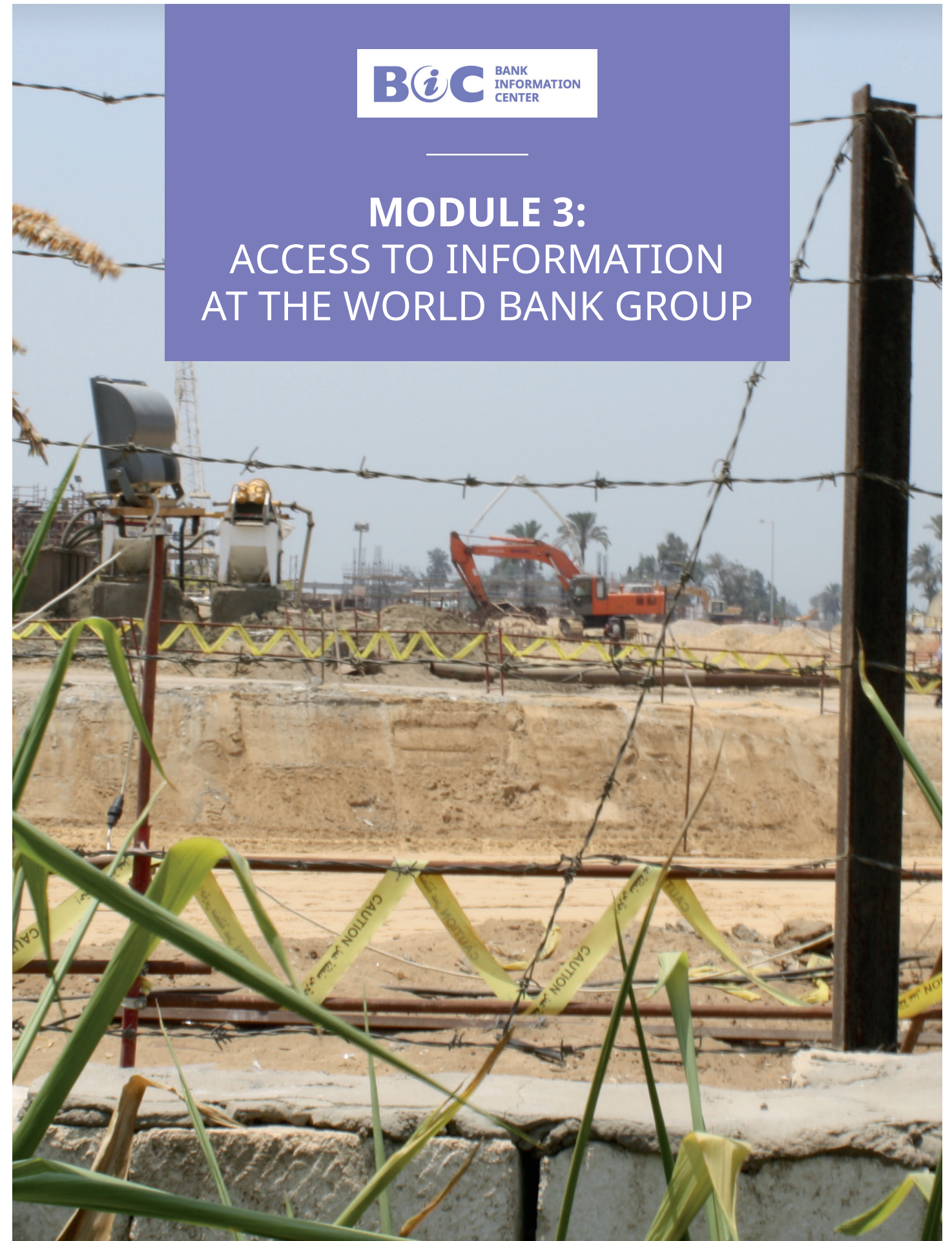




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MODULE 3: ACCESS TO INFORMATION AT THE WORLD BANK GROUP



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Sections In This Module:

- Information is a right!
- Disclosure policies at the World Bank, IFC and MIGA
- Other strategies for obtaining information about World Bank Group operations in your country
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- Quick Reference: How You Can Get Information from the World Bank Group

Civil society has made significant advances in opening the World Bank Group (WBG) to greater public scrutiny over the past decades. Nevertheless, the public is kept in the dark about many of the Bank's decisions and operations.

Access to information is the basic starting point for informed engagement, active resistance and proposals for viable alternatives to WBG operations. Understanding what documents exist, what rights you have to access them, and how to obtain them are powerful tools to have under your activist belt.

Information is a right!

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas." This statement encompasses the right to access information held by public bodies,



WHAT'S STILL SECRET? PUSHING THE TRANSPARENCY FRONTIER AT THE WORLD BANK GROUP

Although far more information is available from the WBG today than it was years ago, many of its decisions and operations remain shrouded in secrecy. The following areas represent major gaps in the institution's transparency:

- Draft information about strategies, policies and projects under consideration is not routinely available to the public, unless they are subject to public consultation. This secrecy, protected by the 'deliberation exception', deprives affected populations of the opportunity to influence decisions before they are taken.
- The Board of Directors meets behind closed doors and transcripts of discussions are not made public, preventing people from knowing how their governments are representing them and shielding the most important development decisions from public scrutiny.
- The WBG discloses very limited information during the implementation of projects and strategies, hampering efforts to monitor the impacts of the institution's operations and to track the use of its funds while there is still time to correct problems.

including international financial institutions such as the World Bank Group. Goal number 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 includes the aim to "...build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels." People have the right to know what is being planned for their communities in order to make informed decisions about development processes that affect their lives and hold officials accountable.

Disclosure policies at the World Bank, IFC and MIGA

The World Bank, IFC and MIGA have recognized the right to information by establishing information disclosure policies, in the same way that countries have adopted Freedom of Information laws. The World Bank and IFC adopted their first disclosure policies in 1994, and MIGA followed in 2000. Their policies went through several reviews and the latest Access to Information policies at the WBG typically contain the following elements: principles of disclosure; exceptions to disclosure; routine disclosure; and request driven disclosure.

Principles of disclosure: The fundamental principle of World Bank Group policies on access to information is "a presumption in favor of disclosure." In theory, this "presumption" means that all information held at the institution can be disclosed unless it is commercially sensitive or otherwise deemed confidential (on the basis of an exception to disclosure specified in the policy). In practice, however, the World Bank, IFC and MIGA release only a limited amount of information and over-apply their broad exceptions to disclosure.

Exceptions to disclosure: The World Bank, IFC and MIGA Disclosure Policies list several types of information that cannot be disclosed, including:

- Confidential and sensitive business information
- Information related to internal and external negotiations and deliberation
- Information generated by a third-party (such as a government or consultant)
- Proceedings of the Board of Directors
- Personal information about employees
- Information prohibited or restricted by other policies or national laws.

Most of these exceptions to disclosure are overly broad and could include almost all information held at the institution. In addition to being more narrowly drawn, disclosure exceptions should only protect information that would otherwise cause harm if disclosed.

Routine disclosure: Most of the information available from the WBG is automatically—or routinely—disclosed through its website.

Typically, this information includes:

- Basic information about the structure of the institution
- Board of Executive Directors contact information, meeting calendar and meeting minutes (including a brief list of attendees, issues discussed, and actions taken—not a record of proceedings)
- Operational policies and strategies
- Country analytical studies and programs
- Evaluations, and monitoring reports including some reports produced by the Independent
- Evaluations, and monitoring reports including some reports produced by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)

Request-driven disclosure: All other information that is not posted on the World Bank, IFC or MIGA websites should be available by request from the WBG’s headquarters, country offices or through the institutions’ portals.

When a request is denied, the requester can submit an appeal to be considered internally, and if denied, again, the requester can appeal with an independent panel.

Other strategies for obtaining information about World Bank Group operations in your country

Your government should be able to provide information on World Bank, IFC and MIGA projects in your country. As discussed in Module 2, the Ministry of Finance or national equivalent is your country’s main liaison with the WBG. Various ministries are involved in the implementation of Bank operations. Sometimes legislative committees are responsible for overseeing government loans from IFIs, including the WBG. Approaching any or all of these sources for information could prove useful.

TRANSLATION FRAMEWORK

Approved in 2003, the World Bank’s Translation Framework aims to increase the regular and timely translation of key documents, including strategies and project information. However, the framework does not provide strict guidance on what documents must be translated. It rather vests responsibility for translation decisions in the business units. Find more on the Translation Framework <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/333211468162290165/pdf/36923.pdf>





Civil society organizations operating locally, regionally or internationally are also often very good sources of information about WBG projects and policies. Bank Information Center can help you identify civil society groups working on issues relevant to your country: Contact us at info@bankinformationcenter.org

In brief

People have a fundamental right to know what is being planned for their communities in order to participate in and make informed decisions about development processes that affect their lives.

- The World Bank, IFC and MIGA have recognized the right to information by establishing access to information policies. However, in practice the institutions release only a limited amount of information.
- You can access World Bank, IFC and MIGA information through their websites. Your government and civil society organizations are also important resources.
- When information is not routinely disclosed, request it and demand an explanation for why something is kept confidential.

Find out more!

Resources from Civil Society Groups

“Transparency Charter for International Financial Institutions: Claiming our Right to Know”. Global Transparency Initiative, September 2006. <http://www.freedominfo.org/wp-content/uploads/GTI-charter.pdf>

“Unlocking the World Bank’s Access to Information Policy: Your Key to the Vault” Bank Information Center, July 2011 https://bankinformationcenter.cdn.prismic.io/bankinformationcenter%2F0ea43428-7b36-481e-8b86-97829a41acff_access_to_info.pdf

“Early Warning System” (an online tool that provides information and project documents on development projects around the world), Center for International Environmental Law and the International Accountability Project, <https://ews.rightsindevelopment.org>.

Resources from the World Bank Group

World Bank Access to Information Policy
<https://policies.worldbank.org/sites/ppf3/PPFDocuments/Forms/DispPage.aspx?docid=3693>

IFC Access to Information Policy
<https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/c8a61c48-32c2-49b2-8e46-2ade87f774e0/IFCPolicyDisclosureInformation.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

MIGA Access to Information Policy
<https://www.miga.org/report/access-information-policy>

QUICK REFERENCE: HOW YOU CAN GET INFORMATION FROM THE WORLD BANK GROUP

The World Bank, IFC and MIGA websites

Much of the information about World Bank Group operations is routinely available through the World Bank, IFC and MIGA websites: www.worldbank.org, www.ifc.org and www.miga.org.

Some useful World Bank Group webpages:

- The Projects Databases for the World Bank, IFC and MIGA link visitors to information on over 19,000 World Bank Group projects, including relevant project documents:
 - The World Bank's projects database: www.worldbank.org/projects
 - The IFC projects database: <https://disclosures.ifc.org/#/landing>
 - MIGA projects database: <https://www.miga.org/projects>
- The Document Database links visitors to approximately 30,000 WBG public documents. Access the database through the "Publications" link on the World Bank homepage: www.worldbank.org/reference
- World Bank Country Pages provide information on current projects and priorities in borrowing countries, and link visitors to relevant country and project documents. Country pages can be accessed through the "Countries" link on the World Bank homepage: www.worldbank.org/countries. You can also directly access your country page on the World Bank website by typing the name of your country [www.worldbank.org/\[your country's name\]](http://www.worldbank.org/[your country's name]).

The Project and Document Databases and Country Pages are not always consistent, so if you are looking for a specific project, start with the Projects Database, but if you are seeking general information on operations in your country, search first via the country page.

World Bank Group Information Research Guide

The World Bank, IFC, and MIGA each have websites loaded with information. Researching those websites can be an overwhelming exercise. To make researching easier, the WBG developed a guide to navigate the websites and help users find the information they need. Unfortunately this website guide is only available in English. Access the guide here: <https://researchguides.worldbankimflib.org/WBGInfoguide>

Through this guide you can find information about and links to:

1. The WBG structure;
2. Different ways to get involved;
3. Projects and Operations across WBG's different institutions;
4. Information about each country members in the WBG;
5. Links to different data and statistics resources;
6. Research, reports & repositories;
7. Legal cases and grievances handled by the accountability mechanisms of the different WBG institutions;
8. Links to the different WBG social media accounts;
9. Contact information for WBG institutions.

Making requests for information

As per the Access to Information policies of the WBG, you can submit requests online for information that you cannot find on the institutions' websites. Here are the links to submit requests:

World Bank:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/access-to-information/request-submission>

IFC:

<https://disclosures.ifc.org/#/inquiries>

MIGA:

https://www.miga.org/contact/access_to_information