

Plenary Address: *The World Is Our Workplace*

Speaker:

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Arlington, Virginia

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Frank Tugwell, of Winrock International, a nonprofit organization that focuses on helping to increase economic opportunity in the developing world while also helping to maintain environment and natural resources, gave a rousing address on successes and challenges in the developing world.

One billion people live on less than \$1 per day, and 2 billion people around the world are without electricity. Winrock attempts to help them by teaching them how to use their resources more effectively. Tugwell gave three success stories of Winrock's efforts in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Nepal.

In Bangladesh, the poor rely on fishing for their livelihood. Because of overfishing, catches were low, and people were concerned. Winrock helped to explain that the fish bred during the dry season and that by not fishing as much during this season, the local people could guarantee better harvests later in the year. The villages formed conservation leagues, and 18,000 hectares came under management. The results were dramatic: a 50% increase in catches and a 20% increase in biodiversity.

The problem in the Philippines was a lack of electricity. Winrock set up what is essentially a small energy co-op in the



Tugwell presents plenary address

villages. Each person pays a small amount for a battery that is charged at a community solar-panel array. The batteries can be used in homes, schools, and businesses to power lights, fans, and television sets. The amount covers the cost of replacing batteries as they die. Through this program, 160 communities now have electricity.

Finally, in Nepal, Winrock worked with the local people to teach water-management and irrigation strategies. Farmers were able to buy inexpensive pumps and drip-irrigation equipment that resulted in crop increases large enough to pay for the equipment with the first crop. In the course of 3 years, 27,000 families began using the irrigation systems.

Tugwell noted that the dominant theme in all those successes is that people are ready and willing to make changes to

improve their lives as long as they are not being asked to risk themselves or their families.

A number of issues can get in the way of success. One of the major issues that Tugwell talked about was the presence of an enabling environment—one that includes the rule of law, contracts, and real markets. Many developing countries do not have such a framework, and internal corruption can seriously handicap efforts to help local people.

Global issues also affect the success of people in developing countries to escape poverty. Increased demands of a growing population will make it increasingly difficult for everyone to achieve a level of typical American prosperity. Meanwhile, the increased strain of a growing population will place more burdens on an already-damaged system. Tugwell stated that 60% of the world's ecosystems are damaged. Linked to that problem is our reliance on shrinking hydrocarbon resources. Hydrocarbon fuels come from the earth, placing a further burden on the planet. Finally, Tugwell pointed to climate-change problems as another obstacle to developing economies. Climate change could cause migrations and the loss of arable land that people in developing countries depend on.

Tugwell stated that although the developed world has resources to combat such problems, the developing world does not. Coming challenges will be most difficult for those in the most vulnerable positions. However, any change that occurs must start from the bottom. To judge by the great success stories that Tugwell highlighted, it's just a matter of time. 