I'd like to welcome all of you here today and thank you for coming to what we hope will be an exciting and important conversation about a topic that is central to development. We have people here from across the globe, representing all sectors of society—civil society, the tech community, the private sector, government, the development community, and academia. This conference is a terrific opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences, and hopefully to generate new insights that will fuel all our work. Before I begin, I’d like to take the opportunity to thank our partners in developing this conference; Civicus, InterAction and the Government of Finland. The Bank firmly believes in the role of partnership in tackling development challenges and promoting good governance. Partnerships make us stronger and more effective and through this forum, we hope to bring about significant outcomes for the way in which we harness citizen voices to improve development outcomes.

I. Why This is Important
I want to begin by asking you all a question:

Why are we here today? We’re here today because we believe that listening to citizens is central to doing development better. Let me give you some examples.

A pregnant woman in Karnataka, India can now use a smart card in her cell phone to provide real-time feedback on the health services she receives, including information on any problems that might have arisen. Using this data, officials can track the delivery of services
across the district and respond far quicker to urgent needs and supply constraints than ever before.

In Nepal, the poor today have much greater voice in determining the public services they receive. By combining national poverty data with participatory social assessment tools, the poorest communities in Nepal can be identified and empowered. Community members voice their concerns and needs, enabling decision makers to target more systematically where needed infrastructure should go, to determine which services a local health clinic should provide, and to report how many children are attending schools. As a result, school enrollment has increased by an average of 2.1%, child immunizations by 5.3% and access to safe drinking water by 6% in more than 59 districts covered by the program.

A child trying to access clean water in a Nairobi slum can now use a mobile phone to report water leakages. The child will receive back a message noting the time and date a service provider will be on site to resolve the problem. The call is automatically linked to a local advocacy group that acts on consumers' behalf to address persistent and addressed issues.

These are all examples of how citizen engagement is working to improve not only the work we do as a development community, but the actual lives of people.

II. The Science of Service Delivery

Some of you have heard me speak about the “science of delivery.” By this I mean learning how we in the development community can engage closely with country partners to develop agile, evidence-based approaches to overcome persistent bottlenecks in implementation.

Like everywhere, people in developing countries deserve access to good education, healthcare, water & sanitation, and transport. Whether it’s bed nets, or medicines, or textbooks, or roads, we know a lot about what could make lives better—but not always how to ensure that these goods and services reach those that need it most. If we can help governments and other actors overcome these failures in implementation, we could truly ‘bend the arc of history’ and rapidly bring millions out of poverty and boost prosperity.

To do this requires changes in the way we work, but none more than helping governments deepen their engagement with citizens.

Citizens can help provide critical information for solving complex delivery programs.
When governments and development practitioners like ourselves listen *upstream* in the design of policies and programs, they better meet the needs and circumstances of citizens. When we listen *mid-stream*, we can get real-time feedback on challenges in implementation that can facilitate learning for mid-course correction.

And when we listen *down-stream*, during evaluation, we can learn which programs and approaches how best to deliver on the promise of development.

But, in addition to providing crucial information, citizen-centric development also helps set *incentives* vital to solving complex delivery challenges. Citizen voice can be pivotal in providing the demand-side pressure on government, service providers, and organizations such as the World Bank that is needed to encourage full and swift response to citizen needs. Citizen voice is at the core of accountable actions.

This may seem a simple concept, but it is one that the development community lags behind in implementing. Our colleagues in the private sector have long understood that failure to listen to their customers results in reduced sales and profits, the universal measure of success in that sector. Yet still, in far too few instances do we in the development community take the time to engage with citizens—our beneficiaries—and accurately assess their needs.

And—as important—to build systematic mechanisms for responding to those needs.

If we bypass the beneficiary as a source of information, experience, and pressure, we deprive ourselves of insights into how we might do better—insights that are uniquely grounded in the day-to-day experiences of the very people the programs are created for.

**III. What We Are Doing**

Citizen engagement in development has a long and rich history. In the World Bank, we want to build on this history and create more systematic opportunities for citizen voice.

First, we have worked hard to open the World Bank—beginning with our landmark Access to Information policy, Open Data, Open Knowledge Repository and much more - sharing our data and extensive information and what we do, how we do it, and our results. Each day we are looking at ways at pushing the Openness agenda further, at consulting early and often, providing citizens with the information that they need to hold us to account.
Second, last year, the World Bank created the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, which is providing knowledge and financing to civil society organizations to strengthen citizen voice in development. Already 14 countries have joined this facility, which will enable their CSOs to receive grants. More than a dozen foundations and civil society organizations have already endorsed the Partnership, including the Ford Foundation which has recently committed a generous contribution to the Partnership.

But there is much more to do. A recent survey of Bank staff revealed pent-up demand for real-time data from citizens, the beneficiaries of Bank-financed projects. Standard M&E procedures mostly consist of quantitative indicators measured at periodic intervals. And while necessary, they often fail to fully take into account the perspective of beneficiaries on project implementation.

Therefore, we are now at the early stages of working closely with governments to systematically integrate beneficiary feedback into Bank-financed operations and sector work. This is an exciting development, because it provides new opportunities for many of our country partners to explore how they might better integrate citizen voice into development.

And this is a particularly exciting time for doing so. Recent innovations in information technology and the rapid penetration of mobile technology and social media in the developing world provide vast new opportunities for connecting governments and development practitioners with citizens. In addition to learning from our private sector colleagues, we will hear today from a wide range of innovators in the technology field on the potential to revolutionize how we engage with citizens for enhanced development impact.

We have many innovators in the Bank. Last fall, we held a competition designed to scan, surface and reward projects that incorporate citizen engagement and beneficiary feedback into their design and implementation. The examples used earlier were among the winners and honorable mentions from this competition and showcase just a small sample of the exciting and innovative ways in which Bank staff are integrating feedback mechanisms into their work.

But there are even more innovative ideas outside the Bank. I encourage you to walk through the gallery located on the first floor of this building to learn more about some of these innovative projects not just from the Bank, but from government, private sector, and various CSOs.
We will also hear from government officials at all levels about the innovations they are incorporating into their work to help them better listen and respond to their citizens, as well as the challenges and constraints that remain. At the end of the day, this is what matters most: that governments systematically bring into their decision-making the voices of citizens to improve the reach and effectiveness of services.

This is a fascinating group brought together today. We are here to learn from each other, to build on what we have done in the past and explore how to do better in the future. The Bank has much to learn from you all.

**IV. Closing**

So with that said, I’d like to thank all of you for bringing your perspectives, your insights, enthusiasm and dedication to the conference. Together, let’s move this agenda ahead.