

# The World Bank Accountability Mechanism

*Where your concerns are heard*



**AM** Accountability  
Mechanism

**THE WORLD BANK**  
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# What

## **WHAT IS THE WORLD BANK ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM?**

The World Bank Accountability Mechanism (AM) is an independent complaints mechanism for people and communities who believe that they have been, or are likely to be, adversely affected by a World Bank-funded project. It aims to promote accountability at the World Bank by ensuring that project-affected people have access to an independent body to which they can express their concerns and seek recourse.

The [Board of Executive Directors](#) established the AM in 2020 and it became operational in 2021. It houses the Inspection Panel (the Panel), which was created in 1993 as the first independent accountability mechanism at an international financial institution and carries out independent compliance reviews, and the Dispute Resolution Service (DRS). The DRS was established along with the Accountability Mechanism and is intended to facilitate a voluntary and independent dispute resolution option for those who submit complaints and government Borrowers.

The Accountability Mechanism Secretary and Inspection Panel Members are independent of Bank management and report directly to the Board.



# How

## HOW DOES THE AM PROCESS WORK?

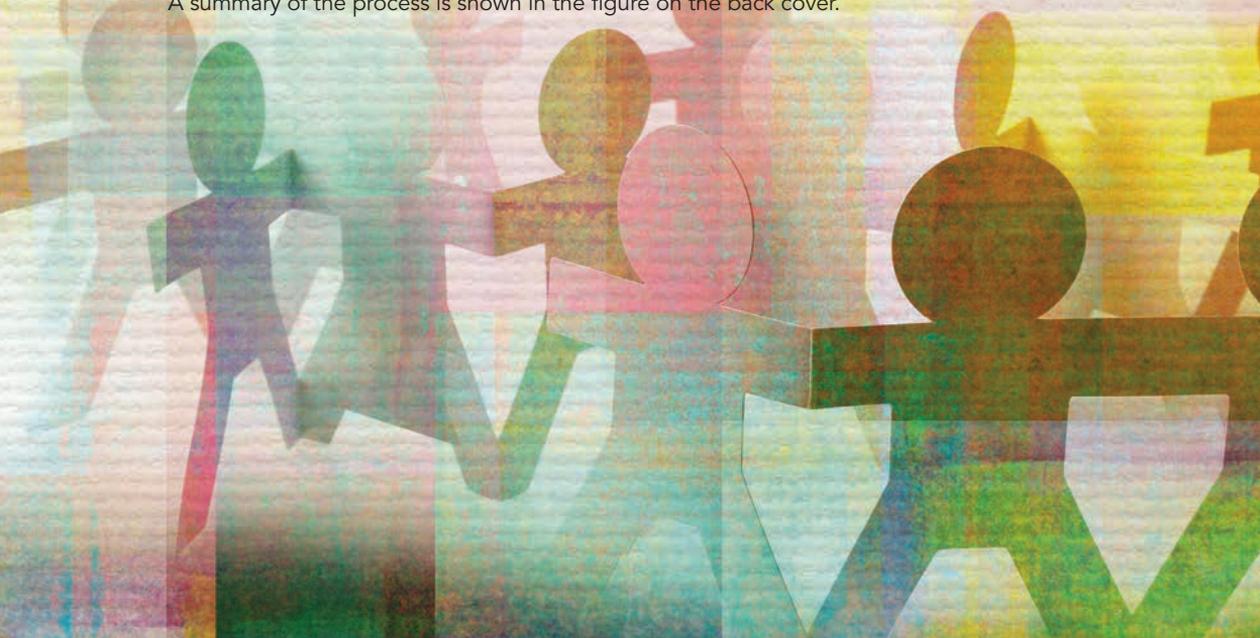
Two or more project-affected people, referred to as “Requesters,” may submit a complaint, formally known as a Request for Inspection, to the Panel. Through its process, the Panel assesses whether the Bank has complied with its internal policies and procedures designed to safeguard people and the environment. It also assesses whether any non-compliance has contributed, or may contribute, to the harm described in the complaint. The [Panel’s Operating Procedures](#) explain the different stages in its process, including how the Panel determines if a complaint is admissible and eligible for investigation.

If a complaint is determined to be eligible, Requesters and the Borrower will be given the option to enter into dispute resolution. If they both agree, the case is referred by the Accountability Mechanism Secretary to the DRS, which provides a neutral, collaborative process through which parties may find mutually satisfactory solutions to the issues raised in the Request for Inspection. [The Dispute Resolution Service’s Interim Operating Procedures](#) set forth the process if the parties choose that option.

If the parties agree to dispute resolution, the Panel’s compliance process will be held in abeyance. The maximum length of the dispute resolution process is one year from when the AM Secretary notifies the World Bank Board, the Panel and Bank Management that the parties have agreed to pursue dispute resolution. If both parties agree, the process may be extended for up to an additional six months.

If the parties reach agreement, such agreement is memorialized in a Dispute Resolution Agreement and the case is closed. However, if the parties do not agree to dispute resolution or if the dispute resolution concludes without an agreement, the Panel will commence a compliance investigation and report its findings to the Board.

A summary of the process is shown in the figure on the back cover.



# Who

## **WHO CAN SUBMIT A COMPLAINT?**

Two or more project-affected persons in the country where the Bank-supported project is located can submit a Request for Inspection. It can be sent directly by Requesters or through a representative. The Panel and DRS will keep the identities of the Requesters and their representative confidential if so requested.

# What

## **WHAT CAN REQUESTERS COMPLAIN ABOUT?**

Many different types of harm or potential harm to people or the environment have been addressed in response to Requests for Inspection. Some cases have involved harm to people's livelihoods or environmental degradation resulting from infrastructure projects. Over the years, the Inspection Panel has also considered projects involving forced relocation (for example, due to the building of a dam, road, pipeline, landfill, or power plant); projects affecting the rights and interests of indigenous peoples (such as customary land rights, sites of cultural significance, or livelihoods); and projects affecting the environment, cultural sites, and natural habitats (for example, from air and water pollution, stress on water sources, adverse impact on wetlands, deforestation, or loss of biodiversity).

Cases have also addressed gender-based violence and the right of affected communities to meaningful consultation and participation in the planning and implementation of projects, including their access to information. All of these types of harm or potential harm are reviewed within the framework of the World Bank's operational policies and procedures for projects approved before October 2018 and within the Bank's Environmental and Social Framework for projects approved after that date.

The Inspection Panel's mandate does not extend to issues relating to procurement of goods or services, corruption, or issues that were addressed in a previous case, unless new evidence or new circumstances are presented. Suspected fraud or corruption and issues related to procurement in a World Bank-supported project, or to Bank staff misconduct in relation to allegations of fraud and corruption should be reported to the Bank's Integrity Vice Presidency: [www.worldbank.org/integrity](http://www.worldbank.org/integrity).

The mandate covers projects financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association of the World Bank Group, in addition to Trust Funds managed by the World Bank. Complaints about projects supported by the International Finance Corporation and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency are dealt with by the Office of the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman, or CAO. More information about the CAO can be found at [www.cao-ombudsman.org](http://www.cao-ombudsman.org).

# How

## HOW TO SUBMIT A COMPLAINT?

A complaint (the Request for Inspection) may be submitted by letter or email. Please note that it can be written by any citizen without the help of experts or lawyers. It should be signed and must include the information listed below.

- Your names (there must be two or more Requesters), and where you live. If you are designating an individual or an organization to represent you, their name, along with a signed statement that authorizes them to act as your representative, needs to be included.
- Title (if you know it) of the World Bank-supported project about which you are concerned.
- Description of the harm that you—or the environment where you live—have experienced or the harm that you believe is likely to occur as a consequence of the project.
- A description—to the extent that you know—of why you believe the Bank has failed to follow its policies and procedures, and how that has resulted in harm (but please note that a Request for Inspection does not need to identify any specific Bank policies to be considered).
- An explanation of when and how you informed the Bank about your concerns and why you are not satisfied with the Bank's response.
- If you wish, you can describe actions that would address your concerns.

English is the official language for the Accountability Mechanism process, but you can submit a complaint in your own language. It can be sent in hard copy to our mailing address (see Contact Information on the back cover), electronically to [accountability@worldbank.org](mailto:accountability@worldbank.org) or [ipanel@worldbank.org](mailto:ipanel@worldbank.org) or via the [Accountability Mechanism website](#).

A sample complaint form can be found on the website together with other information about the AM, the Panel and the DRS. If you have more questions, you may find answers on the website, or you may contact the Accountability Mechanism Secretariat directly by email or phone (see Contact Information on the back cover). Secretariat staff can also help you understand the basic requirements for a complaint to be admissible.

# What

## WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT AS A RESULT OF THE AM PROCESS?

### SUBMITTING A COMPLAINT MAY:

- Lead to a voluntary dispute resolution process convened by the DRS if the Panel recommends an investigation and if both the Requesters and borrowing country agree to engage in the process.

# What

- Lead to a dispute resolution agreement mutually acceptable to the Requesters and Borrowers.
- Lead to a determination by the Panel about whether violations of the World Bank policies and procedures were linked to the alleged harm.
- Help draw attention to the harm or potential harm, generating lessons that may help avoid such harm in future Bank projects.
- Lead to remedial actions by World Bank Management to correct the harm.
- Lead to the Panel verifying that remedial actions have been successfully implemented. (This process is similar to “monitoring” done by other independent accountability mechanisms.)

## **SUBMITTING A COMPLAINT WILL NOT:**

- Automatically lead to a dispute resolution process as the Board must first approve a Panel recommendation to investigate a project before the parties are offered that option.
- Guarantee a dispute resolution agreement as that requires the assent of both parties.
- Automatically lead to the suspension or cancellation of the project (which is a Bank decision).
- Guarantee that harm being caused by a World Bank-funded project will be brought to an end or prevented, as the Inspection Panel is not a court of law with power of enforcement. However, the Panel reports directly to the Bank’s Executive Board, and Bank management has a responsibility to address and respond to the Panel’s findings.
- Produce determinations of guilt or innocence of individual Bank staff members; rather the Panel examines issues of compliance by Bank management as a whole.
- Lead to an investigation of the borrower government, as the Panel investigates the Bank and not the Borrower.

# Why

## **Why the World Bank Accountability Mechanism?**

The mission of the World Bank is to help countries eradicate poverty and create shared prosperity. Development projects and programs are intended to bring about positive change, but their implementation involves risks. Despite everyone’s best intentions, people or the environment can be harmed. The World Bank has policies to help avoid such outcomes, but even so, some problems may remain unrecognized or unaddressed. In such circumstances, one way for concerns to receive attention is if the citizens themselves speak out. Through the Inspection Panel and Dispute Resolution Service, the World Bank Accountability Mechanism can help affected people be heard and have their concerns addressed.



# World Bank Accountability Mechanism Process



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