

Uniting the Powers of Knowledge and Technology behind the Fight Against Poverty

by
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Introduction by Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, Managing Director, The World Bank: It is my great pleasure to welcome all of our guests to the Seventh WBI Donors' Breakfast. It is a very important event in our calendar, and your turnout here indicates to us that you, too, believe that it is important. I particularly want to welcome those of you who have come from out of town and, in particular, Koos Richelle, who is coming as our guest speaker, we welcome you. We also welcome Mr. Wolfensohn, who I'm sure none of you knows at all, so I have a very difficult task of introducing you to him. He is the energy and the spirit behind the World Bank taking the issue of knowledge as a second pillar of the Bank's strategy, as well as looking at the issue of capacity building as being crucial and essential to sustainable development. We thank him for his leadership, and we welcome him.

I also have the pleasure to introduce to you our new Vice President for WBI, Frannie Leautier, who has brought a lot of energy to this part of the Bank. You will see plenty of Frannie during the breakfast today, but I hope, even more importantly, you will make contact with her, and she will certainly seek your counsel, as she strengthens WBI to fulfill the task that is set for it.

My job is to make sure that you're comfortable and for you to enjoy your breakfast, and then we will take the agenda forward after you have had something to eat. So enjoy yourself. Thank you.

Mr. Wolfensohn: First of all, I welcome you again. This is, I think, also my seventh breakfast, and it caused me to reflect, as I was coming in to the meeting today on just how far we've come with many of the ideas that we have exchanged together. The implementation has been a function surely of the colleagues that have done such remarkable work.

Let me, at this stage, welcome Frannie Leautier, who is now taking on the load of running WBI. I should tell you that Frannie was Chief of Staff in my office, and so I've made a huge sacrifice to let the community have her, but I know that you will find that she is a remarkable leader and someone of tremendous capacity and tremendous sensitivity to the issues that face us.

In terms of the emotions I have felt, I want to remind you that when we started all of this, we were saying at the Bank that the Bank has two faces. It is a lending Bank, and it's a knowledge Bank. Although we have

been providing knowledge services for many, many years, we somehow had never got them into a focus as being an essential element of the development process.

We started to build on the excellent work that had been done by our predecessors, but we decided to expand it and take it to a wholly new level, a level of interchange in Washington, a level of reaching out across the seas with physical emissaries that went, training of trainers, and then reaching out across the seas and across the countries using technology.

I brought here a radio that I showed you I think once before. This was our first technology. It's a wind-up radio that I think all of you probably have seen. I said to you that we were going to use this technology to start teaching in Africa, and indeed we did, but we're not limited to Africa, and I should tell you that today the new models are being distributed in Afghanistan, where we are also reaching out to communities across the country. We then got a second model, smaller with a solar strip, to save the energy of winding. We have a third model which is smaller, and so we have this great radio technology, which we are now using to reach out, but the dreams that we had about distance learning have now also come to fruition. I will be in Afghanistan in just over two weeks time, and there the first thing that Chairman Karzai really responded to was the notion of having a distance learning center with satellite links, two screens, a classroom for 30 people, and a room where they can have coffee and talk. The first building that was allocated funding for in Afghanistan was the teaching center. We've had three missions over there already, and we'll be up and running, within two or three months, with classes going in everything from budgeting to taxation to how to run a water department - all done in the local language. We've identified Afghans teaching at New York University and other places.

I've just come back from Central Asia, where we're also setting up distance learning centers in the five republics, and where they will be able to do teaching and interchange within the area, so that it's South-to-South cooperation, if you like.

In the work that we've been doing in Mexico, we have now put 10,000 people through courses jointly with the Monterrey Institute of Technology. If you go down there on a Saturday morning, which I have done, you'll find a team of teachers or professors doing a course which we have distributed to 1,500 recipients - a course in Spanish, which is now going out by satellite to more than seven countries, to mayors and administrators of small towns, with those that are picking them up doing synchronous returns of questions. We are also downloading it into television sets, we're also putting it on-line on the web, and through the week the interchange continues from seven countries back to the seat in Monterrey Institute of Technology. But much more than that, they have a website for the mayors where they ask questions of each other. So someone will say, "I run a Police Department, and the cars that we have are not running very well", and very quickly he'll have 50 answers saying, "I have a cousin who is a car dealer in Costa Rica" or whatever or, "We have had the same problem, and can we send someone down to help you?". We're building communities of learning together.

What we thought of seven years ago - and we talked about it here - of distance learning, of outreach using modern technology, is now a reality. The latest thing that we're doing in Mexico is that the Mexican Government is now putting 50,000 terminals in 50,000 towns and villages throughout the country, all the way from Chiapas to the more wealthy areas, terminals that are using satellite-to-radio, with radio distribution to the computers, which are powered by solar energy so that you can be out in the middle of nowhere with a computer, with solar power, receiving a radio signal and seeing visually the classes that are coming through on the small screen. If you've got a little more money, you can have a larger screen into which you plug your computer and more people can see it. Then you have a reverse flow using Internet.

I say this because you have lived part of this when we have talked here about the use of technology, about how we can use this to have an outreach program, and this is now going all the way from the wind-up radio to the solar-powered computer out in the field, where you're getting visual images and responding in real time.

The power of technology is enormous, and the dreams that we had and that we have shared over the years are no longer dreams. They are reality. We have 34 distance learning centers. We are shooting for 100 within the next two years. Within countries, there are networks being set up. We started one in China less than six months ago. They have now asked for another five. They want to cover the country with distance learning centers. In Andhra Pradesh, in India, the whole of the state of 80 million people will be linked by broadband fiber optic, with a view to teaching an e-government.

The Italian Government has recently agreed to put up two centers, one in Milan and one in Rome, one of which will be concerned with e-government. In our meeting just a week ago, where we had a very large number of delegates, we said we were going to start this, and the people that were not included in the e-government ideas were queuing up to say, "When can we be part of this program?"

It is not simply the technology, but it is wonderful to have the technology there so that we can, in fact, create not a network which emanates from Washington, but an interactive network, where the teaching and the learning can be done as part of the system. That is the development which is now upon us because you have equal access to the net and to the video conference facilities.

Now the real question for us is substance. It's great to have the technology. How quickly can we get appropriate substance on the net, with follow-up, using training of the trainers in the area so that you can have a physical person in the area for the teaching process, and then have the proper courses. Courses which so many of you are involved in and which we now have the opportunity of bringing together in a much more coordinated fashion so that, in fact, there is a global curriculum.

It's not a World Bank curriculum, it's not an OECD curriculum, it's a curriculum that we share. Then we have to bring the quality standards up,

and we have to make sure that these courses are available wherever they are needed. We have the capacity, through translation, to be able to conquer the issues of local language, but where possible we can now identify people who have the language skills and then bring them in from wherever they are to run the courses.

Seven years is not a long time, but we have all witnessed in this small group of ours a tremendous revolution in the knowledge business. For my part, it is perhaps the single most critical element that there is, in terms of allowing us to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Because at the base of education, at the base of governance, at the base of economic movement forward is the basis of knowledge. We are now working, because job creation is so crucial, in training people in small- and medium-size enterprise, both on the ground and the distance. We are working with local NGOs and community-based developments.

If we can give the knowledge, it can fulfill the belief that I think so many of us have, which is that poor people are not an object of charity, they're in fact the asset. If we can arm them with the knowledge and the resources, they become not a burden, but the creators of the activity, and the wealth, and the development that all of us are seeking.

I believe that this breakfast and what all of you are doing is at least as important as the discussions we have about how much money we are going to get for ODA [Overseas Development Assistance]. One cannot work without the other, and I believe that what all of you have done, in your support of this activity, has really been to make a signal contribution to the issue of development, coming a long way from the teacher with the blackboard, through the wind-up radio, to the distance computer that's solar powered. Now what we need is the substance, is the content, and the cooperation.

The cooperation which you have given us has been just fantastic. We could not operate without you. I hope you find us good and open partners. We certainly want to be that. We cannot exist without you. We need your help. We need your partnership, and in areas where you have got good ideas, we need your leadership. So it is a very lateral community that we are creating, a community that I think is seized with the same objectives, and a community, which I see from this breakfast, enlarges every year.

I am thrilled to welcome you. I want to congratulate you on the last seven years and say that it is only the beginning. The potential of this is really enormous - whether it is person-to-person teaching or training of teachers or teaching a group of teachers or Internet connectivity in schools. I might just touch on that because five years ago I came and I told you that we were setting up a school program to link students and teachers.

I told you a story that I'd just come back from Uganda and gone to my house in the West of the United States in Jackson Hole, and was asked to speak by the local Chamber of Commerce. I was tired, and someone asked me a question, "Well, what should we do?" And I said, "Well, why don't we link the local high school with the high school in Uganda." Anything more

absurd you couldn't imagine than the mountainous, rather wealthy community of Jackson Hole going into Uganda to link the high school kids. Well, we did that, but now there are I think between 300,000 and 400,000 kids linked in 60 countries. They are getting to more than 50,000 teachers. We have spun out the program from the Bank. The thing is now self-financing, and we have a totally linked student program at the level of high schools and primary schools.

The point I want to make to you is that the limits of this are the limits of our imagination, and that is a fantastic position to be in. The leverage that we get in education is exponential. But having said that, we still have 125 million kids around the world that are not in school, and we still have many, many countries that do not have the capacity and leadership that they need.

So we'll be having many more breakfasts, many larger breakfasts. I think we're entitled to stop for a minute and say we've made a good start, but certainly we look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

Thank you.