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OPIC and Small Business

The Overseas Private Investment Corporation yesterday signed a cooperation agreement – the first of its kind – with small-business international lender **WorldBusiness Capital** to give a boost to its effort to promote US small business investments in developing countries.

The Hartford-based company typically makes loans of between \$250,000 to \$10 million for three to 10 years to assist US small businesses in often difficult overseas markets.

Since its establishment in October 2002, OPIC's Small Business Center has approved \$57 million in financing and \$3.4 million in political risk insurance for 27 small business projects. Another 15 are in the pipeline, OPIC President Peter Watson told a meeting of the Small Business Exporters Association yesterday.

The projects range from insurance support for a US manufacturer donating a brick-making machine for school construction in Afghanistan, to OPIC loans for a small business rebuilding Bosnian housing stock damaged in the 1990s' war. Another was for providing a million children daily in Central America with affordable nutrition.

The center was established to provide qualified small businesses the opportunity to utilize OPIC's resources with improved customer service, flexible coverage, and easier access through a streamlined approval process.

The OPIC-SBA Small Business Initiative, concluded in September 2002, formally integrated the agencies' efforts to promote the expansion of US small businesses into emerging markets. Each agency will provide training on its programs to the other's personnel in order to better serve US small businesses, and OPIC and SBA staff will meet regularly to share information about economic, financial and political developments, business development and risk mitigation and management.