Opening Remarks to the 2003 Development Marketplace Global Competition

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Good morning, everyone. Let me first of all say that this is the event I look forward to most every year, and I have a lead up with our team. They apparently get very upset with me because I'm forever saying that it's the only efficient team in the Bank because they're all under 30. And I recall the time when this idea was brought to us by the younger people in the Bank, and we decided that the best way to handle it was to give it no management at all and just let these wonderful young people run with it.

Well, I'm informed now that some of them are approaching 40 and they have children and their concern about their job security is quite considerable. So let me say they all remain the same difference to my own age, which is advancing, but they're all a good 30 years plus younger than I am, and it's a pleasure to start by congratulating them on what they've done.

And so let me say to all of you just how important this enterprise is to us. I think you know this is the third of these events, and the way in which this has developed has really been quite remarkable. We not only have had three events here, but we've had 16 individual events in the field, and we have another six that are already planned, and a waiting list of countries in which we can work.

This year, as I think you know, for this event we had more than 2,700 proposals from 133 countries, and if you add in the applications in the field in this last year, there's been a group of 7,000 approaches that we've had and projects that we've had, which is truly quite remarkable. We have obviously tuned into something which even the Harvard Business Review gives grudging recognition for the fact that this is a remarkable endeavor. And what is so remarkable about it for us is that it's a chance for us to listen, but it's also a chance for us to learn from you, the participants. And what we've discovered is that it's a fantastic chance for people to network amongst each other about ideas that have emerged in the course of the work that all of you are doing.

The other fascinating thing to us has been that your proposals are not just of interest to us, but that they're of interest to other organizations. And more and more organizations, whether it's the Global Environment Facility or UNAIDS or parts of the UN Network or individual
companies, are now coming forward and saying we believe in this and we're happy to join you in sponsoring it. And this year we have more than $5 million that is available to support the winning projects. And so that, again, is something which is, again, to us, quite remarkable. And it's a tribute not just to, I think, my colleagues who have put this together, but most particularly to all of you because the quality of the proposals has moved dramatically and it's also in line with this year's theme, which is "Making Services Work for the Poor."

What we recognize very acutely here in the Bank is that there is no way that we as an institution can be the effective transmitter of all the ideas to people in poverty and people that need assistance. And, therefore, what is crucial is to have proposals which can be replicated and can be handled at the field level and can, in fact, allow us to scale up with simple ideas well executed that can be carried from one place to another and one country to another and one region to another.

And so for us, this has been a dramatically important development in which we're coming closer and closer all the time to the constituency that we're trying to serve. And if you just look at each other, you can see the people that are making this happen, and we're tremendously grateful to you. We feel very privileged that you have taken the time to support this and very privileged that you take us seriously enough that you come here and that we can meet each other as part of the same community.

And this is not for us a political event, an attempt to reach to civil society or to look at the traditional differences between international financial institutions, civil society, private sector. It's a real chance to come together in looking at how it is we can make the lives of people improve. And so for us to meet you on equal terms, it is just a fantastic opportunity. We've never found any politicking at these meetings. What we've found is a genuine interchange of ideas. And for us also to have the group that we have as judges that I will acknowledge this afternoon, who have given of their time and given of their passion, along with our team, to try and sift through these proposals to come to the winning proposals gives it a sense of order and discipline and integrity that I think we all have to be very grateful for. It's tomorrow, by the way, that we'll be looking at it.

And the last thing that I'd like to say is that, whether one wins or loses, this event is really part of a process. The process does not end when there is a winner or someone who doesn't win. Already, to reach this group, we're winners because it's out of 7,000 proposals.

What we've done is to bring back this year previous finalists and previous award winners to allow for an exchange of views as to what happens next. If you succeed this time, how do you move from concept or idea to implementation? And so I hope you'll take this as not just a contest but as part of a process in which we are very anxious to be supportive, to be continuous in what we're doing, and to help you, each of you, achieve the objectives that you're looking for.
So my single purpose in this morning's remarks is to thank you very sincerely for the efforts that you have made, to say that we hope you find this as exciting an experience in terms of exchanging ideas as we do, and that together we can form part of a group in a world that's in pretty lousy shape at the moment, a group that is really truly making a difference. And every one of you is making a difference, and we hope that together we can take some of the headlines away from the more dramatic events that are going on around us and make a difference to people everywhere.

So thank you for being part of this exercise, to you, our new potential finalists, to those from the past who've come back, to our team that I'm incredibly grateful to, the ever youthful team, and to an ever youthful, more youthful-looking group of people as I see out here, given that I had a birthday yesterday and I now feel so old that everybody seems young. So I thank all you young people for what you're doing and hope you have a great two days, and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow afternoon.

Good luck.