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Transcript

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# Women and Food Security: Finding Solutions to the Global Food Crisis

## MCC Hosts a Public Outreach Meeting

### Speakers

Aaron Sherinian,  
Managing Director, Public Affairs  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

Rodney Bent,  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

Melanne Verveer,  
U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues

Max Finberg,  
Director  
Alliance to End Hunger

Debdatta Sengupta,  
Research Analyst,  
International Food Policy Research Institute

Kristin Penn,  
Senior Director for Agriculture,  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

Ritu Sharma,  
President and Co-Founder,  
Women Thrive Worldwide

## Transcript

SHERINIAN: Good morning. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here. My name is Aaron Sherinian, Managing Director for Public Affairs of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and on behalf of the organization we'd like to thank you for the overwhelming response to this important and interesting and timely topic that's brought us here today, this morning.

I'd like to, with your permission, cover a few housekeeping items, if I may. First, and perhaps foremost, if there's anything in your purse, pockets, belt, or bag that might beep or otherwise make noise during the presentation, if you could silence it for us at this time that would be helpful.

Also, we'd like to remind you that we here, together, are going to listen and participate in a dialogue, but the entire proceedings are being filmed, recorded, and will be Web cast and available on the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Web site, [www.mcc.gov](http://www.mcc.gov), where an important and even larger audience will be able to take part in what we're going to hear today from our keynote speaker, our panelists, and from the questions and answer portion of the program with each of you.

We will begin today with a program that has two parts, with the formal section. And we will hear from the Acting CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Rodney Bent, after which we are so pleased to have with us Ambassador Verveer, who will be offering keynote remarks to us today. Following that portion, we will move into the panel.

In the meantime, help me by welcoming acting CEO, Rodney Bent.

Thank you, Rodney.

(APPLAUSE)

BENT: Welcome to the Millennium Challenge Corporation. I think this is on. Many thanks to our distinguished guests, most especially Ambassador Verveer, for coming here. Thank you also for Women Thrive Worldwide for partnering with us in this important event. It's an honor for the MCC to host this event.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation is committed to food security because our partners are committed to food security. Of our \$6.8 billion, we've done \$3.2 billion for food security programs, \$2.2 billion of that being in Africa. So you can see that we like to put our money where our mouth is, but more important, we want to put our money where our partners want us to put our money.

For our purposes, and I'm going to simplify very greatly, food security for us is really two things. One is access; the other is availability.

Access means that people have the income needed to buy food stuffs, whether you're in an urban setting or elsewhere. The key component of dealing with food security is to have families that can afford food.

The second part of it is the availability of food, and that's fairly straightforward, except it's not. It, of course, means growing things, but it means transporting things, it means moving things, it means processing things, and that takes us, I think, directly to the role of households in producing food.

It's no secret, I think, that something like 51 percent of the world is female, and guess what? In Africa 50 to 80 percent of the producers are -- producing farmers -- are, in fact, female.

So food security, to us, is in fact a gender-oriented kind of activity. You can not pay attention to food security without looking at the issues of gender. And that's why I'm delighted to have Ambassador Verveer here; she is the unprecedented first ambassador-at-large -- I'm not quite sure I've got the whole title, but it's distinguished enough.

I'm going to cut my remarks a little bit short because Ambassador Verveer has to leave, and I frankly think you'd rather hear from her than from me. So let me say a few things about her.

She is, as I mentioned, the first ambassador, so that's an unprecedented honor and I think it distinguishes the importance that the Obama administration is going to put on these kinds of issues. She previously was chief of staff to the first lady, so she has had a long career in Washington, in the cockpit, in watching how things get done. But even beyond that, she's had a clear (inaudible), I think Vital Voices, and given an outlet for women to talk about the important issues that are there.

Let me stop there and introduce her, and thank you very much for coming.

(APPLAUSE)

VERVEER: Well, I don't know how unprecedented all of this is, but I just want to say we will all have an open door, and to the extent that we can continue to make a difference for women around the world as part of America's foreign policy, you are all very much needed to be part of that conversation and to provide that advice.

I want to also apologize in advance. When I had accepted to come here, it was several days ago of my now nine days in the job, and things sort of have already gotten out of hand. And my schedule this morning looks worse than my schedule for the previous days, so good intentions have been derailed, but I do want to promise in advance to come back at another point and really have a heart conversation about how we achieve the kinds of results we all want to see.

It is a particular pleasure for me to come to the Millennium Challenge Corporation because you, here, bring an innovative and strategic development approach to the fight against global poverty, and one based on economic growth, which is terribly, terribly

important. Any life (ph) we put a premium on good governance, country ownership, and results, and I particularly think we're all aware these days that we've got to achieve results. And one of the most important ways, in my view, biased as I am, but I think it's based on good empirical data, is that you make a difference here by your commitment to gender equality, which constitutes both smart development and smart economics.

I also want to say what an honor it is to be here with the distinguished panel that's been assembled on this topic. In addition to MCC, Women Thrive Worldwide, with whom I have worked closely, and the International Food Policy Research Institute, who has brought us all so much good research and data, both groups -- all three, with the corporation -- bring considerable expertise to today's topic, and I regret that I will not hear the discussion, but I will look forward to reading the transcript.

We gather for this conversation this morning at a very critical time. Our world confronts a serious food crisis, exacerbated by a very severe global economic downturn. But it's a crisis that reminds us once again of the persistent problems of hunger and poverty in the developing world.

Millions of people are at risk of being pushed back into poverty. Millennium Development Goal one, to cut hunger and poverty by half by 2015, is certainly being jeopardized. And to make for an understatement, food security is a pressing concern.

President Obama and Secretary Clinton are committed to focusing more attention on food security. The president has made clear that alleviating hunger worldwide is a top priority of the administration, and as the secretary explained, "The president and I intend to focus new attention on food security so that developing nations can invest in food production, affordability, accessibility, education, and technology."

Now, we delude ourselves if we think we can achieve this goal, if we think we can foster agriculture production, income generation, and better nutrition, without empowering women. In much of the world, as Rodney said, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, women make up a substantial majority of the small-holder farmers who grow and cultivate the crops.

Unless we take gender differences into consideration in our policy responses, we will neither successfully address the food crisis in the short term nor create sustainable food security for the longer term. Investing in women is nothing less than one of the more powerful and positive ways to alleviate global poverty and hunger.

Now, as I thought about what to say today, a movie, sort of a reel of experiences, kept running in my head. And I was recalling a trip I made with the then first lady, now secretary of state, to Sub-Saharan Africa; it was one of many, many trips over the years. And on this occasion we were riding in a van with an economics minister of the country who was opining about the economic decision-making process and the pillars of the economy there and how it was functioning.

And in the context of his remarks, he said that women really had no role in the formal economy of the country. And as we were riding on a very bumpy dirt road, as far as our eyes could see on one side and the other side were fields. And in those fields were hundreds of women bent over, many of them with little children in papoose kind of holdings, many of them -- some very young -- bringing wood for fuel, others carrying water.

And the first lady said to this gentleman, "How can you say that, sir? Everything we see here is women hard at work helping make a difference in this country. Can you imagine if all of them stopped working, even for one day? What would happen?" And so the lesson I think we can all derive from that kind of experience, which is not unusual, is that women's role in the economy needs to be understood and recognized.

And then another movie that keeps running is our trips to Bangladesh, and particularly in villages where the Grameen Bank has been very, very active. And you know that they've made a huge difference on making small amounts of capital available. They started lending both to men and women, and as Dr. Yunus said, over the years it's become 90 percent women, 10 percent men, because women tend to make the kinds of investments with their resources that make a difference for their families and their larger community, and they tend to pay back their loans that's the envy of any commercial lending institution.

So as we're sitting with a group of women from one of the borrowing groups, they're telling us about the difference access to capital has made -- access to credit has made -- in their lives. And one woman said, "You know, I got my first loan" -- and you can only get this if the other members of the group support you and you have to espouse certain principles, you're going to send your children to school, you have to ensure that you're going to follow a set way to pay back this loan with interest.

And she said, "I got my first loan and I bought a milk cow, and it made such a difference for our family. We were in a much better place; we had more than we could consume ourselves. And I paid it back and I went for another loan, and I got it approved, and I bought another milk cow."

And by then they had a transformed life in this family, the likes of which they couldn't imagine. And she said, "And when I paid that loan back, I decided it was time for my husband to go to work, so I took out a loan and we now have a rickshaw. And he can now take this milk to the market and they byproducts, and we are in a place that was unimaginable." Very small vignette replicated so many times over around the globe.

And I remember when Dr. Yunus was telling me that he was -- he and the bank got word that they had gotten the Nobel Peace Prize, and when he was negotiating with the Nobel committee they said, "OK, sir, you'll be coming. You're obviously the founder and one part of this prize ownership, and then your bank. And who will be representing the bank at the big ceremonies?"

And he said, "Well, the shareholders; the owners of the bank."

And, "Well, who are they?"

"Well, they're hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of poor women."

And so imagine: They had to select a very tiny percentage to represent all the shareholders, and these women whose lives had been changed so dramatically sat there for the Nobel Peace Prize as the recipients of a prize that acknowledged what they represented to the kind of world I think we all want to see.

So the importance of this lesson, this little story, is that women need access to credit; they need training; they need the tools to help them increase productivity for themselves and their families. They need to be able to take on a greater role in their households, and they need to have access to social networks, and even bargaining powers within their own families.

The third little story -- and it's much of a story because it's an ongoing experience -- but it's the recognition today that we need to come together across sectoral (ph) lines -- lawyers and business people and others. And I've seen this happening more and more across Africa and growing beyond, and that is to recognize that if women are going to participate more effectively in the economic lives of their countries we have to remove the obstacles that stand in the way, because we can't have smart economics when we've got in place impediments that do not level the playing field.

Whether it's inheritance rights or the lack of property rights, or other kinds of rules and regulations, they need to be addressed or we won't ever achieve the kinds of outcomes for half the world's population that will make a difference for a better world in every respect. And so increasingly, groups of people are getting together -- men and women; predominantly women -- working to identify those impediments, those obstacles, and then finding ways within the community and more broadly getting to the policymakers through advocacy to bring about the kinds of changes that will make a difference.

So the third lesson here is that smart economics also requires that legal and other kinds of impediments to women's full economic participation are addressed.

Now, there's plenty of data to buttress my experiences. There is a growing body of information, all of which I'm sure you have accessed one way or another, from the World Bank to the World Economic Forum, and from major companies from Goldman Sachs to Mackenzie (ph) to so many others these days, that correlate investments in women with favorable outcomes for economic growth, poverty alleviation, in fact, decreases in corruption, and in a general -- for the general prosperity of countries. The data recognizes that gender inequality is a significant constraint to economic growth, and as all of you here certainly know, gender equality is one of the MDGs, and I personally don't know how we achieve most of the MDGs if we don't make some progress -- some considerable progress -- on achieving gender equality.

Women's empowerment is a very important key to food security and poverty reduction. The 2008 World Development Report stressed, "Where women are the majority of small-holder farmers, failure to release their full potential in agriculture is a contributing factor to low growth and food insecurity." I don't think we could sum this better than that.

And yet -- and yet -- we have yet to really incorporate gender considerations in development assistance directed toward agriculture. This includes the gender inequalities that are costly to food security and economic growth.

The record is, frankly, abysmal. And, as several studies have shown, the high cost of neglecting gender issues results in decreased agriculture productivity and income.

So what should we do to boost food security, considering the importance of women as drivers of agricultural productivity and all the other related important tools that go with it? We need to make the kinds of investments that will yield high level returns. We need to bring women and every rung of the ladder to food security.

That means that we have to consult with women, especially in the rural communities but across the board, about the kinds of technologies and innovations that are going to be appropriate and useful to their local needs. It means giving them access to credit to afford technologies that they require to improve their family farming methods and related activities.

It means offering them training and extension courses that are understandable and appropriate to them and their lives and their places. It means business education and access to markets, to social networks that disseminate the kinds of information they need, and to participation in decision-making.

Ascending this ladder further up, we need to strengthen their control of assets so that they can afford to take the long-term view instead of making short-term compromises because they lease and don't own land, for example. It means that we need to support legal reforms and to ensure property and inheritance rights to cement that control of assets, not only because it's fair and equitable, as important as that is, but because the aggregation of more far-seeing individual decisions translates into efficiencies on the greater community and even up to the national level, which is something all of you understand.

And at the very top of the ladder, we need more women engaged in policy decisions on all of these issues to ensure that women's issues are fully incorporated and represented among the decisions made on their behalf. In other words, if we want to achieve dramatic and sustainable progress in food security, poverty alleviation, and nutrition, not just for women but for men and women, for boys and girls, for the kind of world all of us want to see, we need to ensure that our interventions engage, empower, and invest in women.

And in order to do this, decision-making and decision-makers like all of you need to ensure adequate treatment of gender in all the policy responses we're going to be considering as we deal with the very important issue at hand: food security.

Thank you all very much.

(APPLAUSE)

SHERINIAN: Madam Ambassador, thank you for those keynote remarks that kick off an important discussion. And as you outlined, these are long-term problems that merit and that demand long-term solutions. And we're here today to do just that with your participation, the participation of the public, and an expert panel.

And so we understand, Madam Ambassador, that you have to leave us, but we will take you up on your offer to be with us in the future. And to have you here as the U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, again, it was a privilege and an honor. So thank you, Madam Ambassador.

(APPLAUSE)

We're now going to turn our time to the second portion of the event, and that includes our experts, and truly expert panel on this issue, on the nexus of women and food security. So we'd ask our panelists to join us here at the table at this time, and I would also like to turn over the moderating responsibilities -- the hefty responsibilities -- and put that in the hands of the capable colleague who has joined us today, and that is Max Finberg, who is with the Alliance to End Hunger. Max has been given very strict instructions today, I will let you know, to introduce our panelists with a brief bio, although you have their biographies in your materials today, but also to help facilitate your ideas and this public consultation on this important issue.

So with that, panelists, please join us.

Max?

FINBERG: Thank you, Aaron.

As he said, we're part of finding solutions here; well, I'm part of the problem. Fortunately, I'm learning. So just last month I was able to go to Togo, where my wife served in the Peace Corps, and visit Mama Whoopie (ph). Mama Whoopie (ph) is who we're talking about today.

Mama Whoopie (ph) is a farmer in rural Togo, not one of the MCC countries, but sandwiched in between Ghana and Benin, and got there, too. But it's her life out in the cotton fields, harvesting the cassava, that is the focus of what we're talking about today.

The Alliance to End Hunger has two honorary co-chairs that fit the theme that we're discussing. One is Eva Clayton, former congresswoman from North Carolina; she was the first African-American woman elected to Congress from North Carolina and the first woman overall. And she succeeded at many things, but she has failed miserably at retirement.

So when she retired after a decade in Congress she was recruited by the Food and Agriculture Organization to address global food security. She did that by creating the International Alliance.

Her colleague is Jim Morris. Jim Morris is the former executive director of the World Food Program, was Dick Lugar's first chief of staff back when he was mayor of Indianapolis. He was with us a few weeks ago and he said this himself, so I'm not speaking out of school. He said, "I left through Nolan (ph) for the World Food Program as a Republican from the Midwest, generally conservative, and I came back a radical feminist."

(LAUGHTER)

I wouldn't put that on him, but he put it on himself. I've had that verified a couple times.

And that is part of the solution. How is it that we can change that dynamic? So we are very excited.

You, as a sophisticated audience, know the stage. You know the (inaudible), the vicious circle of women and food security. And we're going to hear a little more about that.

So we have three dynamic ladies who are going to share with us in a way that sets out the research. It's always good to start with data. I mean, it doesn't always work, but it's a good way to do that.

So, Debdatta Sengupta, with the International Food Policy Research Institute, is an economist, so she has six (ph) opinions all to herself, but she's going to share her work, and her data is part of that. We are thrilled, she has worked a great deal, as you can read in her bio, in a region named after a woman who was powerful: Queen Victoria, in the Lake Victoria region, fits right in.

Kristin Penn is the senior director here at MCC that does all of the Ag. Development work. She's responsible for that \$3.2 billion -- OK, not really. But it's because of the recognition of the role it plays that it's gotten so much attention from the countries that want the money, and Kristin is the one who helps make that all come together, especially given her private sector experience. She, too, was in the Peace Corps, so it's always a great foundation to have.

Last, but definitely not least, the Ritu Sharma, who is a voice for her ancestors in the Pung Job (ph), for her relatives, for women who don't always get the ability to talk with folks at the State Department, at the White House, at others. But through Women Thrive Worldwide, for the past decade, she has been doing just that.

So research, implementation, and policy.

Debdatta, take us away.

SENGUPTA: Thank you, Max.

Talking about the food crisis and being very true to my flock (ph), I have this inherent urge to present before you tons of data and tons of research that show the enormity of the crisis. But it's a good day outside, so I will try not to bore everyone to sleep.

But it would probably suffice to say that this crisis has put about 105 million people in low-income countries back into poverty, which is almost equivalent to about seven-years' worth of -- loss of seven-years' worth of poverty reduction efforts, which all of us, in our respective fields, have been engaged in. But since then, the prices have actually fallen, and it was driven, as we all know, by a fuel and energy crisis, and prices have fallen.

Production of fuels (ph) has eased a little bit; fuel prices have fallen. So does that mean that the crisis is over? Should we relax now?

The second thing that I would really want to touch on is, it seemingly seems to be that with the increase in food prices, the small farmers should actually benefit. So why is it that we are talking that with food crisis and it is the small farmers and it is the rural poor whose livelihoods are actually agriculture are the worst hit because of this crisis?

And third, but not least, I will definitely want to touch about why is it important to talk about women in this, and how they're affected by the crisis.

So, food prices have definitely increased a lot, and depending on which commodities we are talking about, between 2005 and 2008, it has peaked. But since then it has eased. But research from IFPRI, OECD, as well as FAO, show that they are definitely on a higher trend. So technically, the next 10 years the prices will be on a higher level than the past 10 years.

So would this mean that the farmers who are actually cultivating these foods commodities stand to gain? And why is it, then, if they are not gaining from it, they are not gaining from it?

Well, a little bit of background on that is that rural households are both buyers and sellers of food commodities, so it depends on whether you are a net buyer or a net seller that you would be affected by it. So, two kinds of prices that really affect them are the farm gate (ph), or the producer prices -- the prices with which they sell their commodities at the market, and the consumer prices -- the prices that they participate in the market as a consumer.

So -- I'm sorry, I have to get into this whole economics -- but these two prices are the main prices that are affecting them. And depending on different times of the year, these are the prices that they either buy with or sell with.

But necessarily (ph) during the crisis, the consumer prices have gone up much more than the producer prices. So even if they are gaining some amount by selling their commodities, they are actually losing out because they are paying much more to buy some other things that are needed for their household food requirements.

Research out of Ghana shows that while the producer prices have gone up 50 percent, so farmers who are selling their commodities are gaining some money, the consumer prices that they face have actually gone up by 100 percent. So the difference is enormous, so naturally there is the food security issue, and that is where and why, actually, they are negatively affected.

And moreover, small farmers actually lack the capacity to respond to fast increases in demand because of their lack of access to credit, lack of access to input. When talking about small farmers -- and we know that 60 to 80 percent of the women who cultivate in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia are women -- and these women farmers are definitely negatively and disproportionately affected.

I have several IFPRI research briefs outside which show how women farmers are negatively affected, and why they are important to household security, food security, and why they have been really the hardest hit during this crisis. But in general, during food shortages households, and especially women, cut back on the quantity -- that's the calorie intake of foods -- and the quality, which is the dietary variety that they get in the food. So expensive and more popular cereals are substituted by less expensive cereals, which are not necessarily that nutritious.

Secondly, women almost always end up being the shock absorbers for their family, so they are the ones who would take the brunt and reduce their own consumption while giving their children and the men in the household the opportunity to have enough amount of food. And this is even without a crisis, a research from Bangladesh shows that 60 percent of women are more likely to actually reduce their consumption during food shortages for the family. And this is not even during a crisis.

And as farmers and as cultivators, more importantly, they face this whole brunt of very high input costs, while being sellers they don't always necessarily gain that much because they don't own the land, so they don't necessarily get the benefits from this. So there are IFPRI research -- and we are doing a lot of research at IFPRI and definitely at other institutions, but I'll pretty much talk about IFPRI here -- which show that giving women assets and increasing their assets in production in agriculture increases their bargaining power, which would actually increase agriculture productivity.

There's also a Banagator (ph) analysis from 1970 to 1995, actually, which go to say that increasing women's education actually increases -- or decreases the chances of child malnutrition by a whopping 43 percent. So that is a significant number that is coming out of research, and we need to actually learn and inform the other; you know, implementation and policy so that we can benefit from the kind of work that we are doing.

I'm also engaged in this very exciting research, which shows -- and the data is out from Colombia -- that women are much more faster in adopting biotech crops. So given an option, women adopt biotech crops much fast than men do.

And the other thing that I would definitely like to talk about is the fact that just moving away from cultivating main cereals to cultivating indigenous vegetables and other food security crops and marketing them is the other project that I'm doing in the Lake Victoria region, actually gives women the bargaining power to -- because that is their own part of the field; that is the crop that they cultivate -- and it gives them the bargaining power to make the money for with which they will feed the children.

So, what next? We need to actually talk between these silos (ph) of policies, implementation, and research, and trying to inform and learn from each other so that, you know, we don't wait for another crisis to get us going to the right direction.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

PENN: OK, great. Thanks. Thanks, Max. Really a pleasure to be here with my fellow panelists, and thank for all of you for coming today.

I would like to just start off my seven minutes here with just picking up on something Rodney said earlier. You know, since our inception -- MCC's inception -- eligible countries, when given the opportunity to tell us what they would choose to invest in to create significant economic growth in their countries have come to us with proposals for agriculture, for agriculture systems development, for food productivity, for access to markets.

And we have been able to say yes because, one, we're not earmarked yet, you know, we're not bound to an issue or to a sector; or to a type of assistance. So in the era when, frankly, we all know, in the past 10 years agricultural development was basically in a closet, we, over the past four or five years, have been able to say yes to agriculture. And as a result, we have the numbers that we do that Rodney mentioned earlier: Out of the \$6.6 billion we've approved and are putting into action, some \$3.2 billion that are helping to improve the food security in these countries.

And, you know, as a result, you know, we have ended up being one of the U.S. government's largest contributors to agricultural development today, and we're very proud of that. But it is because of our process that we follow, and I'll just reiterate that again.

It's country ownership. When we put the countries in the decision-making position to tell us what they'd like to invest in they have, for the most part, chosen agriculture, contributing to their food security in their country.

The other aspect of the way we operate that has put agriculture on our radar scope and in our portfolio is that economics matters. And in some of our decision-making tools that we use to determine what we invest in, the proposals that come to us by the countries have to represent a robust economic rate of return. And in many of these countries, the agriculture system represents uncapped economic potential for a lot of people, including women, to gain economically.

Another part of our process that has driven us toward saying yes to agriculture is that we really care about beneficiaries. You know, we assess the; you know, we baseline them; we track them; we care who they are, we care where they are, we care what they're doing; we care about what is the change going to be on their lives as a result of our investment; and we care about the result. What are they going to feel at the end of the five years, 10 years, as a result of our investment?

So when a country comes forward with a proposal, specifically in my case agriculture, it triggers a fairly intensive assessment process. We take a look at what they've proposed, and through a technical lens, through an economic lens, through an institutional lens, through an environmental lens, and through a social lens.

MCC has a social gender policy, thanks to Ginny (ph) and the social assessment team here at MCC; and many other people at MCC, and probably many people in this room, have helped us form a policy and guidance that helps us, MCC, and our MCC counterparts ensure that gender is front and center throughout our entire process of eligibility, of consultation, of assess, appraisal, and implementation. And, you know, it's not easy. It's not easy keeping gender front and center, but there's some things that we're doing along with Ginny's (ph) to do our best to continue to keep gender -- gender assessment -- front and center in our process.

One thing is to train us, the sector people. You know, I'm a woman; I've been involved in agriculture for 25 years. But that doesn't make me a gender specialist. We need to be surrounded by social scientists that really know the subject.

We also need to be trained up and tooled with knowledge and understanding of what it is that we can do as sector specialists to ensure that gender remains front and center in the actions that we're responsible for in terms of assessment and implementation. We have trained -- Ginny Seitz and her team provide us training on a regular basis. In fact, just last month we went through a training called, "Cultivating a Gender Perspective," for all of the agriculture and land team members, so that we are continually learning how to make sure that we are taking into consideration the dynamics around gender and the agriculture investments that we make.

So it's one thing to train us, and I think that's very, very important, but I want to go back to a couple real key things that I think are going to help MCC breathe life into our gender policy.

One is resources. I mentioned it before: social scientists. We need to be surrounded by social scientists -- we, the sector people -- in land, in agriculture, in infrastructure, in economics, in modern training and evaluation. We have our particular technical lens that we have been hired to use to appraise and approve and provide technical oversight on the investments that MCC makes in agriculture, for example, but I am not a trained social scientist, so I don't have that ability to apply that social lens appropriately.

We trained up a little bit, but I need to be surrounded by experts in this area. So we need social scientists on staff. I'm going to look over at Rodney. We have two full-time social scientists at MCC, and they have a big job to undertake.

We need social scientists embedded in our accountable entities out in the field who are actually implementing -- step back. In the teams, when they become eligible and when they go through their consultation process, we need social scientists on those teams to keep the gender dynamics front and center in that whole process, and then to have them be permanent members of the accountable entity's team as they prepare to implement.

I'm losing my place here, but -- OK, you can have your resources in place, you can be trained up, but then you have to mobilize it. And one of the important lessons that we've learned so far -- I've only been with -- I've been with MCC for four years, but it's really, really important not to silo (ph). We go out in the field as technical teams as project sector needs to evaluate an investment, and it's so important to ensure that we're going out there not just with our agriculture entourage, but to ensure that on that team is a social scientist that is also asking those very particular, important questions that keep, again, gender front and center in our appraisal.

So the gender specialists are hearing the technical questions that we're answering, and they're hearing the same responses we're hearing. And we're hearing the gender specialists as their questions, and we're hearing the same response. And together we're making adjustments to potential design.

Together we're identifying critical policies at the 10,000-seat (ph) level that are critical to enabling men and women's participation in a certain investment. It's really important to have that mind and that mouth on your team while you go forward in your assessment.

The other thing I wanted to land on are our tools -- tools that help us assess and monitor and report and adjust our agriculture investments to ensure that we are taking into consideration and maximizing our investments that enable, as much as possible, participation of women and men and boys and girls -- purple tools. We have a fantastic monitoring and evaluation team here at MCC. They help us design baseline studies, and baseline studies, with Ginny's help, that also incorporate specific questions that get at the gender dynamics in a sector.

It's very important to have those questions embedded in these farm surveys, and it's also very important to follow the interview process so that that is gender sensitized. Just like the ambassador mentioned, we need to talk to the women. We need to get them in front of us, ask these questions, and get some unbiased responses, and then we need to take that information and use it -- use it to refine our investments, use it properly to ensure that our investments in agriculture are incorporating the dynamics of gender in that country's agriculture system.

Another tool is our monitoring and evaluations plan. Again, we have a great monitoring and evaluation team here. We disaggregate gender data and develop monitoring and evaluation plans that are tracking participation and impact on men and women. That's great. That's great.

And then our implementing entities are reporting up to us data that we can analyze. That's very important. It's one thing to collect data, but it's another thing to analyze it.

And most importantly, after you analyze it, use the results to make adjustments in your investment if it's necessary. I mean, if you look at that data, you know, and participation of women is not where it was supposed to be, the adoption rates of women on some productivity practices is not where we thought it was going to be, the income generation for those women at a household level isn't where we thought it was going to be, that raises a red flag. Then we need to do something about it, and during implementation.

And that's where MCC is now. We've got maybe a dozen contacts that are in their second, third year, and we must use this data that we're collecting on a disaggregated basis to make sure that we step back and make the necessary adjustments where necessary to ensure that our taxpayer dollar is doing as much as it can to ensure the participation of women and their direct benefit.

Those are just some of the actions that we are trying to integrate into our assessment and our implementation here at MCC, and I really look forward to the audience's input and guidance and ideas on how we can do it better. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

FINBERG: Appropriate way to close the day after tax day: How do we spend taxpayer dollars (inaudible)? We're square (ph).

Take us away, Ritu.

SHARMA: I don't want you to care about women. I really don't. I think if we would have put gender and food security at the title of this session you may not have come, so we tricked you into it.

But the reason that I don't want you to care about women is that ultimately a focus on women is not going to be successful. Women and gender are not the same thing. Gender is looking at the different roles, rights, responsibilities, resources, dynamics of men and women and taking both into account when designing our initiatives, in this case in food security.

That's the critical difference, and what we really need to integrate, again, is gender. And this is something that I think, both from the ambassador and from Kristin, that the MCC has done extremely well and is a model for the food security initiative of this new administration, but also for foreign assistance overall.

From a policy perspective, I want to give you -- or from a practical perspective -- some examples as to why it's important to focus on gender and not just women. In the case of agriculture and food security, there was a study from Zambia that looked at a project that was encouraging women and men to inter-crop the crops that they were traditionally responsible for -- men being responsible for maize and women being responsible for beans.

And they did outreach to the men and women, tried to get them to do this; the women refused to inter-crop the beans with the men not because they had anything against, the men, not because they had any issues with the land, but simply by virtue that if a woman planted her beans on that land the man owned the beans. It's as simple as that. And unfortunately in the case of this project, they didn't do the evaluation until the end and it was too late to figure that out.

In Afghanistan -- and as many of you know, there's legislation and authorization moving through on AFPAK and what we're going to do there and what we need to do differently, and I think this is one of the most stark cases where we have focused on women almost in a zealous way, because of the, I think, extreme situation of Afghanistan. But in essence we've created a backlash against women and a backlash against gender integration, because in Afghanistan what gender has come to mean is women, and anyone doing a project or having a contract in Afghanistan knows that they have to say the word "gender" throughout the proposal and through, you know, et cetera, et cetera, in order to get the money, but then when it comes down to it they don't look at gender, they look at women.

And there are many, many case studies -- I don't think there is research on this, but a lot of anecdotal evidence from Afghanistan -- that when the outreach was specifically to women and not to men, whether it's for agricultural extension or alternatives to poppy crops or whatever it is, that the women were putting themselves at extreme personal risk to participate in these workshops, and if they did not bring home income to the family in short order, violence against women increased. So again, as Melanne said, it's not rocket science; a lot of this is common sense, but it has to be thoughtfully incorporated into our policies and our programs.

So, at Women Thrive we are advocates for incorporating gender into U.S. government assistance policies and programs, and when we look at what institutions are doing, we actually -- I don't know if you know this, but we report to our board on an annual basis. We grade MCC, USAID, and some of the specific initiatives -- economic growth, agriculture -- we grade each of those for their integration of gender and report to our board on an annual basis how well we've done at pushing the U.S. government to do this. So thank you, MCC, because you make me look really, really good.

I wish I could say that about the other metrics. But there's five ingredients that are critical and that we look at and that we actually report on.

The first is leadership. There has to be leadership at the top that gets that gender is important not because they're necessarily a feminist or because their wife told them to or because they have daughters, but because it is fundamental to the effectiveness of the money that they are stewarding. And they talk about that. They talk about it in senior management team meetings; they make sure when they visit countries that they are talking about the importance of gender, because if the leader isn't talking about it, nobody else is going to talk about it.

Again, the MCC's leadership here has been phenomenal. It wasn't always that way, but I think that when Ambassador Danelovich (ph) was at the helm it was clear that that was a huge shift. That's when things started to move; that's when the gender policies started to happen.

And I think, Rodney, your leadership, too, has been fantastic on this, and that you've continued in this vein, and we're all anxiously waiting to hear who will or won't be appointed to head the MCC.

But again, this is something that is very, very important. Again, there needs to be a mandate. There needs to be a written policy so people are clear, countries are clear, aid missions are clear: What is meant by gender? What are the expectations? What are the accountability mechanisms? You know, for example, the gender policy at the MCC says that if a country proposal does not adequately address gender, it gets sent back to the country until it does, and there's no release of funding until the analysis and incorporation of gender are adequate.

So there has to be a strong, clear policy. That's the second ingredient.

Third is resources, which Kristin mentioned, where I think the MCC could improve its score on my metrics chart. There needs to be more budget for this. It's got to be strong.

Not only does that send a political message rippling through a system or through an institution, it does cost money to do this; it does take particular expertise. Analyzing and collecting sex disaggregated data is very expensive to do.

The fourth is capacity. You can have the money but you can often not have the capacity. We've seen this many, many, many, many times, where we've thrown money at something and it hasn't actually built the capacity. So you've got to do the training, you've got to have the gender structures in place, a database, tools. You need all of those things.

And finally, you have to have the accountability. And this is very interesting: At DFID the top 100 staff have it as part of their performance evaluation to incorporate gender. And not only that, 25 percent of their annual bonus is based on the quality of their attention to gender.

I wish my bonus was based on gender.

So it's, again, they mean business. They understand how important this is to success.

And I think one of the best ways to think about gender is to think about it as information technology systems. You know, my dream is that one day we'll think about, like, how did we ever do this without gender? Like we think about, like, how did I ever live without e-mail? How did I ever live without my iPhone?

You know, it is a tool, just like your phone or your computer; it's a tool that we just for our productivity, for our effectiveness, to carry out our work. And gender, in an institution, I think can be structured very much like we structure our I.T. function: It requires a special unit of specialists who understand I.T.

That's all they focus on all the time. They do the training, they make sure that I.T. is state-of-the-art, and it's integrated into everything everybody does. You don't say, "Look, I don't use a computer because the I.T. department uses computers." You know, that's insane.

So it's important that it's integrated throughout the system. And as you know, I wish that institutions who would spend like this would spend as much on gender as they spend on information technology. You know, maybe that's a good benchmark or baseline.

So my other dream is that there'll be like this one-stop shop in the U.S. government, like the Apple Store, and you can walk in and there'll be like this Gender Genius Bar where you can get anything you want when you want it. That would just be to die for.

So those, I think, are the key ingredients of gender integration from a policy perspective, and I think the key elements that we'll be looking for in the administration's new food security initiative. If one of these things is missing, it's not going to work.

And again, it doesn't matter if you really care about women or not. I'm so glad that this administration cares about women enough to appoint Melanne to her new position, but the real test will be how we actually go about our work around the world.

So thank you very much. Thank you for being here.

(APPLAUSE)

FINBERG: A terrific set up for this phase of our morning together. How do we go about it? What are the ideas, but also the questions directed to our distinguished panelists that can help inform Ambassador Verveer's agenda, as it were?

It's auspicious that we meet 10 days after her appointment, still within the first 100 days of the administration, even though we're looking forward to some new administrators at some point, we don't have them yet. So now is the time to feed in some of those ideas to get to that Gender Genius Bar.

So, please identify yourself. We've got a mic. And again, this is going worldwide.

AUDIENCE: David Lambert (ph). Terrific session, thank you very much.

Since our goal is global food security, we talked this morning about what we've done in this country and we'd like to think that we now get it on gender sensitivity -- a focus on other OECD countries -- DFID was mentioned and what's going on there -- what is your sense about other OECD countries and whether they are getting it about gender sensitivity and whether it's finding its way into policies, such as policies like the NCC policy? Thanks.

FINBERG: Let's go ahead and do a couple other questions. We'll line them up.

Yes, please, ma'am.

AUDIENCE: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Rosemary Vegerra (ph). I'm the president for Hope for Tomorrow (ph). I come from Kenya.

I just want to thank the Millennium Development Goals, (inaudible), Mr. Ambassador; I think when I spoke about gender and the president of Ghana (ph) was here, for you to involve women into this (inaudible). I didn't know you had (inaudible), but I thank

you so much because I (inaudible) as much as you give the money to the countries, women are the most hardworking people, especially in Africa.

I come from Kenya. I'm talking from experience. Women are the hardest-working women on the ground. I've written to president and everybody, and I just am so happy that Millennium Challenge has taken this as an (inaudible).

My question is, as much as you are working hard trying to see that the world gets out of poverty -- especially Africa -- (inaudible) Africa is a very rich country in agriculture, in minerals, in energy (ph). But the problem is violence against women. As women try to do something men come and beat them, and people, you know -- so it becomes very, very difficult.

So what I would propose the Millennium Challenge to do is also to look into violence against women, because these women are the ones who get food for their families and the ones that can make Africa get out of poverty. So thank you so much for this wonderful event, and the only (inaudible) rural areas, where the women are.

Because many organizations go -- they go to town. Where people work is in the rural areas. So work with me, and involve us to work with you. So from experience, thank you.

FINBERG: Thank you, Rosemary.

One from this side?

Please, ma'am (ph).

AUDIENCE: Yes, thank you.

I think it was very refreshing to hear your perspective, Kristin, about the efforts that you're making to integrate gender into the MCC programs. And my question is really, you know, there are some really difficult problems in that, I'm sure, and I could hear some tension in your voice when you were trying to talk about that. And you go to the point where we're analyzing the data.

OK, now, you're probably going to -- but there was a hint there that maybe you weren't addressing gender to the extent that you would like to. But I know that you work with governments, and I'm kind of wondering whether some of that difficulty or some of the push-back or some of the constraints are really going to be at the level of governance, and whether you have done any thinking about how to address, at the policy level, some of those governance issues that may or may not constrain the potential.

Now, some of those issues will not be involved. Obviously you can't, you know, you can't address some of these issues on the ground. But some of the issues are definitely locked in the legal system, locked in policy, et cetera. So I was just wondering if there have been any moves in that direction, what they have been, and where things are going at the moment with that?

FINBERG: Great. We'll stop there and answer those three, on what about what other OECD countries are doing in terms of Africa and its richness; what about violence against women? Perhaps we can get to the rural areas too; and then finally, how do we deal with some of that push-back?

SHARMA: Ok. So, the other OECD countries -- again, it really depends on the leadership. And if you look across the OECD countries at which ones have integrated gender and which ones haven't, you can literally track it back to the leadership that those institutions have had.

So some are better than others. Australia has done a very good job and has some very innovative tools, as does Canadian FEIDA (ph). So there is a paper on this that if you give me your card I'd be happy to send you that does a side-by-side of all of the DAC countries and agencies and how they've integrated gender.

And the OECD-DAC has also done some fantastic work on best practices and recommendations for its member countries on how to integrate gender, although it's not reflected in their Paris Declaration, but that's another story. But there's some very good guidance there.

On violence, I think that our organization came to work on violence -- we work on economic growth and poverty and income, and we now have a focus on violence because wherever I traveled around the world, women would say to me, "If I bring home money I'm going to get beaten up." And it is just something that you can not take apart from women's economic empowerment and violence. The two are sadly very much interrelated -- sometimes in positive ways, where income protects a woman, sometimes in negative ways, where income increases violence against women.

I think it's -- and this gets to the question of governance that you raised and the legal system, and the MCC -- and I hope, Kristin, you'll talk about this -- has engaged with governments on changing national laws that prevent women's participation in the economy. I think this is a potential area for partnership -- interagency collaboration. One of Melanne's responsibilities, actually, is to coordinate and look at what the U.S. government is doing on violence against women overseas overall.

And maybe the MCC isn't the best agency to do that, but there are other agencies in the U.S. government that are well suited to address it. And are there some creative ways where you can match projects or do the work together in a particular region or country? There can be some very creative solutions to that.

PENN: Yes. On the policy issue, I'm going to ask my colleague Ginny Seitz to talk about the experience that we've had thus far on looking at the policy and the legal and the socio-cultural constraints to women and men becoming full beneficiaries of our project.

SEITZ: We do review policy as part of the assessment process, and the -- perhaps the most striking example we have was in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, where the status of women as legal -- adult women -- as legal minors was identified as a policy constraint by the government of Lesotho in its earliest engagements with MCC, and they had a law that they were trying to pass to give women the rights of adulthood that had stalled and hadn't gone anywhere.

And in 2006, when they finally submitted a proposal for a compact with MCC, we responded by looking at these lack of basic economic rights as a significant constraint to economic growth and poverty reduction, did an assessment tour, and then our senior management and Ambassador Danilovich informed the government of Lesotho that it would be problematic to sign a compact

unless this was remedied. And we identified eight economic rights that were in the bill that hadn't been passed, and within a few months the bill was passed.

And this is, you know, this was a little bit of help for all of the efforts in Lesotho to change the situation -- to remedy it -- that we gave them, and I would say, I just spend two and a half weeks in Lesotho and I am very impressed with how the small gender and economic rights training and public awareness program and the MCA Lesotho are taking this very seriously. They have a wonderful gender integration plan for every activity in the compact, and it is very, very -- our support for this has given them what they need to really push this issue at the forefront.

And as far as I know, we're the only donor that has conditioned foreign assistance on gender equality, so we're very pleased with that. Oh, and I should mention, we also, in our review of world (ph) property rights of women, tenure (ph) look at gender, and we've got a very good track record on titling property to women.

FINBERG: Thank you.

Yes, sir, in the back. And then we're coming around; we have a couple more minutes.

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much. My name is (inaudible). I have many hats, different organizations. Can you hear me? OK.

I'm nobody who's supposed to talk, just observe. But when you reach a critical issue that is central to us, then I will have to make a statement.

I will suggest about the gender issue that you continue to push it as many times that you can to the government in Africa as well as to other organizations within Africa. And one you do that (inaudible), then we will step in, and trust me, it will be changed.

FINBERG: Yes, sir.

UNKNOWN: (OFF-MIC)

(LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE: Thank you. My name is Rick LaRue; I'm with the Solar Electric Light Fund. And we're working with Doth Pasterneck (ph) and Ickerset (ph), working with him on his drip irrigation systems in Bernaine (ph), and we're providing the solar energy to power the pumping and the water. And this is a little bit of a -- somewhat of a segue or break into silos (ph), and of course we're working with women's cooperatives to use these systems, and they've been very, very productive. We've just done three pilots right now, and we're expanding the program.

And so my question is, in terms of irrigation, particularly in countries where, of course, there are dry seasons of pretty extensive length and fields remaining on silos (ph) for a long time, to what extent is solar looked as an alternative for power and/or to what extent does energy itself get factored into some of these considerations? Because, much as Ambassador Verveer spoke, that

women being a fundamental factor for all of the development goals, perhaps, as well, particularly in communities where we work a lot that are off the grid, that energy and electricity is a factor as well.

FINBERG: Ma'am? Yes.

AUDIENCE: Good morning. I'm Kathleen Curtis (ph) from the Academy for Educational Development. Thanks, everyone, for your comments, and thanks to the MCC for organizing this event. It's very useful. And thanks to the president for having an ambassador, now, on this important topic.

My question is about (inaudible) comment is about capacity, and I realize that it's linked to leadership. (inaudible) for the MCC, though, sort of as Kristin mentioned, there's capacity at the MCC, which means throughout the U.S. government, and then there's capacity amongst policymakers or people looking to do the evaluations or implement the programs. And so I just wonder if there's some comment about how it's been and, you know, how successful, and is it truly going on at both levels?

And I guess it's not only about capacity on gender; but I'm very impressed with the level of monitoring and evaluation, but there's a huge amount of capacity that it takes to do that, again, both in our -- the kind of work we do at our level and then also in the countries at the level of policy or program implementation. So any comments would be useful.

FINBERG: Let's stop there for now. We'll hopefully get one other round if we can squeeze it in. So, how to push the African governments, the connection with solar alternative energy and irrigation agriculture, and then finally on capacity.

SHARMA: Yes, to the gentleman from Africa, if we could just clone him, that would be really great. I don't have anything...

PENN: You know, when we -- we have a tool that we use to do a constraints analysis. That is one of the early-on activities to prepare for proposal development in a country: constraints analysis to economic growth. And in many cases, utilities -- access to energy, and of course, infrastructure.

Back to access to energy, it becomes an area, a sector -- a service sector -- that we will consider and have considered, and have improved -- approved investments in in power generation, power transmission, power distribution. So yes, we do look at investments in power; and we look at it over the long term -- its sustainability, its cost of generation, cost of delivery, and the ability of our target beneficiaries in the country to pay for that service. So alternatives are always a part of our conversation.

SENGUPTA: I just want to address the energy and the solar issue. What I have been working in India and in a lot of places in Africa, these kinds of technologies and utilization is very limited. And also, administering them is very limited in pockets.

So people who actually have the access to these and know how to utilize it, so it's not only access to these resources and access to solar panels, but how exactly best to utilize it so that we get the maximum benefit. So that is only very limited, and it's limited to people who are probably educated and they know how to use it, but in a lot of cases, not only solar panels but also biogas, which is another environment-friendly thing, it's not really utilized that much in developing countries, and I think investments towards these technologies would be very welcome.

FINBERG: Kristin, you had wanted to just touch quickly on the capacity issue, given that MCC started with -- what was it? -- seven, and then 13, and capacity is building.

PENN: I'll just say a few words, and maybe my colleagues can join in here, but I did want to respond to Mara's (ph) question about hesitation around analysis. And I just want everybody to know in this room that we are committed to putting action to our gender policy, and we can't just flip a switch and all of a sudden it becomes systematic.

And so some of my hesitation is because we haven't quite got it systemized, and time, and the dynamics, and the pressure of us to move these investments through the process sometimes gets in the way of us doing the best job possible on gender integration. I'm going to pitch it back to Ginny on the capacity issues at the country level as well.

SEITZ: We have a lot to do -- it's a real challenge to assure that there is sufficient capacity in our partner countries to manage these investments. It's another challenge that perhaps those that make decisions about our funding don't quite understand.

In terms of gender, well, you know, it's ministry of finance that make the calls initially about how they're going to develop a proposal and they have to encourage them to include voices around the decision table that they don't normally have. And we've had some wonderful successes in that regard.

I remember going to Burkina Faso two years ago, at least, and spending the first visit out with the head of the NCA that was going to be developing a compact, and talking with (ph) -- before we had a gender policy, and engaging in a conversation with him about gender where he interrupted me and said, "Oh, this is just, you know, these outside agendas."

But he did have, because of my visit, has asked a consultant or someone to be seconded from the planning ministry who had some gender expertise. And we spent the next 10 days visiting every NGO and social ministry and talking about the NCA compact development process, and they would say, "Well, how can we get engaged?" And we would give them (inaudible).

And so at the end of a 10-day visit, in the presence of the minister of finance, he asked for her to be assigned full-time to work on gender in the compact. So, you know, you can -- you can do that. And hopefully we will continue to do that and do it very effectively.

FINBERG: Time for one more if we hurry.

Yes, please?

AUDIENCE: Hi. I'm Nora O'Connell; I'm with Women Thrive Worldwide. And I have a question that actually I get asked a lot, and I think it's even on more people's minds than the people who ask it, which is, a lot of this is based on the fact that it matters who in the household earns the income. So if you could talk a little bit about why it matters who earns the income, and if men don't use their income to feed their families, what do they use their income for?

FINBERG: Come on. Just hit it out of the park.

SENGUPTA: Simply, drink, as always. But mostly it is probably true (ph) that entire part of their income they drink or gamble it away, but mostly it's the women's incomes which -- and the reason why we stress on the women's income is because that is what goes into child nutrition, and that is what goes into actually bringing up the food insecurity in the family. So it's mostly men's income go either -- if they're agricultural families go into land, inputs, stuff like that, the big and bulky kind of assets that they have, and it's the women's income which goes into schooling, which goes into nutrition of the child, and health.

PENN: I mean, there's not -- I don't think there's any silver bullet to ensuring that women that generate the income have control of the income and that they're going to spend it on the right thing. I mean, that's all about why we have a gender policy, so that when we are designing these investments we're taking a look at how we can ensure that we're getting women to participate in the programs, that we've targeted training and skills development for them, that we look at these higher-level policy issues that ensure that they can fully participate and benefit from our investments, in terms of policy and legal reform.

I don't know how to answer your question other than, we've got to be hitting on several fronts to ensure that there is an empowerment base that drives our investments for women.

SHARMA: No comment.

FINBERG: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. We have reached the end of our time.

This is an auspicious moment. This is the time to feed in the ideas. You've heard their receptivity, both from the research end of where the data fits, but especially from the United States government saying, "We want your input on this particular issue."

As an advocate as well, Women Thrive Worldwide and the Alliance share a lot of (inaudible) in what more we can continue pushing, because we realize that simply having the policy isn't enough, that simply having something on the books doesn't get it done, simply having the authorization doesn't mean you always get money.

So with that, I want to thank the audience for joining us this morning, but especially thank our panelists and Ambassador Verveer, who isn't with us anymore, but thank you very much.

END