

From

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FORUM,
HYDERABAD.

To

Ms Sona Shrestha,
Director General,
South Asia Department (SARD) Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Email: sshrestha@adb.org
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Date: May 3, 2026

Ref: Case SPF-2026-13-01-0233

Sub: Urgent Request for Safeguard Compliance, Transparency, and Least-Displacement Approach – India: Musi Riverfront Development Project - Project ID: 59485-001.

Respected Madam,

We, the Environmental Justice Forum under LEAD Foundation, Hyderabad, respectfully submit the following inputs to assist the ongoing Problem-Solving Function review (Case No. SPF-2026-13-01-0233), which serves as an independent forum to address concerns of stakeholders affected by the project.

While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appraised the project as an 'ecological restoration' initiative, the manner of its implementation by the Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Ltd (MRDCL) raises serious concerns regarding alignment with the ADB's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) 2026, particularly Environmental and Social Standards (ESS) 5 and 10. Available information indicates that certain project components, including proposed transport infrastructure, may be driving interventions that could result in significant and potentially avoidable displacement, warranting careful examination of their necessity, proportionality, and consistency with the stated ecological

objectives.

1. Potential Non-Alignment with ADB ESS 5 and National Legal Frameworks

The proposed approach raises concerns regarding alignment with ADB's ESS 5 on Involuntary Resettlement, which requires avoidance of land acquisition through feasible alternatives and, where unavoidable, minimization of displacement. The absence of a transparent alternatives analysis and reliance on approaches leading to large-scale clearance suggest a departure from this principle. This is also inconsistent with the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (Sections 4, 7 and 8) and the EIA Notification, 2006 (Para 7 and Appendix III), which mandate least land acquisition, alternatives analysis, and public consultation.

2. Need to Re-examine the flood design basis

There is an imperative need to re-examine the flood design basis for the Musi River using updated and transparently disclosed hydrological studies. Riverfront planning and floodplain zoning should be based on an appropriate, risk-informed **design flood**, rather than relying solely on extreme worst-case scenarios such as the **Probable Maximum Flood (PMF)**, which are intended primarily for safety verification of critical infrastructure. Over-reliance on such extreme assumptions for spatial planning may lead to overestimation of risk, unnecessarily large clearance zones, and avoidable displacement. Any proposed interventions must adhere to the principle of 'least displacement' under the LARR Act, 2013, prioritizing in-situ solutions and minimizing impacts on vulnerable communities. Infrastructure components, including arterial roads, should not drive land acquisition under the guise of river restoration. River restoration must fundamentally remain ecological, hydrological, and people-centric in approach.

3. Arbitrary Enforcement of Buffer Zones & Conflict with CWC Guidelines

It appears that buffer provisions under G.O. Ms. No. 168 (07.04.2012), read with G.O. Ms. No. 86 (04.03.2006), are being applied as a uniform setback along the Musi River, creating a de facto no-construction zone. Such a fixed-width approach, without reach-wise hydrological validation, is not aligned with the risk-based floodplain zoning principles of the Central Water Commission

(CWC), which advocate graded land-use controls based on design floods. Replacing such science-based zoning with a generic setback may lead to overestimation of risk, disproportionate land clearance, and avoidable displacement, raising concerns of proportionality in governance.

4. Failure to Align with National Urban River Management Frameworks

As a member of the River Cities Alliance (RCA) - a joint initiative of the National Mission for Clean Ganga and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Hyderabad is expected to align with national urban river management principles that prioritize floodplain conservation, decentralized wastewater treatment, and non-structural mitigation. An approach that relies predominantly on structural interventions and large-scale displacement appears inconsistent with these frameworks, raising concerns about alignment with sustainable development commitments, including those of the Asian Development Bank.

5. Potential Non-Alignment with ADB ESS 10 and SIA Requirements

The invocation of urgency provisions through G.O. Ms. No. 921 MA&UD dt.16.12.2025 and related orders appears to have curtailed the conduct of a comprehensive Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and associated public consultation processes under the LARR Act 2013. This raises concerns regarding alignment with ADB's ESS 10, which mandates *meaningful, timely, and informed consultation* with affected communities, along with *transparent disclosure of project information* and an effective *grievance redress mechanism*. Any dilution of SIA and consultation processes may undermine these core requirements and the principles of participatory and accountable project planning.

6. Concerns on Characterization of Enforcement Actions and Safeguard Compliance

Recent enforcement actions by the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Protection Agency (HYDRAA) have been presented as 'environmental protection' measures. However, these actions appear to involve clearance of residential settlements along the Musi River, raising concerns that displacement impacts may not be fully disclosed or assessed. Such characterization may limit the application of applicable safeguard frameworks, including ADB's requirements on

involuntary resettlement and meaningful stakeholder consultation. All such interventions must be transparently assessed and addressed within appropriate social safeguard frameworks.

7. Concerns on Sewage Estimation, Water Allocation, and DPR Transparency

In absence of the final DPR in public domain - in contravention of the *ADB Access to Information Policy*, it is not possible to independently assess the adequacy of sewage estimation and treatment provisions. Given known gaps in sewerage coverage and diversion of wastewater into storm water drains, there is a risk that actual sewage loads may be underestimated, potentially affecting treatment outcomes, contrary to norms emphasized by the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) and the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Further, proposals to augment Musi River flows from sources such as the Mallanna Sagar Reservoir without a ring-fenced urban allocation replicates the '*Singur Precedent*' threatening the *riparian rights of downstream farmers* and *violating ADB Social Safeguard Policies* regarding livelihoods protection, requiring transparent, basin-level assessment of allocations and downstream impacts. In this context, public disclosure of the DPR and a Supplementary Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (SESIA), including water balance and wastewater assessments, are essential for informed scrutiny and sustainable decision-making.

Requested Actions from the ADB

1. **DPR Disclosure:**
*Require immediate **public disclosure of the draft / final DPR**, including hydrology, floodplain delineation, sewage estimation, and water balance.*
2. **Independent Technical Review:**
*Commission an **independent review of flood modelling** (design flood vs PMF), floodplain zoning, and wastewater assumptions, aligned with CWC and CPHEEO norms.*
3. **Alternatives Analysis (ESS 5):**
*Mandate a transparent evaluation of feasible alternatives to **avoid and minimize displacement**, including nature-based solutions and in-situ options.*
4. **Restore SIA & Consultation (ESS 10):**
*Ensure a comprehensive Social Impact Assessment and **meaningful public consultation**, with full disclosure and an accessible grievance redress mechanism, consistent with the LARR Act, 2013.*
5. **Adopt 'Least Displacement' Approach:**

Prioritize in-situ solutions and limit land acquisition to the ***absolute minimum necessary***, with clear justification.

6. **Sewage & STP Audit:**

Verify actual sewage flows and treatment capacity, including unsewered areas and storm water drain inflows.

7. **Basin-Level Water Assessment:**

Require transparent evaluation of water allocations, including use of sources such as Mallanna Sagar Reservoir, and downstream impacts on agriculture, livelihoods etc.

8. **Safeguard Compliance Review:**

Undertake a full ESS 5 and ESS 10 compliance audit and ***condition, or defer financing*** until gaps are addressed.

We respectfully request the ADB to ensure that appraisal or financing proceeds only after full compliance with safeguard, technical, and disclosure requirements. We look forward to your prompt intervention to prevent irreversible impacts on livelihoods, safeguard constitutional and legal rights, and ensure that the project remains aligned with its ecological objectives and the principle of least displacement.

Yours sincerely

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