

World Bank transparency undergoes review

Idasa and ANSA-Africa news alert

21 April 2009

Without timely access to information, individuals are unable to participate in decisions that may affect their lives and livelihoods. Without access to public information, communities are unable to hold decision makers accountable for their actions. The right to access information is a fundamental prerequisite to meaningful participation, democratic accountability and to combat corruption.

The right to access public information is a fundamental human right. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, in part, that everyone has the right “to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” This right is enshrined in national constitutions and international legal agreements.

Civil society groups have long demanded greater transparency from their own governments. As the power and intrusiveness of donor governments and international agencies has grown, particularly in relation to the world’s poorest countries, the transparency debate has broadened: do international lenders such as the World Bank respect and promote a right to access public information?

During 2009 (April-July) the World Bank will review its transparency standards. The Disclosure Policy review provides major opportunities for civil society organizations to challenge the continued secrecy of decision making at the Bank and to strengthen access to information on Bank-financed projects and programmes.

As part of the review, the World Bank has posted an Approach Paper on its website, inviting comments from the public, and proposes holding public consultations around the world, including in the following African countries: Cameroon, DRC, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Idasa’s Economic Governance Programme, as part of the Global Transparency Initiative (GTI) and the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa (ANSA-Africa), encourages civil society organizations to use the following opportunities and resources, many made available by our GTI partner, the Bank Information Centre (BIC).

Take Action

Here are a few options for further action. We encourage you to use those that are most appropriate to your context.

- **Attend your regional World Bank Disclosure consultation or hold public meetings:** For a list of consultations taking place, please see the table on p.4 of this document. To attend a consultation, you will need to e-mail: Disclosure_Consultations@worldbank.org.
- **Send your comments to the World Bank, and us:** Send your comments about the Disclosure Policy to the World Bank directly through their website. Since the Bank is not posting comments as they are received, we would be happy to do it so stakeholders can benefit from shared information. Send us your comments at gtiupdates@bicusa.org.
- **Contact your WB Country Executive Director (ED):** Share your concerns about the Disclosure Policy with your ED who represents your country on the World Bank's Board of Directors. Find your ED's contact information at BIC's [World Bank Executive Directors Page](#).
- **Join the Disclosure Policy Facebook page:** BIC has created the [World Bank Disclosure Review Facebook](#) page where you can find others in your region who are interested in this topic, and join in on the discussions taking place. If you don't have an account yet, it is easy to set one up. Visit www.facebook.com.
- **Prepare cases:** Groups wishing to engage in the disclosure review should document cases and examples of access to information problems with World Bank projects and programs. GTI can assist in pulling these together. Share your experiences with GTI at gtiupdates@bicusa.org. You could also share your story with local media sources to help raise awareness about these issues.
- **Endorse the GTI Transparency Charter:** The Charter document provides supportive commentary on each of its principles. Endorse the Charter to strengthen the call for recognition of the right to public information at the IFIs. Click [here](#) to endorse.
- **Sign-up for email alerts:** GTI will send regular email alerts and updates during the World Bank policy review. Send an email with the word "subscribe" to gtiupdates@bicusa.org.

Resources

GTI will send email alerts and updates during the World Bank policy review. To receive updates, send an email with the word "subscribe" to gtiupdates@bicusa.org.

- World Bank webpage for policy review www.worldbank.org/disclosure
- GTI website and GTI Transparency Charter www.ifitransparency.org
- GTI World Bank Transparency Scorecard: www.ifitransparency.org/resources.shtml?x=55994
- BIC webpage on World Bank Transparency www.bicusa.org/wbtransparency
- IFI Transparency Resource (database on IFI disclosure policies)
www.ifitransparencyresource.org
- freedominfo.org IFTI Watch (IFI access to info news service)
www.freedominfo.org/ifti/index.htm

For further information contact Gary Pienaar gpienaar@idasa.org.za

Idasa www.idasa.org

ANSA-Africa www.ansa-africa.net