Remarks at the World Bank-NGO Conference on Participatory Development

by

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Washington D.C., November 19, 1998

Thank you very much, and let me say that yesterday when I landed from a trip -literally around the world in 8 days - the first thing I did was to find out what was going to happen at these meetings. I was told that I was allowed in tomorrow afternoon, and I said, "Well, I would like to be allowed in earlier because I feel I am part of these meetings." So I presumed on the time to come and welcome you on behalf of the Bank and to reaffirm not only to our NGO working group, but to our co-sponsors and every one of you just how important we think this is.

In my speech at the Annual Meetings, I laid out where I want to see the Bank going and central to that is the need to bring all the players together if we are to achieve our objective of bringing about a better world and improving our development results. That is very clear to me. It has been increasingly clear in the 3-1/2 years I have been here. As far as the Bank is concerned, we want to be an institution that cherishes partnership, that believes that we are not going to get there unless we work together in a more orderly and coordinated manner, that is prepared to listen, to learn, and to participate.

For many of you, you will say those are words that do not immediately jump to your mind when you describe the World Bank. Well, I guess they do not, and they do not immediately jump to mind to everybody in the World Bank. So what we have to do as a result of these meetings is to really focus on the issue of participation and partnership and confront the areas where we have made progress, and those where we have not made progress. And that means looking at issues where we are exaggerating our efforts, looking at issues where we are saying things are happening and yet when you get right down to the guts of it, they are not; looking at issues we would rather not look at.

I hope that in this meeting we can start at ground level in terms of a real understanding of where we are at, and that you can then tomorrow, when we have the reports, bring up those areas where there are things that need to be done, and we can then identify them very clearly and unemotionally, and set deadlines and a perspective going forward as to how we can achieve those objectives.

I think that by your very presence here, the time for rhetoric about how bad we have been or how bad you have been is almost over. I do not doubt some of that will creep in, but let me say that as far as I am concerned, I am starting with this thing in the knowledge that we have done some things right and some things wrong, and that we do need as a matter of
necessity not for ourselves, but frankly to achieve the objectives against poverty and the targets that we are setting ourselves, to work in partnership together.

There is no way we will be able to do it, either the Bank acting independently or NGOs acting independently or private sector acting independently or multilateral institutions acting independently. We will simply not be able to help governments and have governments lead us and help their people unless we can do it better together.

I can give you 50 examples of things that I have seen where we are at cross-purposes, or where we are doing things which could be much better done, and it applies particularly to the Bank because where we have not done adequate consultation and participation, it comes back and hits you later on. Just as a practical matter, we are nuts not to get the advance advice and assistance we need to try and do our job right. It is not a question of philosophy. It is a question of pragmatism. It is a question that we really need to be closer together.

I can assure you that so far as the Bank is concerned, I am determined to drive this thing forward. I think you will have seen some progress in the last couple of years, but it is nothing to what I hope we will be able to do in the next few years.

We have had an OED study, an internal study of the way in which our own people think we are doing in approaching our work with NGOs. They give us a few plaudits, but they talk about us not effectively tapping the talents of bilaterals, foundations, and other partners, and the in-depth knowledge of NGOs.

They say that we are not as flexible as we should be regarding procurement, contracting, consulting procedures, that we overstate what we are doing with NGOs, that we do not accurately track what we are doing with NGOs, that we are doing good things on a number of projects, but there are a lot of things that we are doing badly.

So I start with this as my base. I do not think I am being deluded by our own advertising or by what I am being told by some colleagues. I am starting at a very clear-sighted level.

I think that there is a change in the institution. We now have more than 50 NGO representatives in the field. We have some areas of the regions where the regional consultative groups are working extremely well.

You will remember that we started with a global committee, and then at the suggestion of the committee itself, we broke it down to regions. Some regional vice presidents are doing better than others, I think it is fair to say.

So we are starting to develop some best practice, and where it is best practice, it is working, I think, extremely well; light years from what it was.
So what I am looking for you to do during these 48 hours is essentially to try and review with us where we are and where we need to go. Give us your views on the participation, give us your views on partnerships. And come back to us tomorrow with practical steps that you think that we can take - within the framework of the capacity of human beings to change, and behavior patterns to change after long years of different behavior patterns.

I have to get my colleagues in the Bank to recognize the importance of participation. We have, together, to get governments and other participants to recognize the importance of participation because it is not always the case that we can develop best practice in various countries and then move it on to others. This is not going to be an instant fix. This is something that we need to fix progressively, but with a tight time frame.

We are ready to do that, and I am ready to mobilize both our management and our people to deal with it, and there will be some laggards. There will be people that will not do it. We have got to find out who they are, but with the remarkable machinery of the NGO e-mail system, that is probably not going to be very difficult, given the way I get traced around the world. [laughter]. So my guess is that if we work together, there will be plenty of ways of finding out where the success stories are, and where the success stories are not.

All I came to say was "welcome" and to let you know how I very much look forward to our discussion tomorrow. I hope that it can be constructive both ways, and that as the Bank's behavior patterns change about NGOs, maybe even some NGO patterns of behavior and reactions about the Bank will also modulate a little bit so that we can have a true and effective accomplishment together.

I wish you a very good day and a half. And I look forward to meeting you again tomorrow.