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In a Shift, the World Bank's Next Likely President Is Facing 2 Rivals

By **ANNIE LOWREY**

WASHINGTON — For the first time, the [World Bank](#) is considering more than one candidate for its five-year presidency — a change that reflects the fast-growing clout of emerging economies, even as it raises questions over whether that change is coming quickly enough.

Experts say that victory is all but assured for the American nominee, [Jim Yong Kim](#), the president of Dartmouth College and an expert in global health. But emerging and developing economies are rallying behind Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the 57-year-old Nigerian finance minister, and José Antonio Ocampo, the former Colombian finance minister and high-ranking United Nations official, who is 59.

The World Bank's 25-member board will interview all three candidates in the coming weeks and plans to announce its new president by the I.M.F.-World Bank meetings in mid-April. Robert B. Zoellick, the current president, will step down at the end of June.

Ms. Okonjo-Iweala and Mr. Ocampo have won the endorsement of a group of developing economies. And the United States is weathering criticism for the time-honored gentlemen's agreement that ensures its control of the World Bank, even if the institution's presidential selection process is opening up.

“For all its virtues, this nomination and its predetermined success reflects how global governance continues to lag behind shifting economic realities,” said Eswar S. Prasad, a professor at Cornell and an expert on international institutions. “Domestic politics has again trumped true multilateralism.”

Global health experts largely applauded Dr. Kim's nomination, and he has scooped up the endorsement of a number of prominent commentators, like the development economist Jeffrey Sachs. Europe is expected to back him in that the United States supported the candidacy of Christine Lagarde, the former French finance minister, for managing director of the International Monetary Fund last year.

Ms. Okonjo-Iweala and Mr. Ocampo were carefully vetted and specifically chosen for their long résumés and expertise in development and international economic negotiation. African governments lobbied the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, to encourage Ms. Okonjo-Iweala to run; the Group of 11 emerging economies pushed for Mr. Ocampo.

Ms. Okonjo-Iweala was a World Bank managing director — working directly beneath the president — from 2007 until last July. In Nigeria, she has fought to reduce the country's debt, gain greater access to international credit markets and battle corruption.

Mr. Ocampo served as finance minister and the head of the Colombian central bank, and led the arm of the United Nations that facilitates economic development.

In an interview, Mr. Ocampo expressed some initial hesitancy to enter the race, given the odds. "It is a relatively unbalanced competition," he said with a laugh.

But he said his four decades of experience in development and international policy made him an excellent candidate. "I thought the developing-country candidates who were suitable for the job should be in the race," he said. "I felt a responsibility to put a stone in the road toward a democratic process."

Speaking by telephone from New Delhi, where she was attending the BRICS meeting of leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Ms. Okonjo-Iweala also called for a merit-based, transparent selection process, suggesting a televised debate for herself, Mr. Ocampo and Dr. Kim.

"I have tremendous respect for Dr. Kim," she said. "But you're looking for the best. You're not just looking for the acceptable. I can't believe what I'm hearing: Is this the same West that talks about democracy, openness, and meritocracy, and it's like it has already been decided!"

In a communiqué, the leaders of BRICS — whose countries represent more than 40 percent of the world's population — underscored the need for a merit-based presidential selection process and change within the bank.

"We welcome the candidatures from developing world for the position of the president of the World Bank," the [statement](#) said. "The nature of the bank must shift from an institution that essentially mediates North-South cooperation to an institution that promotes equal partnership with all countries as a way to deal with development issues and to overcome an outdated donor-recipient dichotomy."

Major aid groups like [Oxfam International](#) and development research groups like the [Center for Global Development](#) have also called for an open process and criticized American dominance over the bank.

Dr. Kim, President Obama's nominee, has tried to head off some of that criticism and rally support for his candidacy since the White House announced its choice last week. In an [opinion piece](#) published in The Financial Times, Dr. Kim called for an "open, inclusive" bank, saying, "If the World Bank is to promote inclusive development, it must give developing nations a greater voice." He is currently on a "listening tour" through Ethiopia, China, Japan, India, Brazil and Mexico.

Dr. Kim, who is 52, has not yet outlined his goals for the World Bank. A senior administration official indicated that Mr. Obama chose him for his data-driven development approach, hands-on experience in developing countries and focus on the world's very poor. The administration also wanted a practitioner rather than a banker or a politician, officials said.

Ms. Okonjo-Iweala said that she hoped to make the World Bank more "nimble" in responding to developing countries' needs and to be able to give loans or other forms of support in days or weeks rather than in months or years. She also called on the bank to improve its focus on alleviating unemployment, particularly among the young.

"There is an opportunity for a demographic dividend" for emerging economies where a large proportion of the population is under 30, she said. "The World Bank is the premier institution to support young people, with all of its instruments to create jobs, build infrastructure and invest in human infrastructure," like schools and hospitals.

She said she had the necessary experience and familiarity with the World Bank to do that. "Doing grass-roots development work is wonderful," Ms. Okonjo-Iweala said. "But ultimately, this is about making tough choices that effect millions of lives. And I've done that. And I can hit the ground running because I know how to make this institution work for the world's poor."

Mr. Ocampo said he planned to make the World Bank more responsive to international development goals. "There are issues related to low-income countries which should always be the priority of the World Bank," Mr. Ocampo said. "But there are also issues for middle-income countries that are increasingly the bank's concerns, related to global public goods." He said the World Bank should work more closely with the United Nations to make progress on issues like corruption and [climate change](#).

