

Disability and Inclusive Development: Sharing, Learning and Building
Alliances

Remarks at the
2004 World Bank International Disability Conference
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Washington, D.C., December 1, 2004

Let me thank you all for coming today. For those who were here two years ago, you will remember that we were a little nervous that we had never had such a gathering in the Bank before. I was a little nervous because I was worried as to whether or not we could establish the sort of partnership of trust that I was looking for.

I have to say after the two intervening years, I feel that some of the most important relationships that I've established and some of the more important work that I've done has, in fact, been in trying to unlock the opportunities for 600 million people or more who have one form of disability or another, but who have with these disabilities tremendous competencies that we need to unlock and to make contributing to the society in which we all live.

I'm particularly happy today to welcome a number of representatives that are here to join us. I think you know today is the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons, and I'm happy that we have representatives here from ILO, WHO, UNICEF, UN DESA, UNESCO, IDB, and development agencies from Norway, Finland, Italy, England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Japan.

But I'd also like to pay a special personal tribute to someone who is here sitting in the front row with whom I have a much longer relationship, and that's Eunice Shriver. And Eunice, as you know, is the President of the Kennedy Foundation and has done just extraordinary work in the field of disabilities and, in particular, in mental disabilities and, in particular, with the Special Olympics. She for me is an icon. I've been happy to know her and privileged to know her for a long time. And in my early work in disabilities years ago, when I was President of the World Multiple Sclerosis Federation, I talked to Eunice--she may not even remember--about how she got organized in her own field. And I just want to pay special tribute to you and thank you for being with us here today, Eunice.

[Applause.]

MR. WOLFENSOHN: I also should say that she helped to provide two Kennedy fellows to us, Daniel Mont and Yagin Habtes, and Daniel is now employed by us here at the Bank, so I'm especially grateful for that also.

And I'm also very grateful to all of you here from the international disabled community because there is absolutely no doubt that there is no way that our institution could function effectively in trying to support you and in trying to make the question of disability not a Christmas tree ornament, as Judy said, but something that is central to our lives without your trust and without the work that we're doing with you.

I know that we were late, much later than I would have wished, but I'm really proud to tell you that in these intervening two years, the progress in this institution has been just remarkable. It only took an explanation to most of my colleagues of the fundamental issues that were shown in that movie to have them immediately come on board and say, "Why have we not done more?"

It has not been a question of me sending poor directives from the President's office. It's been a question simply of exposing to the greater number of my colleagues the issues. Given that people here are deeply concerned and devoting their lives to the question of poverty and to the question of peace, when we simply said that there is a group of 600 million people who not only have one form or another of personal handicap, but who are ignored in many of the countries in which we operate, so that whatever problems they have are magnified in terms of not just of them but of the total community. As soon as we brought that very simple fact to the fore, colleagues in all the regions have come together with interdisciplinary groups to ensure that in the projects in which we're operating, the issue of disabilities is not an afterthought. It is not some gloss that is put on later, but that we are learning, and we are learning every week and every day, that we're learning to try and understand that society as a whole means society as a whole. It doesn't just mean a group of society who are fully endowed with their capacities and facilities.

And so for us, in a way, it has been an enriching experience also inside the institution because we've had experiences like this before. Curiously, for quite a number of years, the issue of women, the issue of gender was an issue that was by early predecessors of mine given a backward place until we discovered that the key to development was, in fact, gender and that the secret weapon for development was, in fact, women.

We also have been looking in these recent years at the issue of youth; 2.8 billion of the 6 billion people on our planet are under 24 years of age, 1.8 billion are under the age of 14. We were doing a lot with youth in terms of education and programs. But in terms of taking a focus and saying youth are really a force, youth have their special needs, youth indeed are the future, we were looking at youth as something in a rather patronizing way of older people trying to set out the future for young people. And Victor was at a meeting of young people at the first meeting

we had in Paris, where I was making some patronizing comments to the young people about their future. And one of them said to me, "Mr. President, we are not the future. We are the now."

So I learned about that, and I'm very happy to tell you that in every one of the meetings that we have had with young people since then, including the Sarajevo meeting, including a meeting I just had two weeks ago in India, we have ensured right from the beginning that we had with that group, integrated into the group, young people with disabilities. And what has been fascinating to me and wonderful for me is to see that the next generation understands that society is a blend of people, is a mixture of people. And I think Victor is as much a member of that group, maybe more a member of the group than most of them because he's quite outspoken, I have to tell you.

And there are some others in the picture who also have become leaders, and so we're looking to the next generation to be a generation that just doesn't make distinctions and where we have an inclusive society.

So these last two years have been a real learning trip for our institution. I don't believe we have by any means accomplished what we can, but the opportunities have become enormously clear to us of what we can do together.

We've had to try and enhance the knowledge of our personnel because all too many of our personnel were unfamiliar with the sort of issues that have been addressed today. And we have had training sessions and we have had courses really throughout the world. And, again, I want you to know that the reaction has not been one of, "Oh, gosh, this is yet another thing we have to do." It has been a reaction of, "This is right, this is a partnership, this is something which is necessary." And, in fact, if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which, as you know, was set at the year 2000, about getting rid of poverty, about dealing with education for all, about halving the rates of mortality in birth and for children, it is simply impossible to conceive of doing that without inclusion of this community. Impossible.

We started on this and I made a grant of \$500,000 from a little cache of money that I keep secret from the Board of Directors. I'm sure our Executive Director will not tell anybody about it. But, anyway, we put this money forward from the so-called President's Contingency Fund, and this was the stimulus that allowed us to move forward to be able to create the sort of environment that we have here today. And as you can see from the film, we've also enriched our own working staff with colleagues who are showing us the extent of their capacities and not just on issues related to disabilities but doing full-line jobs in terms of the operations of this enterprise. And that itself is another example, I think, of the way in which things are working.

In fact, the young lady there who is without hearing is, in fact, one of my assistants, and she is fantastic, and we are expanding the range and content of people that are coming in here.

We also started something else since we last saw you called the Global Partnership for Disability and Development, because we recognized that as an institution we are sort of neophytes in this and that the best way to approach it was to try and work with the UN. I'm very grateful, Ambassador, that you're here--with NGOs, with different governments, with foundations and institutions. And this Global Partnership for Disability and Development was initiated by us, and I'm very, very happy to say that we had the first meeting in Rome, I think in December last year, we had another organizing meeting in May of this year. This is not just another group, for there are already too many groups. This is an informal, if you like, connection of people to try and allow us to help each other and I think also to engage in an effective a way as possible the strength of our institution in the development field. And I'm very happy to say that it looks as though a couple of countries that are represented here today have agreed to fund a trust fund that will allow this to carry on for the next five years and allow us to move forward.

Another area that we also ran into was data collection. How do you make a case without data? You can do it intuitively, and it's obviously--you can make a lot of intuitive claims. But we put \$285,000 in a group here called the Washington Group on Disability Measurement, and that has become a very important group, so far as we're concerned, with results already being shown from Uganda, Serbia, Honduras, Brazil, and Bosnia. And we're gradually now trying to build up as a standard part of our activities, gathering information that can be used then as evidence as we try and get action.

In our work on HIV/AIDS, it's not surprising to many of you in the disabled community that public announcements that are made don't really get to people without hearing and visual announcements don't get to people without sight. And you will also know that the notices to address the question of prevention both from sexual contact and from drug use have not been really apparent in the development community. And you'll also know very well that the issue of treatment in terms of persons with disabilities has really been disastrous.

And so we have published a small paper on this, and we're now seeking to make people understand that exposure to HIV/AIDS and to other communicable diseases is something which is just as apparent in the community of disabled as it is anywhere else.

Now, this is something for which the penny had not dropped for most people that were engaged in the issue of the fight against HIV/AIDS, and we have now been able to put that on the front burner.

I've already said that on youth we have been fully engaged. On the questions of education, I might add that here, too, we have done a great deal, but I don't want to give you yet another catalogue of what we have been doing. But let me simply say that the issue of inclusive education has become a very important element in our own education program.

So what I'm trying to tell you is that there's a lot that has been going on and that the Bank is moving forward and that we're a powerful ally. But let me say with humility that I think for us, those of us who are

leading this inside the institution, we have the feeling that we're literally just at the beginning--just at the beginning--of the partnership. We have a sense of the possibilities, but what we don't yet have is the texture of the relationships. We don't yet have in the institution the human understanding. We don't yet have in the institution the empathy. We don't yet have in the institution the instinct for issues that face so many people who have lived their lives with one form of handicap or another.

And what we're looking to do is not to just have a list of accomplishments, a list of things that you might expect we would do. But we're trying very hard to internalize the issues that face us in this context. And this internalization, this sense of giving feeling to the issues, this sense of getting an automatic response inside the organization is really our task for the next several years. It's to make everyone in the place instinctively conscious, emotionally conscious of the issues that face the community with disabilities, be they mental or physical. And to do it with a sense of both understanding and normalcy, that this is not something on the outside, this is something that is central to our work.

And it's for that particular reason that we are looking forward to this second meeting that we're having here, and we will look forward to further meetings that are held in the Bank.

I want to assure you that this organization is not just a bureaucratic organization. We had to get through some bureaucracy. But the big change since we saw you two years ago is that you now have a human organization, looking at this set of issues, growing all the time in terms of the numbers in the institution. And we will achieve this and become a partner of yours only with your help. We need your trust. We need you to be forgiving. We need you to understand that when young people start walking, they can trip, but that it's worth it because we truly believe that as the single most important development institution in the world, it is essentially that we have this partnership with your community. And speaking for all my colleagues, I want you to know that we're committed to building that partnership, not in a bureaucratic way but in a way that is intuitive, in a way that is human, and in a way that allows us to have a family together, to face the future together, and to give us all a chance of peace in our time.

Thank you very much.