

CASE STUDY

Viet Nam: Central Mekong Delta Region Connectivity Project Innovative Project-level Grievance Mechanism

Project-Level Grievance Redress Mechanism – Asian Development Bank

SYNOPSIS

The Central Mekong Delta Region Connectivity Project (CMDRCP) case illustrates that effective grievance mechanisms require both innovation and integration. This project combined proactive tools, robust institutional arrangements, and responsive processes to prevent grievances where possible and resolve them effectively when they arose. Its grievance redress mechanism (GRM) stood out for applying innovative solutions across key dimensions—legal and institutional frameworks, financing, information sharing and consultation, social and technical design, timely case management, and coordinated organizational roles—making it a strong reference for project-level grievance handling. The experience demonstrates the value of blending flexibility with institutional clarity, embedding grievance functions into core project delivery, investing early in communication and staff capacity, and treating the GRM as a governance tool for building long-term trust and accountability.^{1 2}

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Implemented between 2013 and 2018, the Central Mekong Delta Region Connectivity Project (CMDRCP) was a major infrastructure initiative designed to improve transport connectivity between Ho Chi Minh City and Viet Nam's Southern Coastal Region. The project involved the construction of two large cable-stayed bridges and an elevated highway. It was jointly financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) – USD 410 million, the Export-Import Bank of Korea – USD 260 million, and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – USD 134 million.

While the project generated significant economic and transport benefits, it also had **substantial social and environmental impacts**. Approximately **224 hectares** of land were acquired, directly affecting **1,770 households** and indirectly impacting an additional **516 households**. Due to the scale and complexity of its impacts, the project was classified as **Category A** under ADB's Safeguard Policy Statement (2009), triggering requirements for robust systems to manage involuntary resettlement and environmental risks.

To meet these requirements, the CMDRCP established a **highly adaptive and effective grievance redress mechanism**, characterized by institutional innovation, procedural flexibility, and strong community engagement.

¹ ADB. 2018. Building Bridges. Lessons from Problem-Solving in Viet Nam. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/424386/building-bridges-problem-solving-viet-nam.pdf>

² ADB. 2018. Case study Lessons from Deploying a Multifaceted Grievance Redress Mechanism. <https://development.asia/case-study/lessons-deploying-multifaceted-grievance-redress-mechanism>

DESIGN OF THE GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISM (GRM)

At the outset, separate grievance systems were set up for resettlement-related and construction-related complaints. These were later integrated into a composite GRM, improving coordination and streamlining resolution.

In Dong Thap Province, a Special Task Force was established, consisting of legal and technical experts capable of addressing complex, high-volume resettlement complaints. In Can Tho City, the GRM evolved from a Field Office initially created for the Income Restoration Program. It became a central hub for complaint handling and community interaction.

For construction-related grievances, contractors served as the first point of contact, often supported by commune or ward-level government representatives. The Cuu Long Corporation for Investment, Development, and Project Management of Infrastructure (CIPM) served as the implementing agency, coordinating and monitoring all grievance-related processes with support from a Detailed Design and Implementation Support (DDIS) consultant.

The Viet Nam Resident Mission of ADB and DFAT played active roles in designing and supervising the GRM, regularly consulting with provincial authorities and conducting field visits. A national-level Project Coordination Committee (PCC), comprising the Ministry of Transport, other ministries, local authorities, and donor agencies, provided strategic oversight.

The GRM has processed nearly 1,000 formal complaints and resolved many more informally. Public awareness of the mechanism was high, inter-agency coordination was strong, and the GRM significantly reduced project delays and social tensions while building public trust in project institutions.

KEY ENABLERS OF SUCCESS

Several factors contributed to the effective functioning of the CMDRCP's GRM:

1. **Supportive policy and legal framework:** Clear regulations on resettlement, environmental protection, and complaints handling facilitated the GRM's operation.
2. **Innovative institutional design:** Distinct mechanisms for resettlement- and construction-related grievances and entities such as the PCC, Special Task Force, and Field Office enabled fast and context-specific responses.
3. **Commitment from project owner and donors:** Strong engagement from the Ministry of Transport, ADB, DFAT, and other stakeholders ensured careful planning, implementation, and monitoring of the GRM.
4. **Integrated consultant and contractor roles:** CIPM, through the DDIS consultant, oversaw grievance recording and resolution, offering flexible responses for complex or hybrid complaints.
5. **Timely and flexible financing:**
 - Prompt fund availability supported consultations, surveys, and compensation.
 - **Retroactive financing** permitted the use of loan proceeds to compensate people affected by an earlier project incorporated into CMDRCP.
6. **Escrow account through state budget:** Allowed deferred compensation payments for cases delayed due to factors beyond project control.
7. **Diverse consultation and information-sharing strategies:** Authorities worked with mass organizations to tailor grievance communication to community preferences.
8. **Strong technical planning:** Attention to design at early stages helped prevent technical disputes.

9. **Social planning and income restoration:** Early implementation of social safeguards reduced the volume of grievances.
10. **Positive institutional culture:** Intangible values such as responsiveness and mutual respect contributed to smooth operation.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Despite its strengths, the GRM encountered several challenges, including:

- **Inconsistent communication** with affected households about the status of complaints and follow-up actions occasionally led to dissatisfaction and mistrust.
- **Lack of a centralized digital complaints database** made it difficult to track, analyze, and share grievance data systematically across project actors.
- **Limited capacity among frontline actors**, including government officials, contractors, and consultants, who often lacked formal training in grievance handling, conflict resolution, or community engagement.