The World Bank Dispute Resolution Service

DRS in Action in FY26

2026

DRS Dispute Resolution Service | THE WORLD BANK IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP

AM Accountability Mechanism | THE WORLD BANK IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP

Under the Hood: Operational Strength of the DRS

Sustained investments in the DRS are translating into disciplined, timely, and accountable service delivery. Time-bound case handling, anchored in the Accountability Mechanism (AM) Resolution and Operating Procedures, has produced concrete outcomes—including agreements concluded and monitored—and a consistent record of meeting mandated deadlines.

Core systems have come online: a robust Case Management System (CMS) to centralize information and improve workflow, and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework with stakeholder feedback to track results against clear principles and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Capacity has been deepened through structured exchanges with peer mechanisms and active participation in the working groups of the Independent Accountability Mechanisms Network (IAMnet), aligning approaches and accelerating learning on case management, mediation, and stakeholder engagement.

Targeted outreach to civil society, especially in priority regions, is expanding informed access to dispute resolution. Governance has been clarified with the Board's decisions on the AM, reinforcing independent reporting lines and operational coherence. Together, these investments are building a durable platform for effective dispute resolution and credible performance reporting.

Efficient and effective case-handling

The DRS process (dispute resolution offer and mediation) is timebound and guided by the AM Resolution and its Operating Procedures. Since its operationalization, the DRS has facilitated dispute resolution for a total of six cases (Nepal, Uganda, Cameroon, Viet Nam, Pakistan, and Mozambique) and concluded four cases with agreements, which the DRS has monitored for effective implementation. The DRS has maintained a 100% track record in meeting its mandated casework deadlines.

Launch of Case Management System

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the DRS process, the DRS team has developed a robust CMS that functions as a centralized repository of all case-related information. The CMS officially launched in FY26.

Building DRS capacity

Throughout FY26, the DRS engaged in quarterly knowledge-exchange meetings with peer Independent Accountability Mechanisms based in Washington D.C.—the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) of the International Finance Corporation/Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism (MICI) of the Inter-American Development Bank. These in-person CAO–MICI–DRS exchanges strengthened capacity across all mechanisms by sharing practices on case management, mediation, and stakeholder engagement. The DRS both contributed its expertise and enhanced its own skills to address evolving dispute resolution challenges.

Outreach, Engagement, and Learning

The DRS understands the value of engaging with its global network of stakeholders to disseminate information about its work and share learning from cases.

Building awareness and capacity for those in the field

The DRS conducted two regional capacity-building workshops in FY26. These workshops targeted the civil society organizations (CSOs) that often play an instrumental role in supporting communities to file complaints and navigate the AM process, including dispute resolution. The DRS continually enhances the content of workshops based on survey feedback provided by participants, which points to a clear shift in participants' understanding of IAMs.

PANAMA

Essential partners to build trust and reach communities on the ground

The DRS and the Panel, with contributions from the CAO, convened a two-day regional workshop in Panama City from May 28–29, 2026 on "The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Accountability at the World Bank Group". The event brought together 25 participants from 18 CSOs across Latin America, including Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Peru, and Bolivia, to deepen understanding of accountability processes and explore pathways for engagement with the World Bank Group's accountability mechanisms. The workshop, conducted in Spanish, offered a comprehensive view of how IAMs operate across the World Bank Group and how civil society can support project-affected communities.

"What stood out most was the openness of the discussions," said Marcos Favero, Dispute Resolution Officer, DRS, who facilitated several sessions. "Civil society participants engaged candidly on the challenges they face in supporting communities. We were able to discuss the reach and limitations of independent accountability mechanisms and demonstrate how dispute resolution can provide a space for constructive dialogue and practical solutions."

"CSOs serve as essential partners in ensuring that concerns are heard and addressed," said William Romans, Head of Operations, DRS. "Workshops like this are essential to building trust and ensuring that accountability mechanisms are accessible and responsive to the needs of communities."

CROATIA

Building a foundation to support project-affected communities

The DRS collaborated with the European Investment Bank Complaints Mechanism (EIB-CM) and the Independent Complaints Mechanism (ICM) of DEG/FMO/Proparco to convene a four-day regional workshop to build capacity in dispute resolution and strengthen awareness of IAMs across the Western Balkans.

The workshop, held in early June 2026, brought together 28 civil society representatives and mediators for a series of interactive sessions, practical exercises, and peer exchanges focused on improving understanding of accountability processes and supporting communities affected by development projects.

Participants explored mediation and dispute resolution in unusual depth, learning about the dispute resolution approaches used by accountability mechanisms, and explored the benefits and challenges of collaborative problem-solving in complex development contexts. Through case studies and practical exercises, attendees examined how dialogue-based processes can promote constructive engagement among communities, project implementers, and financing institutions.

“The Western Balkans is home to a dynamic network of civil society organizations and mediators,” said Scott Adams, Senior Dispute Resolution Officer, DRS. “Engaging directly with them helps strengthen understanding of accountability processes. It also builds trust, which is a foundation for supporting project-affected communities.”

Sharing insights

Learning from the global IAM-CSO network

IAMnet Annual Meetings 2025

At the 2025 IAMnet Annual Meetings, held October 6–9, 2025 in Bridgetown, Barbados, the global network of IAMs got to grips with the challenges of the policy reviews that half a dozen members have been undergoing in recent times. The DRS leadership team participated in several panels and discussions throughout the event.

During the plenary on policy reviews, William Romans, Head of Operations of the DRS, offered his suggestions on the "no-go" areas for policy reviews and provided his insights on how accountability services might be protected: "There should be no regression in policy."

Scott Adams, Senior Dispute Resolution Officer, served as a panelist on "Relationship of Dispute Resolution and Environmental and Social Standards", while Orsolya Székely, Head of DRS, moderated a breakout session on streamlining IAM processes.

A "Single Window" for accountability at the World Bank Group

The Civil Society Policy Forum at the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings hosted an informative discussion on the potential integration of the IAMs of the World Bank Group: the World Bank's Panel and DRS, and IFC/MIGA's CAO. David Pred of Inclusive Development International moderated the event, which the World Bank AM helped organize. The session provided an opportunity for CSOs to get critical updates on the integration process at the World Bank Group.

Orsolya Szekely, Head of DRS, said, "Dispute resolution is more than the solutions and remedies found in a given case." Referring to better development following dispute resolution processes due to improved capacities in Bank management and Borrowers' institutions, Székely suggested that mediation tools could be vital in view of the potential integration of the World Bank Group IAMs.

Dispute Resolution—
The other half of accountability

Dispute resolution has been around for a long time and has a strong recent history in the field of commercial mediation. But DR practitioners across the global network of IAMs have long been challenged by a lack of understanding regarding the nature of their practice, particularly how it relates to delivering remedy for communities who claim that development projects have violated their environmental and social rights. Recognizing this, the DRS has sought to shed light on the cases it has processed and contributed across multiple fora to discussions on mediation within the accountability sector.

Creating and recreating trust

In April 2026, *Accountability Matters* had the opportunity to sit down with the outgoing Head of DRS, Orsolya Székely, and review what the DRS has achieved in the first five years of its operational existence. As the first Head of DRS, Székely recalls the early days of the unit, its first case (in Uganda), and the critical importance of establishing trust. Looking back on the lessons learned from the cases that the DRS has processed since, Székely says: "We can do a lot more with dispute resolution inside the World Bank, learning from 30 years of compliance investigation where stakeholder consultation was a repeated complaint—how that can be done better, how early engagement in development can be done better. This is not only a lesson for the World Bank. A huge amount of investments and extremely large, complex projects can be done a lot better if early social buy-in and environmental concerns are addressed with proper stakeholder consultation."

"We started at zero ... now communities are a part of government"

Székely also stresses the need for accountability to be placed within a more constructive framework: "When I came to this role, I realized that the accountability story, the sort of negative story, needed to change into a positive accountability story. And that means that it's good to highlight harm, the earlier the better, because the earlier you address it, the earlier development can resume, in a better state. When you find solutions to problems, then you are already facilitating the environment for something bigger and better. That's where the development happens."

In January 2026, the DRS published a video on a case related to the Second Kampala Institutional and Infrastructure Development Project (KIIDP-2) in Uganda. Describing the mediation process leading up to the signing of an agreement in May 2023, the implementation of which was supported by the DRS through October 2025, the video features the parties commenting on how they worked through their differences with the support of mediators. Beginning at a low point—"We started at zero," says Pascal Mugisha of the Kampala Capital City Authority—the parties got a point where, as community member Peter Kazibwe says, "They [government officials] are happy to see you. They'll ask you, how can we help?"

This video highlights the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders involved in fulfilling their commitments, as well as the practical lessons and challenges identified during the overall mediation process. The video forms part of the DRS's ongoing commitment to transparency and institutional learning.

Accountability Matters

In 2024, the Accountability Mechanism relaunched the quarterly newsletter *Accountability Matters* as a vehicle for news, views, and interviews from the world of accountability. Since then, *Accountability Matters* has reached 45,000+ readers with features on how accountability relates to the big issues of our time, including climate change, AI, and youth participation in development. The newsletter has shed light on how mediation can add value to accountability processes within the development community.

In the shade of the E&S tree

In the December 2025 issue of *Accountability Matters*, "In the shade of the E&S tree: dispute resolution at independent accountability mechanisms" explored how IAMs, including the DRS, have integrated and updated the practice of mediation to ensure that parties' interests are met while still remaining within the framework of their parent institutions' environmental and social standards. Practitioners were keen to emphasize that problem-solving with communities and borrowers takes place within a well-demarcated playing field. Senior Dispute Resolution Officer Scott Adams of the DRS explains, "DR staff and mediators are focused on helping the parties work together to define the issues to be resolved in their own terms, to identify and satisfy their fundamental needs, and develop options for mutual gain wherever possible. This is all happening in the context of very real power dynamics and legal and policy requirements, which also has to be understood and acknowledged." This includes the Bank's E&S standards.

In the shade of the E&S tree: dispute resolution at independent accountability mechanisms

"A tremendous experience"

A February 2026 interview by *Accountability Matters* with Faris Hadad-Zervos, former Country Director for Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives, offered fascinating insights into how the DRS worked on a case in Nepal, from the perspective of Bank Management. As an observer to the mediation process, Hadad-Zervos says, "The DRS was new to me, to the World Bank, and to Nepal. So naturally, it was a learning process. But observing the process and the commitment of everyone demonstrated that it was doable." He characterizes the work of the DRS as providing "a tremendous experience for the World Bank and other development partners," concluding, "I think the DRS has shown that it helps us enhance development impact for the client, and that where it is invoked, the earlier it is invoked, the more we maximize the chances of having a positive outcome."

"It is necessary but insufficient to provide services, provide extensions, provide infrastructure. People have to feel like they're part of the story."

Looking Ahead: Strategic Priorities for FY26-28

SP 1: Effective case handling

SP 2: Enhancing operational efficiency

SP 3: Improving reporting and data transparency

SP 4: Fostering collaboration in the accountability field

SP 5: Engaging in procedural reform discussion

The DRS is committed to advancing its mission of providing a fair, impartial, and effective platform for resolving disputes. To achieve its goals, the DRS has identified five strategic priorities (SPs) that will guide its workplans in the coming years. These priorities are designed to enhance the service's effectiveness, operational efficiency, accountability, collaboration, and procedural integrity. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) under development will track the achievement and progress of SPs. KPIs will also guide the evaluation and enhancement of DRS operations.

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1818 H Street NW
Washington, DC 20433
Telephone: 202-473-1000
Internet: www.worldbank.org
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