A STRATEGY FOR AMPLIFYING LOCAL VOICES AND DEMOCRATIZING DEVELOPMENT
BIC's VISION

Development is driven by communities, reduces poverty and inequality, sustains the environment, and fulfills human rights.

BIC's MISSION

The Bank Information Center (BIC) promotes social, ecological and economic justice by amplifying local voices and democratizing development.

WHO WE ARE

BIC is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for transparency, accountability, sustainability, and inclusion in development finance.

WHAT WE DO

BIC partners with civil society in developing and transition countries to monitor and influence the policies and operations of the World Bank Group and other international financial institutions (IFIs). In partnership with international, regional, and local CSOs, BIC conducts research and advocacy aimed at reforming and improving IFI policy and practices.
BIC's CORE VALUES

As we work to achieve our vision for development finance, we recognize the importance of ensuring the work we undertake is consistent with these core values:

TRANSPARENCY

The right to information is the starting point for demanding accountability. We maintain transparency in our internal governance and operations and in relationships with our partners.

INCLUSION

Inclusion, with a particular focus on those that have been historically marginalized, is critical to ensuring development benefits are equitably shared and impacts do not disproportionately impact those that are most vulnerable. We do not discriminate in our work and partnerships based on religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other characteristics, and seek out ways to be intentionally inclusive in our work of those who are, or have been, marginalized.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN

Communities should not be viewed as an obstacle to development, or as an afterthought, but rather as an equal partner in the design and implementation of any agenda that benefits or impacts them. We seek in our work to be responsive to and driven by those who are directly impacted by development finance, and who are the ultimate stakeholders and rights holders.
ACCOUNTABILITY

Accepting responsibility for actions that result in harm is critical to positive development outcomes, but accountability should also be viewed as a positive part of the process that helps to level the playing field between influential development actors and development stakeholders and to incentivize learning. We hold ourselves accountable to our Board, donors, and to one another for stewardship of funds and impacts of our activities. We also look to our partners and colleagues to hold us accountable to our values and mission.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The promotion and protection of human rights should be a key purpose and guiding principle of all multilateral organizations. We aim to respect and fulfill human rights in our internal operations and collaborations with partners, and to promote respect for and fulfillment of human rights in our advocacy.

SUSTAINABILITY

Public institutions have a duty to ensure their activities are fiscally, socially, and environmentally sustainable for the benefit of current and future generations. We uphold and promote the principles of sustainability and stewardship in our finances, our policies and practices, as well as our advocacy.

INDEPENDENCE

Avoiding conflicts of interest and making decisions based on evidence and values rather than political expediency is essential. While we always seek to build bridges, our engagement never comes at the expense of our independence and commitment to our mission. This independence is reflected in our relationships with officials in international financial institutions, governments, our CSO partners, and our donors.
BIC's OBJECTIVES

Over the next five years we aim to achieve the following:

01  Local communities and grassroots organizations influence the design and implementation of IFI projects and policies that may impact them, including through participation and inclusion in meaningful public consultations throughout the project cycle.

02  IFIs establish and adhere to the highest international standards in development finance on access to information, stakeholder engagement, accountability and environmental and social safeguards.

03  IFI governance and operations prioritize inclusion of marginalized groups, the protection of their rights, and their equal access to project benefits.

04  IFIs actively promote ecological sustainability and environmental justice, including by ensuring all of their financing aligns with global climate goals and increasing climate financing to support both mitigation and adaptation.
Several new and developing dynamics that BIC recognizes our advocacy must respond to in order to meet these objectives include:

**GEOPOLITICS**

The rise of China and other emerging powers is challenging existing power structures across the development finance landscape. U.S. influence in the institutions remains high, but this shift requires engagement with a broader set of actors to ensure that institutional commitments to transparency, accountability and sustainability are not weakened.

**RACE TO THE BOTTOM**

The rise of new development finance institutions has increased the pressure on established IFIs, particularly the multilateral development banks (MDBs), to become more efficient and less bureaucratic—including by reducing social and environmental protections—which risks setting off a race to the bottom. In this context, established MDBs are less willing to use their influence with borrowing governments, particularly with middle income countries, and those with close ties to emerging powers.

**PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCE**

Increased emphasis on private sector “solutions” and financing for development, along with the use of financial intermediaries and public private partnerships, impact the role of IFIs in the development process. This shifting dynamic changes the pathways by which communities influence development, the ways in which they access accountability mechanisms, and their ability to share in the benefits of development.

**CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**

Increasingly, World Bank borrowing governments are restricting civic space in their countries, making engagement around World Bank projects difficult, risky, or impossible for civil society groups and affected communities. This also has implications for access to funding for civil society in countries with restricted space, making work on development finance doubly challenging. As the World Bank moves more heavily into fragile and conflict affected states (FCS) these risks grow.
Even with the significant growth in resources and the creation of new MDB-administered trust funds, the relevance of these institutions is being questioned, and there is a perception that the role of the World Bank in development finance has diminished. Yet the World Bank continues to influence the global development agenda, encourages policy reforms at the country level with significant environmental and social impact, and serves as a key resource for technical advice to borrowers as well as other development institutions. This rapidly evolving backdrop to our work requires us to be nimble and responsive, but also proactive in identifying new opportunities for us to advance our mission.

Examples of how BIC is adapting to the challenging context

- Supporting monitoring and advocacy vis-a-vis the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with lessons learned in crucial policy areas, including access to information, accountability mechanisms and stakeholder engagement.
- Exploring the ways that the World Bank and other established MDBs interact with Chinese banks and companies to better understand and leverage these dynamics.
- Collaborating with CSO partners to influence the “Maximizing Finance for Development” model by which the World Bank is promoting public-private partnerships and increased private-sector investment in the development sphere.
- Urging the World Bank to take into account the realities on the ground in countries with restricted civic space when implementing its new stakeholder engagement policies.
As the largest development bank, with a longstanding reputation as the preeminent development finance institution, the World Bank remains a standard setter for other IFIs. Changes that happen at the World Bank continue to influence the entire IFI system. Because the World Bank continues to have significant leverage with borrowing governments, it is able to influence national policy in both positive and negative ways.

Unlike some national development banks, the World Bank does provide civil society with openings to influence its operations and engage around its projects. The influential role played by many donor governments, which share an interest in accountability for adherence to high standards, makes positive change possible.

Meanwhile, the influence of the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank’s private sector lending arm, continues to grow and its investment in highly problematic sectors such as energy, extractives and agribusiness merit increased scrutiny.

BIC does not limit its work solely to the World Bank, but rather works to ensure that high standards set by the World Bank—as well as those at other Banks that may be higher—are replicated across the development finance landscape. BIC’s advocacy aims to achieve upward harmonization of policies across institutions and prevent a race to the bottom.
SUPPORTING ROLE

When BIC works on regional IFIs we are rarely the leader of the campaign, leaving that role to groups operating in the regions where the institution is located. Instead, BIC plays a supporting role, bringing policy expertise and lessons learned from World Bank engagement to the network of groups working on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the African Development Bank and others in order to strengthen advocacy aimed at these institutions. BIC also works to support partners with concerns about projects that are financed by these institutions and connect them to broader IFI watcher networks.

THEORY OF CHANGE

We believe that the World Bank, as a leader among IFIs, plays a critical role in driving the way in which development happens at the country and regional level. Influencing the policies and practices at the World Bank has a cascade effect on the policies and practices of other IFIs, as well as the development related policies and practices of borrowing governments. For this cascade effect to take hold, World Bank advocacy must be paired with advocacy at other IFIs to promote upward harmonization and prevent a race to the bottom.

IFIs respond most favorably when pressure is applied from both above, through advocacy with shareholding governments, and below, with civil society and affected communities calling for change at the project level. BIC believes that to maximize our impact and achieve our objectives, our project monitoring work and support to grassroots civil society must inform, and be supported by, high level policy advocacy that amplifies and helps create space for community voices.
ACTIVITIES

ADVOCACY

Create multilevel advocacy campaigns to achieve change in IFI policy and practice including through:

- Convening and building alliances and coalitions to advance policy reforms
- Targeting key decision makers including governments, IFI management, and other influential actors
- Opening space for partners and community leaders to elevate local experience and push for change in project design and implementation

RESEARCH

Carry out research into projects, policies, and programs at the IFIs to inform advocacy including through:

- Developing case studies of projects that have an adverse impact on communities and exemplify broader shortcomings in IFI policies and practices, or of projects where best practices emerge and have led to positive results for communities.
- Conducting policy and program analysis at individual IFIs, as well as comparative analysis of the development finance landscape to identify best practice that should be replicated as well as where there are shortcomings that must be addressed.

SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Work directly with communities impacted by IFI projects, along with local, national and international civil society groups that serve these communities, including by:
• Facilitating communities’ ability to raise concerns about harm that results from IFI projects or programs and seek change to project design and implementation.
• Compiling and distributing relevant information about IFI policies and processes to partner networks, and conducting trainings and providing capacity building support among partners and their broader networks on effective use of IFI mechanisms and policies.
• Improving vertical integration by building strategic connections among our partner organizations at the community, national, regional, and international level.
• Assisting civil society partners and communities in using IFIs as a lever to achieve change at the local, national and regional levels on issues ranging from rights of children and persons with disabilities to protection for forests and forest peoples.

**BIC's UNIQUE STRENGTHS**

**BANK KNOWLEDGE**

Our role as constant Bank watchdog makes us a credible source of information on new developments within the institutions and openings for engagement around policy and strategy reviews as well as ways in which the World Bank can be used as a lever to influence national level policy. Our knowledge of the World Bank’s internal governance and operations also allows us to inform and guide civil society less focused on the Bank with regard to World Bank policies, projects and programs and on the use of opportunities and entry points for influence.
CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our relationships with high level Bank management, Executive Directors, and key U.S. Government officials allow us to effectively influence the IFIs and make us a valuable resource for CSOs seeking to advance an agenda within the institutions. Our relationships with grassroots CSOs along with national, regional and international networks enable us to support vertically integrated advocacy campaigns that connect communities with decision makers at the World Bank and regional IFIs.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE

We have thematic expertise in areas traditionally underemphasized among IFI watchers, including child rights and disability, combined with long term experience in the unique ways in which development finance impacts the environment and affected communities.

REPUTATION

Our unique role and strong reputation is recognized by a broad range of stakeholders including IFI staff, shareholder governments, NGOs, the media and others. Management and others within the Banks and governments have recognized the need for a strong BIC in order to keep the institutions accountable to their missions.