

Day 3 – Wednesday, 28 November 2007
Plenary Session 9.00am-10.30am

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Position: Country Director, Comoros, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles and Somalia

Organisation: World Bank

Presentation Title: Freedom of Information, Human and Economic Development

Compared to a few years ago, development practitioners are paying much more attention to governance, voice and accountability as factors in human and economic development. Empirical evidence from the World Bank and other sources suggests that transparency is associated with better socio-economic and human development indicators, as well as with higher competitiveness and lower corruption. Access to information decreases uncertainty in the market, reduces volatility and improves the macroeconomic environment.

An increasing number of countries are putting in place laws and implementation arrangements that guarantee citizens access to government information. In September 2006, there were about 70 countries with access to information laws, compared to only 12 countries in 1990. The practical challenges ahead include facilitating the implementation of FOI laws in countries that have recently enacted the legislation, and supporting countries that are making progress towards legislation. An even greater challenge is to have interventions in countries that are yet to make any progress towards FOI legislation. The address will focus on these critical areas.

It will also discuss the work that the World Bank Group and other development agencies are undertaking in many countries to have FOI and other transparency and accountability initiatives embedded in national and corporate governance frameworks. An important ingredient of this work is the growing engagement between the World Bank Group and a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, media, civil society, and faith based organizations.