnership for Transparency Fund and Open Government Alliance Building Inclusive Societies and Institutions is one of the 17 proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) No.16. Among the key themes included in SDG No.16 are: access to information, participatory decision-making, reducing corruption and recovery of stolen assets, responsive and accountable institutions, access to justice, and rule of law. SDG No.16 is being advocated and supported by civil society, which has played a major role in promoting these themes. It is expected that the civil society will continue to work with the governments in helping accomplish results in these thematic area.



This session discussed examples of how civil society has contributed to results in the key thematic areas included in the proposed SDG to build inclusive societies and responsive and accountable institutions. In particular panellists from five countries (Azerbaijan, India, Georgia, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan) shared experiences of civil society engagement in their countries, some of which are members of the Open Government Partnership. The following were the panellists.

The session was moderated by Vinay Bhargava (Chief Technical Adviser, Partnership for Transparency Fund). The following were the speakers of the session:

- Nurzat Abdyrasulova (Director, Civic Foundation UNISON, Kyrgyz Republic)
- George Cheriyan (Director, CUTS International, India)
- Vugar Bayramov (Chairman, Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Azerbaijan)
- Giorgi Kldiashvili (Director, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, Georgia) and
- Nanda Sihombing (Open Government Specialist, Centre for Regional Information and Studies, PATTIRO, Indonesia)

Discussants

- **Bart W Edes**, Director, Social Development, Governance, and Gender Division, ADB and
- **Daniel Kaufmann**, President, Natural Resource Governance Institute, UK

Cheriyam spoke on 'Effective Governance', transparency, accountability and corruption in government departments as the key challenges. Cheriyam cited the

example of Indian civil society effectively using 'Right to Information Act' to address the challenges to 'effective governance'. In his presentation entitled '*Power of Information in Empowering the People: Case of RTI in India*' Cheriyam also spoke about the recent challenges faced in this process, the prevailing concerns of the civil society, including the Whistle Blowers Protection Act etc.



After the panel presentations and comments by the discussants, the floor was opened for questions. During the open discussion several queries were raised and Cheriyam also responded to the same. More than 70 civil society, donor agencies and ADB representatives attended the session. ADB officials stated that the session was very informative and interesting and provided useful learnings to the participants.

Cheriyam attended the Mashadi Ibad performance at the Azerbaijan State Musical Comedy Theatre on May 02, 2015 evening and there was a formal welcome reception by ADB President at Heydar Aliyev Centre for the delegates on May 03, 2015 evening, which helped in networking. Arun Jaitli (Finance Minister) and Rajiv Maharishi (Finance Secretary) were present as Indian representatives to the meeting of ADB Board of Governors.

5. Networking

The afternoon session of May 03, 2015 was mainly utilised for information networking. Meeting was held with the following persons:

- Sabina Dewan, Just Jobs Network
- Edgard R Rodriguez (ERR) and Anidya Chatterjee, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)



- Haruka Yamazaki, Partnership Officer, International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)
- Nadzad Ajanovic, Senior Partnership Officer, Islamic Development Bank
- Yaduvendra Mathur, IAS, Chairman and Managing Director, Exim Bank
- Bart W Edes-BWD (Director, Social Development, Governance, and Gender Division, ADB) and Chris I Morris, CIM (Unit Head, NGO and Civil Society Centre), Manila
- Erenetsogt Odbayar, International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ILLDC), Mongolia and
- N Sreenivas, Group Managing Director, ASSIST, Manila

Meetings in Mumbai on May 05, 2015

In Mumbai, Cheriyan met Sandeep Dixit, Transformiti; Shruti Pyare, Investments Analyst, Omidyar Network; and Akanksha Malhautra, Dasra, Mumbai and discussed their possible collaboration with CUTS.