

How to Build Consensus

February 27, 2004—Governments undertaking public sector reforms face daunting challenges in implementation. But the most important and most difficult task is to get the buy-in of critical constituencies and generate support among the population at large.

By helping to strengthen the capacity of governments to communicate with their constituencies as reforms are planned and implemented the Bank is more likely to increase development effectiveness, says Cecilia Verzosa, head of the Knowledge & Capacity-building unit in EXT's Development Communication (DevComm) Division.



Moises Naim and Cecilia Verzosa participate in the first session.

Currently underway is a seven-week Bank-sponsored distance-learning program in Russian on strategic communications. Government officials, NGO leaders and members of the media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are participating. Development Communications is organizing this program along with ECAEXT, WBI, and the Bank Netherlands Partnership Program, which funded the development and delivery of the course.

"We've been quite happy with the progress so far," said Verzosa. After the first module, requests came in to add more people to the course, with about 100 now that it's in week five.

The course has brought together policy makers in three Central Asian countries that essentially share in the same culture and in many ways have similar economies. "It is important that participants can analyze and discuss case studies from other ECA countries and exchange their views and opinions in real time," said Verzosa.

Most of the course material was prepared in Washington and translated into Russian. There is live interpretation of the speakers.

Among those who have addressed participants so far in the three-country distance-learning program: Moises Naim, Editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine; Nick Van Praag, Sr. External Affairs officer from ECA; Dr. Dejan Vercic, a partner in the Slovenian PR firm Pristop and Professor in the University of Ljubljana; Sharon Felzer, head of DevComm's Public Opinion Research Unit; Jose-Manuel Bassat, Communications Officer; and Dr. Lajos Bokros, Director, Financial Advisory Services, ECAVP and the former Finance Minister of Hungary.