

Making Access to Information a Meaningful Right: The FOI Program One Year On
Welcome Speech
to be delivered by
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It is a great honour for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to host the first Philippine Freedom of Information (FOI) Summit organised by the Presidential Communications and Operations Office (PCOO).

On behalf of ADB's Philippine Country Office and the Governance Thematic Group, I would like to welcome you to the Summit and to a fruitful couple of days filled with national and international exchanges of experiences, addressing the challenges in making FOI work for citizens and learning through problem solving case studies.

Since 1966, ADB has been a strong partner in the development of the Philippines, its host country. The Philippine Country Office in ADB has a decades-long partnership to support the government's program on strengthening governance. This Governance Thematic Group in ADB contributes to creating and sharing cutting-edge knowledge across departments and with our Developing Member Countries, and ensure that governance remains an integral part of ADB's operations.

Sharing information for better development is central to ADB's country operations. The Public Communications Policy advances a practice of presumption in favour of disclosure by promoting improved access to information about ADB country strategy, programs and projects. Staff in operations and our country offices play a key role in making this policy work by assisting project sponsors and clients in communicating with project-affected stakeholders, and in ensuring disclosure requirements are met. They help promote awareness among people from the public, private, and civil society sectors regarding the policy and the public's right to access ADB information.

ADB's support for the implementation of the FOI program contributes to the core objectives of the ADB and Philippine country partnership for development. We are encouraged with the results of the first year of the FOI Program and would like to congratulate the government, civil society organisations and citizens in making FOI work.

The groundwork has been prepared. However, there is also a recognition as evidenced from the recent FOI Stakeholder event where government and CSOs shared experiences, that more work is required to operationalise the systems and practices. It is also encouraging to see that the program is anchored on a results-based agenda supported by awards for good performance.

Future performance and the real success of FOI will depend the ease of access to information by citizens outside the main cities and towns. For this, investments in records and information management, request processing and case management systems will be required in the regional, provincial and district offices of national government agencies. Civil society organisations need to empower citizens and a concerted program of capacity building will be required. Local government units also have an important role and piloting FOI within existing policy frameworks would widen and strengthen FOI implementation.

The Governance Thematic Group in partnership with the Philippine Country Office will consider practical ways of implementing the FOI requirements alongside ADB's Public Communication Policy associated with investments in the priority sectors reflected in the country operations and business plan.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you at this important event. I wish you a successful Summit providing a road map for the next phase of FOI implementation.