



WORLD SAVINGS BANKS INSTITUTE

PRESS INFORMATION

Brussels, 31 May 2006

WSBI papers on Access to Finance presented at World Bank/Brookings Institute conference in Washington

The World Savings Banks Institute presented two research papers at the occasion of the prestigious World Bank/Brookings Institute Conference on Access to Finance, which is taking place on 30-31 May in Washington and comprises more than 70 speakers and panelists and some 300 registered participants. The papers are entitled respectively: “*Savings banks and the double bottom-line – A profitable and accessible model of finance*” and “*Double bottom-line: making access profitable – Evidence from microfinance and savings banking*”. The latter will be published this year in a Brookings Institute publication.

The two papers highlight the essential role played by savings banks in providing access to finance. The key findings can be summarised as follows:

- **Savings banks have an inbuilt commitment to providing access.** Their products and services are useable even for low value and irregular financial needs. Their branch network is open to all levels of society and current regulation gives them the benefits of formality without compromising accessibility. Most of the savings banks have products to satisfy the full spectrum of customers’ functional needs.
- **Access is significantly improved if a savings bank has a demonstrable capacity to provide small-scale loans**, additionally to their traditional offer of savings and payments services.
- **Savings banks are the “forgotten giants” in the market for accessible finance:** they are the biggest providers of savings accounts (1.1 billion) and significant providers of loan accounts (30+ million).
- **Savings banks can have a broad outreach without compromising profitability.** Profit is needed to further guarantee the development of their social role. This reinforces their double bottom-line¹ dimension.

Chris De Noose, Chairman of the WSBI Management Committee said: “*As proximity banks, savings banks have built a long-established architecture for access. Policy-makers and regulators should value this proximity banking model, encouraging further the establishment of proximity banks. This should yield more in terms of improved access than scattered efforts to build a new architecture for access solely around the microfinance model*”.

¹ The institutions studied in the papers have two bottom-lines –the traditionally known one of the profit and loss account and the equally longstanding goal of ensuring the financial needs of all segments of population are met.

The abovementioned papers on Access to Finance, as well as all other relevant research material can be obtained upon simple request at the World Savings Banks Institute.

Notes to Editors:

Press Contacts:

Dirk Smet, Tel: +32 211 11 90 dirk.smet@savings-banks.com

Alessandra Pertot, Tel: +32 211 11 91 alessandra.pertot@savings-banks.com

About WSBI

WSBI (World Savings Banks Institute) is the only global representative of savings and retail banks. Founded in 1924, it represents savings and retail banks and associations thereof in 86 countries of the world (Asia-Pacific, the Americas, Africa and Europe – via the European Savings Banks Group). As the international voice of savings and retail banking, WSBI works closely with international financial institutions and donor agencies. It thereby represents savings and retail banks' interests at an international level while also facilitating the provision of access to financial sectors worldwide, e.g., through training, consultancy services, etc., be it in developing or developed regions. WSBI members are typically savings and retail banks or associations thereof. They are often organised in decentralised networks and offer their services throughout their region. WSBI member banks have reinvested responsibly in their region for many decades and are one distinct benchmark for corporate social responsibility activities throughout the world.