

Millennium Challenge Corporation Hosts a Public Outreach Meeting

Speakers

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Transcript

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MANS: Good morning, everyone. Good morning and welcome to today's public event here at the headquarters of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. We are delighted to see such a full house this morning.

My name is Darius Mans. I am the vice president for the Department of Compact Implementation. And we appreciate your ongoing interest in MCC as we work to fulfill the mission of reducing poverty through economic growth.

Let me tell you a bit about how we're planning to proceed this morning. First, I would like to tell you about the group of resident country directors and deputy resident country directors we have gathered here and why we have brought them together from the far corners of the Earth.

Then I will ask all of the resident country directors and their deputies to introduce themselves, very briefly. Then three of them will come forward for a panel discussion about their experiences on the grounds.

There will be some time for questions after their brief remarks.

Unfortunately, we cannot have all of the RCDs and DRCDs speak or get to every question that you may have for them. Therefore, after the panel discussion, I invite you to get back to socializing in these corners where you see the posters for each region, and all of the DRCDs and RCDs will be there.

With that overview, let me say a few words about the resident country directors.

As many of you know, we at MCC have a very small presence on the ground in the countries where we have signed compacts. Often, our mission includes just a resident country director, a deputy resident country director, and a few locally recruited staffs.

The resident country directors are responsible for managing all MCC activity and relations in their assigned countries and oversee all aspects of compact implementation in country.

The RCDs serve as the primary point of outreach to other donors, the local and international NGO community, the press, the private sector, think tanks, universities and other organizations interested in the MCC country program in country.

The RCDs also represent the MCC country program with the inspector general, the GAO, congressional staff, and other oversight organizations, as appropriate.

Every year, we bring the resident country directors and deputy resident country directors together in Washington to share lessons learned and best practices with each other, to participate in technical training, and to engage with MCC stakeholders in Washington.

At this point, I would like to ask each of the resident country directors and deputy resident country directors to stand and introduce themselves and say the country that they're working on.

[RCD introductions]

MANS: Excellent. Thank you all. Fantastic team.

Now, for our panel discussion, I'd like to invite our three panelists this morning to introduce themselves, so you have the entire set, starting on my right.

CARVALHO-PACHECO: Cassia Carvalho-Pacheco, resident country director for Mozambique.

RUSSIN: Good morning. Alex Russin, country director for Armenia.

RUDDY: Good morning, everyone. Vincent Ruddy, resident country director in El Salvador.

MANS: I'd like to say a few words of introduction about these RCDs. We selected RCDs that represent countries in different stages of compact implementation.

We've asked them to share insights into the successes, as well as the challenges of implementation for the stage that their countries are in, as well as program results that have been achieved so far in their country programs.

Cassia is the RCD for Mozambique. Mozambique is in the initial phases of implementation and just entered into force in September.

Cassia will share experiences from MCA Mozambique's work to prepare for entry into force and what we consider to be earlier results in this phase.

Vince Ruddy, the MCC RCD for El Salvador. In El Salvador, as you may know, the MCA, which is called "Full Millennial," has just celebrated its first anniversary since entering into force last year.

He will provide some insights into how Full Millennial has spent its first year and what approaches it is using to achieve early program results.

Alex Russin is the MCC RCD for Armenia. Armenia has just completed its second year after entry into force. Alex will share lessons learned from a program in which implementation is now in full swing.

Each of our panelists will have five minutes to offer an overview for their country.

Let me start, first, with Cassia.

CARVALHO-PACHECO: Thank you, Darius. It's a real pleasure to be here in Washington, to come back to Washington, and to talk about the things that are happening in Mozambique.

As Darius mentioned, we just entered into force. We signed a \$507 million compact in July 2007.

The program focuses on development of the northern region of the country. That is the region that has really been lagging behind the rest of the country economically.

It is home for half of the population of the country, approximately 10 million people.

The compact includes the priorities, actually, the national priorities for development for the country. The largest project is water and sanitation systems for \$203 million.

And with this project, Mozambique will be able to achieve its Millennium Development goals of providing safe and reliable water and sanitation services to an increased number of population.

And there have also been already some tangible results in terms of policy, policy being a major, major piece of this compact. To remain eligible for MCC funding, the government of Mozambique has passed, in April of this year, the human trafficking law. It was passed by parliament. So this is a major achievement. This law had been stalling for years in parliament in Mozambique.

The government also has passed a new water sector policy and strategy, in August of 2007, for delegated management for the water sector and this will allow for public and private partnership for operation and maintenance of water systems in urban areas.

In the land project, a highly politicized and sensitive issue in Mozambique, as in many other countries, the government has agreed to form a land policy forum that will bring government, ministries, public -- other public institutions, as well as private sector, the academic sector and civil society to the table to talk about regulations and implementation of the law that really restricts land rights and access to land titles.

So this is a very good development in Mozambique.

What we have also been doing is preparing for our procurements and we have right now a very ambitious and aggressive procurement plan and several procurements being launched. So a lot of opportunities happening in Mozambique that we do want you to take notice.

Right now, we have until the end of this year, of December, over \$95 million worth of procurements that we're launching on a daily basis. So we encourage you to look at MCC's Web site and the other Web sites for these opportunities, and we do need good companies, NGOs, to come out and bid for the implementation of these activities.

So what I would say is that in the first year, in conclusion, is that we have established a very good partnership in Mozambique with the government of Mozambique, also with the private sector, getting them engaged in this whole process of implementation and civil society.

And there is a very strong commitment at the highest level of the government. The president and the prime minister are personally involved and engaged and really determined to make this compact a success, and we just cannot underestimate this level of commitment and this partnership that is really required to make this happen.

So we do believe that it will be a successful compact and, at the end of five years, we will have some real tangible results for the Mozambiquans.

Thank you.

RUSSIN: Thanks, Cassia.

I want to talk a little bit about Armenia. And, Cassia, just to follow on, in Armenia, fortunately, we don't have land titling as a problem because the Armenian government, quite strictly, about 15 years ago, divided up the entire country into little plots of land that are about 1.5 hectares in size, which presents interesting other problems, but everybody has a title.

Let me say that today is an important -- this week is an important milestone for the MCA Armenia program. It's two years into its five-year implementation program. So technically, that means that we have only 36 months to complete the remaining portion of the program.

This program is focused on agriculture. The Armenian government, I think quite rightly, identified that it was going to use this \$236 million opportunity to try and improve the condition of those people that lived in the rural communities.

It identified, in the rural communities, the main problem -- or the main economic growth engine was agriculture and the main problems to improving agriculture were primarily infrastructure related.

So their original proposal included rebuilding many of the irrigation schemes that had existed under the Soviet system, much of it which has to be reengineered, rebuilding many of the rural roads that helped farmers bring their product from their farms into the market.

And in addition, because of the Armenian situation, there are many people who live in rural communities who were never trained as farmers. So there's a component of the program that deals with helping individuals who would now be struggling with agriculture as a survival mechanism for last 15 years to learning how to become better farmers, how to use water more effectively, how to use better crops that will bring them more profit.

So I think the fundamental of the program is very sound and quite focused on these key aspects.

Now, in the two years that we have been there, we've done quite a bit of procurement and now construction, and I want to focus on three main areas that have been marked achievements.

First of all, in the irrigation infrastructure, about 90 percent of all the agriculture that's grown in Armenia depends on irrigated water. So in a sense, you can't grow anything effectively in Armenia unless you have manmade irrigation systems.

So in the last year, we completed the first of our infrastructure activities. It's not the whole irrigation piece, but it's a tertiary canal system that affects four different communities and, in essence, this is the cement canal system that brings the water down to the farms.

This is just a small piece of the much larger infrastructure that's going to be built for the agriculture sector, but it's important to have an accomplishment quite early on in the process.

In combination with that comes the process of training the farmers effectively so that they can take advantage of this water and become growers of higher value agriculture and, in a sense, start to pay for the water, so that, ultimately, those funds can be used to sustain the value of the infrastructure in the long time.

So the portion of this program that is devoted to training farmers has now completed the training for about 15,000 farmers. Its target is about 60,000 farmers. But the broad reach of the program has been quite effective and we continue to learn how to improve the training process.

But we are now touching a significant portion of the population. We estimate that there are about 750,000 people that depend on agriculture in the rural community.

The third component and example I wanted to raise was the road construction. In Armenia, other donors, including American-Armenian Diaspora members and the World Bank, have rebuilt much of the main arteries in the country.

What has been lacking has been the construction of the small roads that go from a village to either a main highway or a village to another village or some sort of link.

The Armenian government and the World Bank defined sort of a grid work throughout the country as the lifeline network. And this program is designed to rebuild much of that, in coordination with other donors.

And so far, again, we sort of had an accelerated project and we built and are about ready to complete the first 24 kilometers of new road in a sector just south of Gyumri.

But I think more importantly, we've now started construction on another 273 kilometers. So there is now construction happening literally all over Armenia.

And these three components, I have to emphasize, are also being contributed by other donors. The work that we're doing here builds on the work that USAID has done in Armenia, the work that USDA has done in Armenia, the work that the World Bank and others have done in Armenia.

And I think that's a compliment to the government of Armenia in the sense that it is so committed to trying to focus on improving the rural sector of the community that is actively managing the donor investment in a profitable and sustainable and economic way.

I want to close by saying that, as Darius mentioned, our role in the country is mainly focused on implementation. And in Armenia, we are not without problems in implementation. But the larger cloud hanging over the compact really has to do more with the government's ability to meet the MCC eligibility criteria.

And the government has been struggling now to meet the criteria associated with good governance. We are hopeful, during this period, particularly through the end of this year, that the government will continue to demonstrate strongly that it is committed to these criteria.

And as someone who is mostly focused on implementation, my strategy has always been to focus on getting things done on the ground and make sure that the people see the impact of this large grant by the U.S. citizenship to Armenia as clearly and visibly as possible.

So I'd like to describe our work on the ground as moving 250 miles an hour towards a brick wall with blinders on, in hopes that the wall moves away very, very quickly. I think that I really am quite hopeful and really pleased personally for my opportunity, being able to spend two years in Armenia.

Thanks.

RUDDY: Good morning, everyone. Vince Ruddy, with El Salvador, again.

Before I get started, there's an important introduction that was -- I think we skipped over. Kenny Miller, do you mind standing up back there? Kenny is our deputy resident country director in El Salvador.

RUDDY: OK. El Salvador is one of three MCC compact countries in Latin America, specifically in Central America. The others are, as many of you know, Nicaragua and Honduras.

We happen to be the largest compact and, also, the most recent. Our compact was for \$461 million and it's distributed in three main projects. The first is human development, which includes education, training and some public services.

Second is productive development, about \$87 million there. And the third is road construction or connectivity, as they call it. It's about \$234 million.

As Darius said, we just finished our first anniversary since EIF. We're at 20 percent of the total five-year life span of the compact. I like to think of that as the equivalent of a teenager in the human life cycle. Of course, by using that metaphor, I don't mean to sound paternalistic, that we are caring for teenagers or supervising teenagers in El Salvador, but it does give you a sense of where they are in the overall grand rollout of the implementation of the program.

During the infancy of the program, that's to be the first year, this past year, El Salvador -- the Salvadorans managed to disburse just over \$11 million during the first year, a little bit lower than what they and projected originally, a common speech here of our compacts, but actually, if you look at our history, it's one of the highest amounts of disbursements during the first year, which reflected some of the advantages, some of the techniques they used in El Salvador to get off to a quicker start.

They took advantage of some lessons learned that I'll be talking about shortly.

As Alex said, we are, right now, in the midst of some very important developments. This week, right now, the Salvadorans are signing about \$35 million in new contracts that are geared towards implementation, one in the area of productive development and second in the area of road construction management.

I'm very happy to report, many of you would find this interesting, that these two contracts are actually being won by U.S. firms.

In addition to those \$35 million being signed now, already we had about \$50 million of contract commitments. So again, for the first year, for the infancy, now as we're entering into our adolescence, there seems to be a lot of momentum, a lot of effective groundwork, setting the stage, getting the bases for compact implementation.

I see a lot of -- there's a lot of contractors, a lot of NGOs and people interested in possible work opportunities.

I will also highlight, as my colleagues did, that there are big opportunities right now during the current semester, the six months starting in July, ending this December. They were hoping to launch about \$126 million worth of procurement opportunities that spans the entire range, consulting services, road construction, goods, services, et cetera.

So I won't go into the details of all those opportunities. I don't think I'm allowed to. But those of you who are interested, please check out the Web sites. In fact, all the details, more information about the different elements of our compact in El Salvador, the other Central American countries, as you all know, can be found on the Web site, both MCC's Web site and the accountable entity Web sites in the region.

So I encourage you all to check those out and monitor and track and find out about opportunities as they come up.

I want to say -- I want to talk now just briefly, so we can get to your questions, about the three things that I like most about the way the Salvadorans are implementing this compact.

The first thing I like about it is the way they've implemented, the way they've developed the proposal, it has managed to capture the imagination of the citizens of that country and generate a sense of, you know, dreams can come true.

And I'm referring specifically to one of the components, which some people think is the only component of the compact, which is the road construction. They're building or planning to build a transnational highway across the entire northern part of the country that spans from Guatemala on one side to Honduras to the other.

This is a dream that goes back several decades and that road and the connecting roads are seen as a huge -- there's almost symbolic significance to it. It's seen it as something that's going to unite the country, reconnect the

northern zone of the country to the rest of the country, and, in a way, heal some of the wounds that integrate the country and achieve the unity and the stabilization that El Salvador is still trying to seek 15 years after starting their peace process.

And so it's no surprise to us when we see the news and events about the program are splashed across the front page of the newspaper. It's an advantage, but it's also -- it generates certain pressures and extra workload on us.

That's why I assigned Kenny Miller to be the public relations/communications outreach officer, so he can deal with all the reporters and press.

But it is a big deal. Every time the report card comes out on indicator performance, it's front page news and the Salvadorans get grilled and we get grilled and everybody wants to know how they're doing on their performance indicators, which shows how the incentive effect and the policy indicator framework -- I think in El Salvador, you have a laboratory that shows the power of that tool and how it keeps going, even after the become eligible.

The second thing I really like about the way the Salvadorans are managing this program is in our early years, we really benefited -- we were sort of riding on the coattails of Armenia, other countries, other compact countries, in the sense that they got -- they started off before a lot of these things were defined and we've been able to ride on their coattails and take advantage of a lot of the lessons learned.

We've had conferences like this in the past and at each of these conferences, we share our insight and experience and advice and suggestions. And the good news is, as a young organization, the MCC has been able to take advantage of that advice and quickly change, adopt, reform certain things so that we could actually make things work better and accelerate the implementation and get the impact and the poverty reduction that we're looking for.

One example of lessons learned, I mean, all my colleagues said, "Please, please, please, do not jump into entry into force like we did." You sign the compact and that's the international treaty, but there comes a point where you actually declare entry into force, all the papers are done, and the five-year clock starts ticking.

At the beginning stage of MCC, there's a lot of pressure to enter into force and get the major disbursements flowing and countries found that that generated a lot of expectations.

Unfortunately, it takes time to ramp up and get that capacity where you're ready to actually get things started. So we waited 9.5 months. I now see countries waiting up to a year or more between compact signature and entry into force.

I think it's a good idea. I think it's a very good idea to take advantage of that initial phase to get everything set up, get everything prepared.

Another key thing that Salvadorans did in terms of lessons learned is -- we learned from this from our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters. We didn't wait or the El Salvadorans really didn't wait for full blown procurements to wind themselves down before launching certain pilot activities.

So we've been able to get a number of pilots, some scholarship programs, some productive development pilots. We looked at a number of organizations, firms and NGOs already doing activities and were able to quickly roll out some pilot activities.

And what those did, in addition to generating some early impacts, some early wins and a sense of momentum, it really -- again, in country, we're now generating lessons learned and learning from these early pilot activities, so that the full blown activities can be tweaked and adjusted to build on that experience.

Finally, the third thing I really like about the Salvadoran approach to compact implementation is that there's a keen sense, the Salvadorans have a keen sense of participation, of competition, and of accountability.

Many of you know that the consultative process before the compact was even signed included over 2,000 stakeholders, over 53 different meetings throughout the country to get buy-in and inputs into the compact design.

That consultative process not only included Salvadorans and El Salvador, but Salvadorans living abroad. As most of you know, there is a large Salvadoran community here in Washington, in Los Angeles, in New York, in other cities, in the states and otherwise, and that Diaspora community, as it is in the case in other countries, like Cape Verde, makes a big difference and changes the development dynamic.

So including them and having consultative events in those major cities has really helped to contribute to, I think, a very effective design and greater potential for the public investment in the compact to be leveraged by private investment from this Diaspora community.

Now, as we're in implementation, the consultative process continues full swing. We have monthly meetings with mayors. We have regular meetings with NGOs and other civil society groups, again, not just nationally, but internationally.

I just ran into one of our friends from Oxfam who gave me this copy of a report they just did. It's called "Smart Development and Practice" by Oxfam.

Raquel, where are you? Back there. Raquel, I promised to give this plug for your report. It's great.

They came down and kind of took a look not just at MCC, but USAID and other programs and really said some insightful things about how things are starting up in El Salvador.

So, Raquel, thanks for the good report.

The sense of competition, I mean, we are actually -- when we -- because we have other countries ahead of us, we're able to compare El Salvador to how Armenia or the other African countries have done.

And I want to tell you something. When you take a Central American country, like you talk El Salvador and you tell them, "You know, you're doing OK, but there's four African countries that are kind of ahead of you right now on this indicator" or whatever it is, it really gets their attention.

And so there's competition internally, but there's also international competition and having a number of compact countries moving now -- how many do you have now, Darius? Is it 16 or 17? I've lost track.

Having that diversity and being able to share information across countries really helps generate a sense of competition.

So I'll finish with that. I think your questions are more important than our presentations.

Thanks.

MANS: Thank you very much.

Are there any questions for our panel members?

QUESTION: Cassia, this question is addressed to you. I was in Mozambique last year, when Laura Bush was there to announce the grant, conducting data collection for a feasibility study to build an airport in northern Mozambique.

We selected the Nacala Air Force Base, which the government has agreed to give to the airport, to Mozambique, for upgrade. And the airport is in bad shape, but it's a beautiful airport, beautiful site, beautiful beaches, great potential for tourism.

Georgetown University has been conducting some tourism and development studies for northern Mozambique. And so this is a marginal project, because, you know, you've got to have tourism, you've got to have traffic, you've got to have motels, and so on and so forth.

Are there any possible ways that this fund can be used to lay a little concrete and asphalt for access roads, parking, and overlay the runways in your program? This would be really beneficial to the entire region.

We have a representative going over there on October 13. He'd be glad to meet with you, meet with the minister of transportation, who has approved the project or Airport Mozambique, to work out some details on this, if it's possible.

MANS: I would suggest that we take two more questions.

QUESTION: Morning. I'm Amin Samamin (ph) with the "Armenian Reporter." A question for Mr. Russin. It's actually three questions, but two simple ones.

What is the latest dollar figure in terms of disbursements and how devaluation has impacted the overall scope of the program. And also, you mentioned the brick wall. From my understanding, there won't be any elections in Armenia until 2012, when the program should be completed.

And the elections are typically the times when the scandal happens and the officials in various capitals become really concerned.

What do you anticipate in terms of either negative or positive? What kind of positive outcome or feedback from the government are you expecting for that brick wall to disappear?

MANS: Any other questions? I see one here against the wall.

QUESTION: Hi, Nora O'Connell, Women Thrive Worldwide.

And we were recently very pleased to give Ambassador Danilovich, as well as the MCA Nicaragua and a local NGO in Nicaragua, the Consejo de Mujeres de Occidente, the Partnerships for Women to Thrive Award at our 10th anniversary celebration for the incredible commitment the MCA has shown and all of the partners have really shown in integrating gender into their work and the impact it'll have on women on the ground in Nicaragua.

Matt Bohn (ph), who was the RCD, played a very important role in making that happen. And I would be really interested in hearing from the RCDs on the panel how integrating gender has impacted your work both in the procurement phase, as well as in the implementation phase, and changed the work you're doing and what you think will be the impacts of your compacts.

Thank you.

MANS: Good. With that first round of questions, let me turn to the panel.

CARVALHO-PACHECO: Thank you. Thank you, Albert, for your interest in Mozambique. And I fully agree, northern Mozambique just has beautiful beaches and the potential for tourism development is just tremendous.

Tourism has been growing at 20 percent a year and it's a huge potential for employment generation in that part of the country.

The Mozambique compact is defined, as is in the compact agreement, and our compact that now we have entered into force is fully committed for the next five years.

And this compact was the result of a consultative process that was done over a period of time prior to compact signature by the government of Mozambique, with the private sector, led by CTA, the association of private sector, and civil society, and it does reflect the priorities that were put forward to MCC for funding.

Having said that, there are other donors that I'm sure would be interested in the Nacala airport.

The compact, however, will contribute to tourism development in many other ways, through the water and sanitation systems that we're doing in Nacala. We're rehabilitating the Nacala dam and to increase the connectivity of water to many households and businesses, including hotels, tourist hotels and many other establishments that serve the tourists in that region.

And also, the roads, we're improving a lot of the roads in that region. So all of those things contribute, in my view, to the tourism development.

But unfortunately, our program is defined and, actually, I think that's one of the benefits of MCC, so the country can count on these investments for the next five years and having these results as we've agreed in the compact.

MANS: Thank you, Cassia.

Alex and Armenia, followed by Vince on the agenda.

RUSSIN: Thanks. Just to quickly answer the Armenia question. The disbursements have been about \$20 million so far and there's a further request for about \$4.75 million, which we're considering at the moment, through our normal disbursement process.

That leaves us with a big chunk of money to look forward to disbursing in the next three years. And if you follow out the scheme of the program, it would make sense, because that's when most of the construction takes place.

In terms of the challenges caused by the devaluation of the U.S. dollar, there's no question that the program is smaller in terms of physical construction today than it was when it was originally proposed.

And just to give an example, the dollar's devalue into the Armenia dram or, I should say, the Armenia dram has appreciated since the economy is growing so rapidly, the dollar is devaluated by about 50 percent since 2003-2004, when the original cost projections were made, and there's been somewhat of a construction boom in Armenia.

So the local inflation has driven up the cost of construction, as well.

But the net effect, in terms of an example, is that while the compact said we were going to try to build about 900 kilometers worth of roads, if we look at it today, and assuming the dollar doesn't re-value, we'd be building about 350 kilometers worth of roads.

Now, those roads are all over the country and the roads that we focus on are the ones that have the highest economic rate of return. So it's an even disbursement of the construction.

Finally, with regard to the political situation, you're correct, there are no elections, no presidential or parliamentary elections that are taking place for a few years. There are local elections and others.

But I think that the broader political issue in Armenia is essentially how will this new president and his cabinet, which has said a lot of the right things with regard to reform in Armenia, with regard to cleaning up different agencies in the government -- how will it actually put those words into practice and demonstrate, in a sort of clear and transparent way, not just to the U.S. government, but to the broader civil society, that it is serious about sort of pushing forward the sorts of good governance changes.

It's a challenge and I'm very hopeful that they can do it.

Thanks.

RUDDY: I'm going to try to address the gender integration question. First of all, Nora, thank you very much for mentioning that prize.

Our Nicaraguan colleagues down in Central America deserve congratulations for being featured that way and I think that that prize, that award, that recognition is a great idea and it's going to give everyone, I think, an incentive to strive to meet the highest standard set by our Nicaraguan colleagues.

I know Matt Bohn got the ball rolling. The current RCD, Steve Marma, and the deputy, Amy, are carrying on that tradition now.

I can talk a little bit about El Salvador, to use some examples. I think this is happening at two different levels, Nora. We're doing integration within MCC, maybe more focused here in Washington, where we look across all of our countries, and we're also promoting this more at the country level, which I think was the focus of your question.

You probably know about this, but for the benefit of the other audience members, MCC is looking now across countries and doing a sort of research diagnostic of different gender experiences, trying to catalog different best practices and lessons learned, and that information is being distributed to us and to our accountable entities, and I think that's a very valuable thing.

I don't know if Jenny Seitz is here, but she sort of, along with some support people from her group and some consultants, has led that and I think it's been very effective.

I understand the reports are due to come out any time now.

At the country level, I'll give you just one example. I mean, we take the gender and overall environment and social assessment requirements of the compact very seriously. This has to do, for example, with our education and training component.

When the compact was signed, that program, that activity wasn't completely fleshed out and finalized in terms of design. So a technical assistant and some consultants had come in to support and help do that, to finish that work, now that we're moving into implementation.

And one of the things they've done is to do a comprehensive gender diagnostic throughout the northern zone, with a focus on gender, but really the findings of this study have relevance implications across the board in all of our activities.

The report that has been finished now has very interesting and important conclusions and recommendations that are now directly being incorporated into the terms of reference, into the design and the implementation documents that will be used for procurement and for overall program management.

So I would say that's just one example. It's not just happening in education and training. It's happening in our other components.

I'll give you just one final vignette, just to give you an idea of how gender is really being taken seriously.

When we launched our pilot scholarship program back in, I guess, January or February of this year, because it was a real rush and we didn't have too much time, we only were able to award about -- I think it was 110 scholarships to different youth and disadvantaged people in the northern zone.

Among them were many young ladies, many girls, and it was interesting. We have a board of directors for MCA El Salvador, Full Millennial, that includes several women, including the private sector representative, Mana Alfado (ph), who is a former president of the chamber of commerce in El Salvador and a very active exporter, private sector representative, and, obviously, she's a woman.

During a board meeting, when the board was discussing this pilot program, Mana Alfado (ph) said, "You know, we're having this big event and we brought in" -- who was the woman, Kenny, that brought this event? It was a leader. I'm trying to remember her name.

Anyway, there's a major figure, a major woman who is successful in business who was leading this conference on opportunities for women in business, young entrepreneurs, et cetera.

And the board member said -- she's a key speaker -- she said, "I can get tickets for some of these scholarship students." And the next thing you knew, a small group, about, I would say, 15-20 of the young girls in the scholar-

ship programs came down to El Salvador to the hotel, Sheraton, whatever it was, and they participated in this conference.

And just afterwards, we had a little wrap-up meeting at the offices of the accountable entity to hear what the young girls, the scholarship recipients, thought about it and it was one of those -- I mean, tears were coming to people's eyes when these people talked about this opportunity and how much they appreciated it and how much it meant to them to be inspired to have these mentors, these women leaders, business leaders to give them a sense of inspiration and a sense of confidence that they could do the same thing.

So there's all kinds of synergies when you integrate activities, especially when you have the representation on the board not just of the government, but of the civil society groups, the private sector groups, including gender.

So far, so good. We're going to try to strive and win the award next year, hopefully.

MANS: Thank you very much. I know there are lots of questions that people have for individual RCDs. I'd like to leave some time so that our guests can engage directly with the RCDs and DRCDs from the specific countries or regions.

I invite the RCDs and the DRCDs to move to the areas where you see the plaques by region. And for those of you who have interest in particular countries in that part of the world, you'll find them there to address any questions that you may have.

Please feel free to stay until 10 o'clock. The RCDs and DRCDs have to get back to work in boot camp, the training sessions that we have that will start next door at 10:15.

Many thanks to our panel for presenting and thank you again for coming.

Also, on our Web site, in the coming days, a transcript from today's event will be posted for your reference, should you have missed anything today.

Again, many thanks for coming.

END