



GTI World Bank Transparency Review Update 2
13 March 2009

World Bank Begins Transparency Policy Review

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The World Bank publicly launched a review of its “Policy on Disclosure of Information” on March 13. The review provides significant opportunities for civil society groups to challenge continued secrecy at the Bank and to gain greater access to information on Bank-financed programs.

A New Approach

The World Bank has posted an “Approach Paper” to revising its current disclosure policy. The paper – [“Toward Greater Transparency: Rethinking the World Bank’s Disclosure Policy”](#) – proposes a significant shift in the structure of access to information framework and articulates a number of welcome principles upon which the new policy would be based. At the same time, the paper contains significant limitations and potential contradictions. These will need to be addressed during the review process.

The Bank states that the new policy will be based on four principles: (1) maximum access to information, (2) a limited set of disclosure exceptions, (3) clear information request procedures, and (4) the right to appeal denial of information. These principles reflect some key principles commonly found in national freedom of information systems and incorporate elements of GTI’s [Transparency Charter for International Financial Institutions: Claiming Our Right to Know](#).

Under its current policy (see [GTI Update 1](#) for comments on the current policy), the Bank lists a range documents that are to be disclosed (known as a “positive list”). However, a great deal of Bank documentation does not appear on the list and is generally considered secret. Under the new approach, the Bank would abandon its “positive list” and proposes to disclose all information held by the Bank unless the information falls within a limited set of disclosure exceptions.

Unfortunately a number of the proposed exceptions do not appear to be narrowly drawn, which could undermine the “maximum access” principle and unnecessarily restrict information that should be in the public domain. Access to several important categories of information, such as Board proceedings, draft documents, and third-party information, would potentially be circumscribed by overly broad exceptions. A special Board committee will elaborate standards for Board transparency during the review process.

The Bank proposes to significantly expand information during project implementation (such as supervision reports, aide memoires), country portfolio reviews, more evaluation documents, and papers already considered by the Board of Directors.

GTI will analyze the Approach Paper and examine its strengths and weaknesses. We will circulate our analysis shortly.

Proposed Steps and Timeline of the Review

- **First round of public comments:** Eight weeks of public comment on the Approach Paper (March 13-May 8). Comments may be provided through the [Bank's website](#) or by email at Disclosure_Consultations@worldbank.org.
- **Regional Consultations:** Up to 30 consultations will be held in Bank borrowing countries before May 8. Locations and dates are not yet available (to be posted).
- **International fora:** Meetings or events to be organized during the Bank's Spring Meetings In Washington, DC (April 25-26) and an additional location.
- **Feedback:** A matrix of public comments received with Bank responses will be posted (May).
- **Second round of comments:** Bank will post the revised paper for a four-week comment period. Timeline is not specified, but likely to be June-July.
- **Comments on Final Draft is unclear:** Civil society groups have encouraged the Bank to release the final draft of the policy when it is sent to the Bank's Board, but the posted Consultation Plan is silent on this step. Board approval expected between July–September.

Timely access to information has been a longstanding concern of civil society groups regarding World Bank policies and projects. The review of the Bank's disclosure policy presents an opportunity to highlight concerns and issues and to challenge continued Bank secrecy.

GTI will send regular email alerts and updates during the World Bank policy review. If you did not receive this update directly and would like to receive further updates, send an email with the word "subscribe" to gtiupdates@bicusa.org.

Resources

- 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