

# Event: Gender Equality for International Development Effectiveness

## Speakers:

Daniel W. Yohannes, Chief Executive Officer  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

Cassandra Q. Butts, Senior Advisor  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Fatimata Yanta, Student  
MCC Bright II Schools Program, Burkina Faso

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey  
United States Representative

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Ritu Sharma, Co-Founder and President  
Women Thrive Worldwide

Madeleine Ouangraoua Soro, Member, Board Of Directors  
Millennium Challenge Account - Burkina Faso

Virginia Seitz, Senior Director For Social and Gender Assessment  
Millennium Challenge Corporation

C. BUTTS: Welcome.

We still have a few people streaming in, but we will close the door and get started.

My name is Cassandra Butts. I am the senior advisor at the Millennium Challenge Corporation. And I want to welcome you to our event today.

It is fitting that we would be talking about gender integration and international development this week, as we are celebrating this week the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

And while MCC is only seven years old, we have incorporated gender integration into our work from fairly early on in our organization's existence.

And we've done so because we understand that gender integration is essential to effective development assistance and poverty alleviation in developing countries. And we know that unless women and men are allowed to equally participate in their economies, we will not be able to alleviate poverty. So that is then the work of MCC from very early on in our existence.

And so we're pleased to be here today—and we'll talk about those issues during the panel discussion in more length.

But I want to start the discussion, actually, by introducing our CEO at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Daniel Yohannes.

Daniel comes to us from a storied career in the private sector as a banker. And he has brought to the work of MCC and his leadership at MCC those private sector sensibilities that have led us in our work in a very strategic direction.

And we are here today because Daniel Yohannes has identified gender integration as a priority at MCC.

And I'm pleased to introduce Daniel Yohannes.

(APPLAUSE)

YOHANNES: Good afternoon.

Thank you, Cassandra, for your introduction and for all the good works you do on behalf of the Millennium Challenge Corporation on this important subject.

I want to thank Senator Cardin for joining us today. He has shown a strong leadership on the issue of gender equality. And I know he'll continue to do so as the new chairman of the Subcommittee on International Development and Foreign Assistance.

We're also honored to have the presence of Senator Jeanne Shaheen and Congresswoman Nita Lowey, who are champions of gender equality here at home and around the world.

I should mention that Senators Cardin and Shaheen recently teamed up with Senators Collins and Snowe to introduce a resolution in honor of International Women's Day.

Thank you both for your support on this important issue, and MCC looks forward to working with you.

Gender equality is a priority at MCC. We can only achieve economic prosperity when men and women are equal champions of their development.

At MCC, we are committed to make sure that our investments are benefiting both men and women equally. And we have great results—results from major policy reforms that have been made in our partner countries, to major results in economic gains made by women in many of our partner countries.

I have seen the results. I went to Honduras. I spoke to those women that were trained by MCC. I have seen and told of the income they're making as a result of our training program.

I was in El Salvador; I spent some time with a number of those women that were assisted by our program. And they are doing extremely well.

I was in Georgia last October. I met with a number of women entrepreneurs that were assisted by MCC. And they also told me they're doing extremely well.

So we have a lot of work to do, but we are extremely encouraged with the progress.

One of the major constraints to growth is the lack of access to education for girls. And we know why. Because in many of the poorest countries girls are expected to stay home, work at home, attend to the family, attend to the siblings. And usually it's the girls who are leaving home, walking anywhere from one hour to seven hours a day to bring water to the family household. And the same story can be repeated many, many times in many of the developing countries.

Today I have one successful story that I'd like to share with you—a result that we achieved in partnership with Burkina Faso. We partnered with that country on the BRIGHT Program. The program is intended to increase girls' enrollment and completion rate.

For this program, 132 schools were built in the areas with the lowest attendance rates for girls.

I am very proud to tell you that today we have more girls in that program than boys. Usually, it's 95 percent boys and 5 percent girls, but in this case it's 55 percent girls and probably 45 percent boys.

And the girls are not only attending, but they're also completing sixth-grade education. In fact, the program was so successful that they are planning to expand to include junior high to go up to ninth grade.

And today we have two outstanding girls who have traveled all the way from Burkina Faso. Dori Diallo—where are you, Dori?—and Fatimata. They were here, so they're sitting somewhere.

(LAUGHTER)

In the back? All right.

Two outstanding girls that participated in the Women's International Day last Tuesday. In fact, one of them had the opportunity to introduce the First Lady.

I've heard their stories. Dori told me that before she started going to the newly constructed school, she was walking at least four hours a day to go to the nearest elementary school. Today, she told me she only walks about 40 minutes. Still long by American standards, but for her it is a tremendous accomplishment.

Fatimata, on the other hand, she told me her walk is only 30 minutes. She is lucky. But, nevertheless, again, by our standards, it's still a very long walk.

But they both want to become doctors.

And, listen, they really touched my heart and reinforced my commitment to do more for women in many of the developing countries.

So I am very happy they're here, and wish them all the best.

Now, this is going to be a great conversation. And at MCC we're always looking forward to get new ideas in terms of how we can make sure that we continue to stay on the cutting edge in gender integration. So I'm looking forward for our conversations.

With that, I'd like to invite Senator Cardin to the podium, who has been a major supporter.

Let's give him a big hand.

(APPLAUSE)

CARDIN: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Well, first, to Mr. Yohannes, thank you very much for your public service and your great leadership at the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

And we do now have our international guests that are here. Please give them a round of applause.

(APPLAUSE)

We talk a lot about the numbers of people who are suffering around the world, the number of people that we affect, but until you put a face on it and you realize that these are real people whose lives have been changed as a result of our efforts, it's hard to connect just what a difference we make.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation is one of the proud moments in recent times in America's commitment to help build a better world, to deal with international poverty.

About a year, year and a half ago, I was in Morocco and saw the Peace Corps volunteers, which was another initiative in a different generation.

And the reason I mentioned that, Daniel, is that I went to rural Morocco, and our Peace Corps volunteers were working with women to empower them economically, so that they could have a livelihood from the work that they did.

They did work; they just weren't getting paid for it. And the Peace Corps helped them establish a way where they could get the benefits of their own economic work.

So we have a proud history in America of dealing with world poverty issues, and the MCC is just the latest chapter, but one that we're extremely proud of.

Now, let me tell you, your timing couldn't be better. We're on the verge of trying to figure out how we're going to keep the government here in America moving forward.

(LAUGHTER)

If you came next week, it's possible, or the week after, that the government would be closed, so we couldn't even offer you a building. We're not sure. We hope to avoid that.

But I really do think it's important that we talk about what this nation is about.

Our international development assistance is a very small part of our federal budget, a very small part. It is included under the discretionary domestic spending—and I agree with Secretary of State Clinton that it should be part of our national security budget, because it very much affects national security.

We just completed a budget hearing—I am a member of the Senate Budget Committee—and we were questioning Assistant Secretary Nides as to the budget. And he reminds us that that “one percent” that we talk about includes all of our foreign programs, including our embassies.

And when you look at our international development assistance and our humanitarian programs, they are far, far less than one percent of the federal budget.

The bottom line is, we cannot balance the problems that we have with our budget and dealing with international assistance, or even dealing with discretionary domestic spending. We’ve got to expand the debate, and we need to balance the budget. But we need to look at all aspects of the budgets, including revenues and entitlements.

And that’s going to be, I hope, a message that all of us carry forward, because I think it’s vitally important that we maintain and expand our international involvement.

By the way, it’s not only the right thing to do with being part of the international community to deal with poverty, it’s also in our national security interests to deal with nations—with allowing nations to be able to have good governance by economic progress that makes it safer for us, more stable societies, and less stress on our military involvement.

So I first want to acknowledge, as Daniel did, this is the 100th anniversary of the International Women’s Day. And I think it’s appropriate that the Millennium Challenge Corporation is part of the celebration. Because the Millennium Challenge Corporation knows that for it to meet its charge of doing something about poverty internationally that it must empower women. And women’s equality issues are critically interwoven into the goal of the MCC to have an impact on global poverty.

If women are poor, a community is going to be poor. There’s a direct relationship. Women invest more in food, clean water, education and health care than men. That’s a fact. We know that. They are more attentive to the future growth of their family and their community.

Empowering women will help us immensely to fight poverty. Empowering women gives us a much better chance of good governance. Empowering women provides political stability.

That’s why gender equality must be a central theme of our involvement internationally. And the Millennium Challenge Corporation understands this and has integrated gender equality into its central mission.

I am honored to chair the subcommittee on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that deals with international development. And I want to tell you, I think the size of our involvement internationally is very modest, and if anything, should grow and certainly shouldn’t be made smaller. Having said that, there needs to be accountability in every dollar we spend, every single dollar we spend.

And there are examples where U.S. foreign aid has fallen into the wrong hands. And we many times have to choose between countries that are strategically important to us and dealing with a country that we disagree with their fundamental principles.

But we must have zero tolerance—that any involvement in any country, that the United States insists upon good governance, that our funds will be used for their intended purpose, and will not be used to finance corruption. And we need to insist that in every country we deal with that they have an active program to deal with gender equality.

Yesterday, I had a chance to talk to our director of USAID about the circumstances in Afghanistan and other places in the world. I am convinced that that is part and fundamental to our principles to make sure that we have gender equality.

I also wear a second hat, in that I chair the Senate Committee on OSCE, the Helsinki Commission. The Helsinki Commission is best known for its human rights. I agree with Secretary Clinton when she says that women's rights are human rights.

And on the Helsinki Commission, we have made gender issues critically important. Because we know if we're going to carry out our fundamental missions—and at the Helsinki Commission we have three fundamental issues. Best known for human rights, but also economic stability and our international security issues. All three are baskets within Helsinki. But we know you can't do one without the other. You can't have political stability without economic stability. You can't have economic stability without human rights being respected.

So we have made women's rights a critically important part because we believe you cannot have human rights unless you have gender equality.

Violence against women is one of the most critical issues that we need to fight internationally. And we have made that a top priority of our efforts. The International Violence Against Women Act, I hope, will be passed by the Congress—and I'm a proud co-sponsor of that bill.

Let me also mention trafficking. The United States has taken an international role on putting the spotlight on how well countries deal with trafficking.

Trafficking affects girls, it affects young women, it affects boys and men. Women are generally the victims of trafficking. There are origin countries that we all scream and holler about, but there's also destination countries and transport countries that need to do a better job in stopping this modern-day slavery that robs a person of their future and robs a community of their economic potential.

All that needs to be front and center, which brings me to you being here today. You have, I think, an excellent panel that will deal with these issues, and I thank you for participating.

I tell you—I know that we've got a lot of different groups that are represented. My staff told me that there's groups from the International Center for Research on Women, Women Thrive Worldwide, Family Violence Prevention Fund, Amnesty International, Women for Women International, CARE, and the list goes on and on and on. This gives me hope for our future. Your presence today gives me hope for our future, your participation in this program.

So I'm optimistic that the Millennium Challenge Corporation will make a difference in elevating more than just the two girls that are with us today, but a new generation that will have opportunities that the current generation does not have as a result of your efforts and your involvement personally in this issue, as well as your political involvement to make sure we have the right policies in order to succeed.

I have two granddaughters. I have a very vested interest in this. And I know that their future is much better because of your participation.

Congratulations, and thank you for being here.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you to Senator Cardin for his support.

I'll tell you, I actually—in a former life I actually worked as a staffer in the House of Representatives, which is the first time that I met Senator Cardin. And we are, you know, as someone who worked on the House side, it's just so wonderful to see him here in the Senate as a champion of our work.

We are waiting for Senator Shaheen and also Congresswoman Lowey to join us, so they will be coming. As you can appreciate, the schedules are such that they make it when they can. They're obviously doing the business of representing their constituents here, and so they will—they will be here.

But I thought that it would be a good idea, actually, to bring one of the young women who has come to visit us from Burkina to give a few remarks. And we're mixing up the program a bit, so—our interpreter has to come up.

But Fatimata, would you—do you want to come up?

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Can I just say that we're so pleased to have Fatimata. And we worked over the past couple of weeks to ensure that they, Fatimata and Aissatou would be able to visit us this week. And we were doing all this frantic work—and this was the first time that Fatimata and Aissatou have actually visited the U.S., but also the first time they've been outside of their villages in Burkina.

And so we were working frantically with our country team in Burkina, and so we knew that they were in Ouagadougou, but we hadn't spoken to them yet. And so on the last day we were able to speak to them and hear their voices, and they gave us such a sense of reassurance that they were going to be excellent representatives for Burkina, but also for our work in Burkina for the MCC.

So Fatimata?

YANTA (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): My name is Fatimata Yanta. I come from a small village named Kouroumani and go to the BRIGHT school there.

I come from a very big family, and have five sisters and ten brothers. I'm twelve years old.

Before the BRIGHT school, very few girls went to school because the only school in the area was too far away. To walk there from my house takes almost two hours.

Also, before the BRIGHT school, parents wanted to keep all the girls at home to help with the work. Our mothers work very hard. They need help making food, working in the fields, getting water from the well, getting wood for cooking, cleaning, watching the little children, keeping the sheep and the goats.

Also, some parents want their daughters to get married quickly, and they think if they go to school it will take too long.

My father saw the masons, and asked me what they were building. I told him I didn't know.

But he knew. He said it was a school. He said, "When they're done building the school, I want you to go there, because even though I can't read, I want you to be able to read."

I'm now in the sixth year at school. I have always been first in my class, and do better than all the boys.

(LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE)

I'm still responsible for watching some of the little children, but at the BRIGHT School I can take them to the *busingo* [day care] so I can attend class.

When I grow up I want to be a teacher or a doctor. In my village there's no doctor, and when we are sick, we just stay sick. If I can be a doctor one day, I'll be able to treat all the sick people.

I wish all the girls in Burkina could go to school like me.

Thank you, America, for the BRIGHT schools. And please keep helping us. Today I speak for all the girls in Burkina who are thirsty to learn and serve our country, and struggle against poverty.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you. Thank you so much, Fatimata.

And again, she represents us so well.

We have been joined by our other guests. And I believe the order will—we'll take Senator Shaheen first.

I'm very pleased to introduce the senior senator from the state of New Hampshire, Jeanne Shaheen. She is a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, and has been a big supporter of our work and issues concerning women and girls internationally.

Senator Jeanne Shaheen?

(APPLAUSE)

SHAHEEN: Thank you all very much.

You know, one thing you learn very early in politics is that you never want to follow bright young women.

(LAUGHTER)

Children, puppies, none of that. You always want to go later.

I want to thank MCC, and Mr. Yohannes for all of your work, for convening this wonderful event and for what you do on a daily basis. Thank you very much.

I have, for two years now, been the sponsor of the resolution in the Senate to recognize International Women's Day. And I have to say I'm thrilled that this year we actually got it through. So, hopefully, that's a sign of positive progress. And we got it through with bipartisan support. I was pleased to be joined by Senators Cardin, who I think was just here, Snowe and Collins.

You know, International Women's Day is a day to honor women around the world and to recognize the contributions that women make. I'm sure, like all of you, we have been enthralled and watched with great anticipation the events that are unfolding in the Middle East.

And for me, one of the exciting things about watching all of the scenes from Egypt and from Tunisia was watching the role of women in those demonstrations which primarily, until Libya, had been peaceful.

And it's very frustrating now to see in Egypt, for example, that even though women were such a huge part of those demonstrations and that revolution, that now they're being denied access to the committee that's working on the constitution to the ruling groups who are thinking about what governing is going to be like in Egypt.

And so the work that MCC is doing, the lead that and the involvement that we have here in the United States, to point out how important women are and the contributions of women are in the world, I think, is as important today, despite the progress, as it was decades ago.

And, you know, Secretary Clinton said that women and girls are one of the world's greatest untapped resources. Investing in women is one of the best investments that we have, and we all know that. That's why we're here.

But as we think about the challenges we have here in the United States, with declining revenues and some of our budget challenges, one of the things we've got to do is to think about how we can do better with less.

And I think that's a great argument for us to be making about investing in women. Because as we think about where we can put our dollars in development and see the greatest return, one of the things we know is that investing in women is one of those places. Because a woman even with just one year of school is going to be able to do a better job of taking care of her family and contributing back to her community.

And we saw and heard so eloquently the comments of our previous speaker talking about her family and what a difference the school was going to make in her family.

Well, for all of those people who don't appreciate what a difference the contributions to women internationally and in development make, that economic argument, I think, is one of the best. That even if you don't do it because it's the right thing to do that, then you ought to do it because it's the smart thing to do, because it's the economic thing to do.

You know, one of my favorite facts—I was looking at some of the information that we went through to put together the resolution on International Women's Day, and the one that was my favorite is that as women we make up half of the world's population, we do 70 percent of the work, we make ten percent of the income, and we own one percent of the property.

Now, if that's not a message for why this is an investment that makes sense, I don't know what is.

So I'm delighted to be here to support the work that you all are doing to try and help carry that message in Congress and here as we think about what we need to do to make these investments to continue the progress for women and girls around the world.

So again, thank you all very much for everything that you do, and I look forward to continuing to with you.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Now I'm very pleased to introduce someone who, in this world and in our work doesn't really need an introduction because she has been such a champion of our work. I mentioned to the audience, Congresswoman Lowey, that I used to work on the House side. And so I have watched Congresswoman Lowey.

And I am incredibly pleased to be at MCC, where actually I can benefit from her advocacy and all the hard work that she's doing. As the ranking member of the Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations of the Appropriations Committee on the House side, she has been such a champion for MCC. And we are incredibly pleased to have her here today.

Congresswoman Nita Lowey?

(APPLAUSE)

LOWEY: Thank you so much, Cassandra.

What a pleasure to be here with you and our CEO, Mr. Yohannes—thank you. It's always a pleasure for me to join you and listen to you, and learn from you, and especially this week.

I don't know how many of you attended the ceremony at the State Department. Did anybody go over to celebrate Women's International Day? But any event, what was so extraordinary to me—to meet these women such as the president of Kyrgyzstan, or an amazing woman, Ms. Bashir from Afghanistan, I think, and someone else from Pakistan.

I immediately spoke to my daughters afterward and said, "I'm so privileged to be in a position," it was better being the chair, Cassandra...

(LAUGHTER)

... when we were in the majority—but, actually, there's a wonderful woman chair, and I am now the ranking member. And I think it's the only committee where there are two women, chair and ranking.

And when I was chair, I worked very closely with her when she was ranking, and now it's the same in reverse. It may be the only example of bipartisanship these days.

(LAUGHTER)

But before I digress, I just want to tell you, as I heard these amazing women's stories from Pakistan, Afghanistan, from Kyrgyzstan—there were about a dozen women from all over the world. And I called my daughters and I spoke to one of my female grandchildren, and I said, "You know, I feel I wake up every day, and I have an honor and a privilege to do good things, but these women are so creative, so strong, so determined so courageous. They risk their lives in many of these countries everyday to make changes."

I mean, a first—the first woman to get a divorce in Pakistan. You can just imagine. An assistant attorney general in Mexico, with the corruption that's going on there—you can just imagine the strength that it takes.

So I just want to tell you that I am thrilled to be able to participate in some way to strengthen the MCC. And I understand—just raise your hand—I'm sorry I missed you if you spoke, the students here today from the BRIGHT schools in Burkina Faso.

Wow. You're not only smart, but you're beautiful and elegant.

(LAUGHTER)

Good luck to you.

(APPLAUSE)

And I can remember stories about that too. I remember arriving in Tanzania, and I met with a—oh, Tanzania. I met with an amazing young woman who ran away from home—this is about six, seven years ago. I forgot her name. She ran right away from home to get an education three times, and every time she was brought home. The last time, her parents agreed on the education—this was in Arusha. And she came back, and she was welcomed back.

But instead of going off to someplace else and being a doctor, a lawyer, a professor, she went back to work in her community. And I was so impressed with this woman, and I asked to meet just not with women, but with the men, as well.

And I said through an interpreter—some understood. I said, “Look, I’m a member of Congress, I’m a mother, I’m a grandmother, and I even cook for my husband once in a while,”—not so much anymore.

(LAUGHTER)

So as I spoke to the men, I said, “You can have women be educated, have careers, and also take care of the family too. One doesn’t necessarily preclude the other.”

Or I also remember in Tanzania visiting a school; 100 girls, one teacher. I could barely find a book. And these girls walked to school two hours every day; two hours home. Sometimes they were lucky to get a bowl of porridge; and sometimes they weren’t so lucky.

And I came back and I said, “At all of these schools, we need comprehensive programs. We need school lunch programs. We need clean water. And these schools must be the center of a community.”

And to me, that’s the model. Because if a young girl—and boys too—go to school, and if it’s in a community, and you’re providing jobs and you’re providing clean water, and the parents, who may never have had the opportunity to get an education, can also be part of literacy programs, and you have health programs, to me this is the way we have to do things.

And I’m trying—it’s not easy. It’s hard finding all of the money, but this is what I’m trying to do.

And by the way, at that school in Arusha, when I asked these girls—I remember the school, one teacher, no books—I said, “So, what do you want to be?”

“A doctor.” “A lawyer.”

I said to the people with me, you hardly can believe that these young girls who come to this school with almost nothing have dreams.

And I also remember flying, seven flights going up to Dadar in Pakistan. If you ever go to Dadar in Pakistan, you’ll see my name on a plaque—when we dedicated a school in Dadar.

And, again, these girls had never been out of this region. It was right after the earthquake. And the United States had some friends at that point in Pakistan. And we dedicated this school, which we repaired after the earthquake. And one said, “Can you send us a science teacher? Can you send us computers?”

So go forth, young women. I don’t know what you’re going to do with your lives, but I know you will do really good things.

So for me, providing young girls the tools to become active players is really essential. And it makes good business sense. And what you are doing at the MCC has an important impact.

From my perspective it will be impossible for developing countries to progress toward economic stability if they leave half of their populations behind.

We know that educated young women have fewer and healthier children. We know that when women are given opportunities to participate in the economy, their children go to school and their families thrive.

We know that a small-business loan can help jumpstart a woman's life, giving her self-confidence, power, and a say in what happens inside and outside her home.

I'm looking at this lovely woman from (inaudible). I remember the cheese factory that women started, and they suddenly stood taller and were stronger, as they didn't have to take directions. They could make their own decisions about life. And all their money went into the community and helping their families.

So I really believe that in many ways investments in women are the epitome of good development practices. Because they build the wealth, helping the poorest of the poor. They help women and their whole family break the cycle of poverty.

And for that reason I've offered the Global Resource and Opportunity for Women to Thrive Act. I'm going to introduce it again later this year.

The bill aims to give women the tools they need to thrive, including increased access to banking and financial services, training opportunities, technology. It also instructs the Department of State and USAID to implement policies that promote private property rights and job opportunities for women, and support for organizations that address the needs of women and girls.

So I just wanted to stop by to congratulate the MCC. Congratulations for your work in Burkina Faso and elsewhere. And I hope you'll keep gender equality at the top of your priority list for future projects.

(APPLAUSE)

LOWEY: (OFF-MIKE) And these young women I know will go back and learn English when they go back to Burkina Faso.

(LAUGHTER)

If my four-year-old can do it, you can do it too.

Have a great day.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you to Congresswoman Lowey.

MCC is incredibly fortunate in that we are the product of bipartisan support, and we continue to exist because of the bipartisan support that we receive.

And—the current chair of the subcommittee, Congresswoman Kay Granger, has also been a champion of ours. But so I am, I guess, living a little in the past in referencing Congresswoman Lowey as the chair, but a great supporter.

So we're going to bring the panel up. And we are running a little behind. Not surprising when you've got so many wonderful people who want to come and say great things about the work that we're doing. We're going to bring the panel up.

Ritu? Madame? Ginny? And I actually—we can probably just give remarks from the table.

OK. You have in your packets bios, and so I won't go through the illustrious careers of the women who are at the table. But I will say just that we are incredibly fortunate to have such a great group of experts to talk to us about the importance of gender integration and international development assistance.

And I will actually start with my colleague, Ginny Seitz, on the end. Ginny is actually our practice lead for our Social and Gender Assessment Practice Group at MCC. And she has been at MCC since—almost—for five and a half years almost. MCC's been around for seven years, so Ginny has been with the agency for obviously a long time in MCC years.

And she has been such a stalwart of our work on social and gender assessment. And we would not be where we are in what we've been able to accomplish but for Ginny's persistence. And she is—you know, she has been an incredible help to me in thinking through these issues and leading us in how we should be doing our operations to successfully integrate gender into our work at MCC.

So why don't we start with Ginny Seitz, and then I'll introduce the other panelists as we go—as they give their remarks.

Ginny?

SEITZ: Thank you very, very much Cassandra. And thank you for the opportunity to speak with this group today.

As many of you know, MCC's approach to gender is grounded in our mission of poverty reduction through growth. This economic approach is critical because too often issues of gender equality have been ignored in the economic sectors. Since MCC's gender policy was formalized, MCC and its country partners have learned much about gender integration.

We conducted a review of how well we were doing with the gender policy in five countries. And a key lesson from that review is that a strong policy statement needs strong tools to ensure its enactment.

With our new guidelines on gender integration, MCC now has operational procedures and milestones that will be required in all new compacts. They reflect not only our experiences, but what has been widely recognized in the development community as the core requirements for gender integration: leadership, mandate, capacity, resources, and accountability.

We're also releasing a paper available today that uses examples from the field to demonstrate how the guidelines are strengthening MCC's processes and leading to better gender integration in the projects we fund.

So I want to mention a few key lessons that informed the development of the guidelines.

First, effective gender integration requires human and financial resources. Too often gender mandates do not also require gender expertise to ensure that they are implemented. MCC has learned from experience that early engagement of technically qualified staff, both from the MCC and partner countries, is critical to gender integration.

The accomplishments of our Nicaragua compact in removing barriers to putting income in the hands of women rests in part on the MCA-Nicaragua having a senior gender expert on their team.

Seventeen countries now have gender expertise on their staffs, and going forward MCC requires that these experts be engaged from the earliest stages of compact development, and that they be in key positions during implementation.

MCC, too, has expanded our expertise by creating a Social and Gender Assessment Group—currently with five staff—in the Department of Compact Operations. This group, which I lead, is responsible for ensuring that gender integration is accomplished throughout compact development and implementation, and that our gender milestones are met.

Regarding resources, I want to point to the recently approved Malawi compact, which includes \$2 million for a gender integration program and a large-scale power supply project. In addition, the Philippines compact includes \$1 million for a gender incentive grant to encourage innovation in addressing gender equality in small-scale, community-driven development projects that are targeted to communities where poverty exceeds the national average.

Effective use of these resources requires sufficient analytical work, planning and monitoring to produce results. Leading to another of the lessons we've learned, that gender integration requires translating analysis into specific plans and actions. MCC now requires the development of gender integration plans in our compacts.

This is important because it requires specific and practical actions in the detailed design of projects with agreements by all partners in implementation, not just the gender experts. This requirement too is based on what we have seen work best in earlier compacts.

Finally, MCC has learned that gender integration is further strengthened through leadership and accountability. By elevating gender as an agency priority and institutionalizing this mandate through specific policy and operational tools, MCC is providing leadership both within the U.S. government and the broader development community.

Looking ahead to the full implementation of the gender guidelines, we expect to strengthen our capacity and that of our country partners to ensure that gender analysis is fully integrated into all relevant projects. MCC will continue to improve its performance on accountability by working to ensure that gender results are rigorously documented through transparent monitoring and evaluation.

Internally, MCC has aligned institutional incentives with agency priorities by establishing a gender integration award in 2010, and considering gender-related work in performance reviews. And to all the men in the room today, I want you to know that two men won our first gender integration award. So there is hope for you all.

(LAUGHTER)

MCC will continue to share lessons learned and engage in dialogue with the external development community. As we move forward with implementation of the gender integration guidelines, we look forward to reporting to you again on our results.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you, Ginny.

Next I want to recognize Madam Madeleine Sorigo, who is with us from Burkina Faso. She's actually—she's actually had a pretty diverse career, a very impressive career as an educator, as an NGO leader, as a representative of women's associations, and as a member of the House of Representatives in Burkina.

She accompanied the girls here to the States. And we're really pleased to have her, and it's been wonderful to get to know her over the past few days.

And Madame Sorgo is also a member of the board of directors for the Millennium Challenge Account, our accountable entity in Burkina.

Madam Sorgo?

STAFF: I'll introduce myself very quickly. I'm Sophia van der Bijl. I work at MCC, and I'll be translating.

SORGO (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): So women's associations are represented on Burkina Faso's Board of Directors for the compact, and have been following the development of the compact since the submission of a proposal from Burkina Faso and MCC's due diligence of that proposal.

So the BRIGHT I primary education project was evaluated independently and was found to have very positive impacts. It involved not just construction of schools, but also wells to allow clean water, school meals, and take-home rations, as well as training for mothers to support the education of the young girls, and *busongos*, which are kindergartens for siblings to make sure they're taken care of as well.

So based on that positive evaluation, BRIGHT II is now scaling up that investment to three additional classrooms so that the whole primary school is taken into account.

Fatimata and Aissatou here come from very rural areas, as you've heard, and would not have had the opportunity to go to school without BRIGHT. They represent the success of BRIGHT and show that the benefits of education are priceless. They are no longer—according to the expression in Burkina—in the darkness, but in the light.

In the compact land security projects, the stakes related to gender are critical because social, cultural norms remain strong. A woman in Burkina is often perceived to have the status as a wife, of a mother, and many activities can be carried out only through the husband or a brother, for example.

However, the constitution and the various laws on paper confer the same rights and the same responsibilities to women as to men, including rights related to land tenure.

So land is a means of production, which can allow individuals to come out of poverty. Often, though, as an example in Burkina, women have a right of land lent to them, but as soon as it becomes productive it is withdrawn from them.

Thanks to the many reforms that are supported by the compact, the government promises that a certain percentage of land will be reserved for women.

The agricultural development project of the compact will allow gender equity on irrigated land to produce traditional women's crops, including market vegetables, rice and others. Women will also be able to breed goats, sheep and poultry with support from the compact. The compact will provide microcredit and agricultural equipment, which will allow a true autonomy and enrichment of beneficiaries, notably women.

Gender integration in all of the compact's projects follows MCC's guidelines, which Ginny mentioned, which in themselves serve to inform Burkina's own national gender policy, which was adopted in 2009.

So to ensure the effective integration of gender in all of the compact's activities, MCA-Burkina and all of the actors involved in the implementation of the compact together developed this gender integration action plan, which you see here.

So even if it is difficult, integrating gender is a challenge that must and will be met.

SORGO: Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you so much, Madam Sorgo, and our colleague, Sophia, for her translation.

I'd like to introduce our final panelist—to my immediate right—is Ritu Sharma. And for those of you who do work focusing on women and girls in the international community, Ritu is probably a familiar face.

She is a co-founder and the president of Women Thrive International—or Worldwide, I should say.

BUTTS: You're fine with either, is that—we'll call it as it is: Women Thrive Worldwide.

Ritu is—has been really busy this week because she has been in quite significant demand as we've celebrated International Women's Day. She's been a champion of MCC and of our work at MCC. She has been someone in the advocacy community who has nudged us to move forward to actually put our principles into practice at MCC and in integrating and fully implementing our gender policy.

And she is an advocate who not only talks the talk, but walks the walk. And if you—she's a wonderful bridge between Washington advocacy, and also what's going on out in the field.

And particularly in the case of Burkina—if you go to Women Thrive Worldwide, to the website, you will see that she spent about four or five days actually in a village in Burkina last year actually living on a dollar a day with a family in Burkina.

So I know that she'll bring those insights to bear in her comments. And I want to thank her for all the work that she's doing, and how supportive she's been of our work.

Ritu Sharma?

SHARMA: Thanks, Cassandra.

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you. So, I'll be very brief. And I want to first tell you the story of how the BRIGHT program came to be in Burkina, and how Aissatou and Fatimata came to go to school. Because it's a wonderful example of why gender really matters and how Congress—although I think most of the Hill staff have evacuated—how Congress played a really critical role in making that happen.

When MCC was first set up and authorized by Congress, Women Thrive and other organizations worked with, in fact, Nita Lowey and others to make sure that the eligibility criteria for countries was gender sensitive, or was informed by gender. And in particular in the investing in people set of criteria, MCC had originally set one of the eligibility requirements to be a certain level of primary school completion for children in the country.

We advocated for that criteria to actually be changed to not general primary school completion rates, but girls' primary school completion rates. And our analysis, which was done with a lot of assistance from International Center for Research on Women and others, showed that several countries that would have qualified for the MCC program with the general criteria in fact did not qualify when primary school was disaggregated by sex. Burkina was one of those countries, and became instead of an immediate MCC [Compact] country, became a Threshold country.

I have to say that the MCC and the government of Burkina, instead of grousing about the fact that they did not qualify, really embraced the challenge to increase girls' primary school completion rates.

And so MCC announced the \$13 million BRIGHT program that the government of Burkina really ran with, along with other partners, and did in fact boost girls' primary school completion rates, and then ultimately qualified for the MCC.

So I have to say it's particularly exciting and gratifying to meet Fatimata and Aissatou today.

But had Congress not put that element in the authorizing legislation, we wouldn't have had a toehold as advocates to make that change in the eligibility criteria.

If MCC had not embraced that change in the eligibility criteria, I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt there are hundreds of thousands of girls in Burkina who would not be in school today. So it matters. It really does matter.

The second point I want to make is that gender is not women. I think we often—too often conflate those two things. That we say we're going to do a women's project and we say that that's gender integration. In fact that is not gender integration in the slightest.

Gender means both men and women. And what gender integration is about is taking into consideration both the needs of men and women, the cultural beliefs and attitudes and practices of both men and women, and designing an intervention so that it really works for everybody, including the men.

So that what MCC does when it targets women is that it really incorporates male leaders, male family members, male perspectives into how to best integrate women farmers, or others, into a program so that it doesn't create a backlash, it doesn't create more problems for women, frankly, than they already have.

It is in fact the thing that strengthens families in developing countries. Integrating gender does not weaken the social fabric; it strengthens it. It creates an open space for dialogue.

And so I think it's very, very important—because I do hear so often when I walk around Capitol Hill, “Isn't this just cultural imperialism? Aren't we just taking this Western agenda and putting it on developing countries?” And gender is the furthest thing from that. It is paying exquisite attention to the local realities and the local culture.

And that is what MCC does differently, and that is why MCC has been so successful.

USAID is about to create its first real gender policy, I would say ever. And AID's gender policy, the last time it was updated was in 1982. And the world has changed a little bit since then. And I think one of the roles that Congress can play is really encouraging USAID to not reinvent the wheel and not look so far and wide to go find the best gender policy in the world.

The best gender policy in the world is sitting right here, and it's been tested, it's been refined. That's what the gender guidelines are. They are a refinement of an already strong policy.

At Women Thrive, our role—and I should tell you, we don't take any U.S. government money. We are not paid by MCC in any way, shape or form. But we do track and shadow what the MCC does around the world. And we've done this in five countries, including Burkina, where we have been independently watching how gender is, or isn't, integrated.

And I have to say that these guidelines are one of the most important steps that MCC is taking to make the gender policy real. I think the application of it hasn't been able to be even across countries because countries did

need more guidance about what exactly is expected, and what does gender mean? Does that just mean women, or does it really mean gender?

So we're really looking forward to now tracking the implementation of the gender guidelines as they move out into the field.

The last point I will make, and I can't—I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't use this forum to make this point—is that if Congress cuts international assistance, particularly poverty-related assistance, which is where the cuts will fall. They won't fall on the frontline states. They won't fall on disaster assistance. They will fall on programs like the MCC.

And very literally programs like the BRIGHT project will not be able to continue. Girls won't go to school. Mothers will die in childbirth because we won't be able to provide safe birthing kits. Hundreds of thousands of families will be left without mothers and fathers because we won't be able to provide very cheap, life-saving HIV/AIDS medications.

It's not worth it. It's not worth it. Cutting international assistance, even if you wiped it out completely, would address probably a thousandth of one percent of the deficit. And the cost is so, so high. What our country will lose in credibility, in good will, what we will create in resentment against our country—because we don't pay attention to what our role needs to be in the rest of the world. It is such a small investment.

I think that to do this responsibly every member of Congress needs to meet with girls like Aissatou and Fatimata and look them in the eye and say, "You don't matter. We want to save a thousandth of one percent of our deficit." Because that is really truly what's at stake.

So not to put too fine of a point on it, but the decisions that this body will make, both the House and the Senate, over the next few months are really life and death decisions to millions of families around the world.

MCC is a program that works. It's accountable. You can read the evaluations. It lives up to its mandate. And when it doesn't, you can drag them up here to Congress and make them explain why they don't. But this would be the worst place for cuts to fall.

So thank you very much for listening and for staying. And I look forward to your questions.

(APPLAUSE)

BUTTS: Thank you so much, Ritu.

You know that I could not have said it better, in terms of the advocacy for our budget and for the work that we do and what a difference it makes out in the field.

We certainly appreciate that there are a lot of priorities out there, but we obviously think that we're doing very good work. And—and we're pleased to have these experts who can communicate that to this audience and to the Hill in general.

I think we are running a little behind, but I do want to—if there are questions I do want to take two questions. And we—do we have microphones? Fabulous. So we'll take two questions.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Rosemary Segero. I'm the president of Hope for Tomorrow. We focus on empowering women and young people through microfinance, and based here in Washington, D.C. And we are also in Kenya.

My question is looking at the MCC, every time I've spoken, Mr. Yohannes has been in—I've been hearing gender, gender, gender, gender. All the time I talk about gender. Looking at MCC, we have countries—now we are into a global women's month, which is a history month, which is March, most of the countries, some of them are on threshold or they are not eligible to be funded or to be supported by MCC.

So now that we are all here as women from all over the world—I'm from Africa. I'm talking on behalf of Africa. Those countries that are not on MCC and are on threshold, what are you going—I would like to ask how can you help other women in other countries, despite of being on the threshold, or bad governance. Women are women. Women are not part of the corruption. We want MCC to consider women in all countries despite of corruption or whatever. Women will manage their own business, will do their own money. Let MCC put money in all countries for all women to be empowered. Thank you.

BUTTS: Thank you for the question and for the comment.

As you are aware—and I think that a number of people know that the MCC model is—is distinct in how we provide development assistance.

And one of the things that is a key part of our model is that we actually require that countries are performing on the policy front before we can extend our resources, which does mean that we are selective in the countries that we choose to work with.

In our threshold program we don't have that same criteria, but we're certainly looking for countries that are on their way to showing policy performance that is a key indicator to us, and I think in the international community generally, that they are moving toward—they're moving toward being able to sustain economic growth and being good partners in providing development assistance. And that—that means that not all countries qualify.

And we certainly want to be able to provide maybe not direct assistance, but—but certainly by the example that we set in how we work with other USG agencies and forwarding work. But we cannot work everywhere, unfortunately. We don't have the resources.

Kenya is a good example of a country where we have a—we had a Threshold Program. And we believe we did good work in Kenya. But Kenya doesn't qualify for a compact quite yet because of their performance on our policy indicators.

But we hope that Kenya will soon qualify and that we'll be able to do work in Kenya as we have done in neighboring countries like Tanzania and—and in Mozambique and in other countries in the region.

But we certainly hear and understand your comments. And we would love to be everywhere, but our model doesn't allow us to be everywhere.

Questions?

Well, I want to thank you for coming. This is a large room, and we're very excited that we were able to fill it up with so many people who I think believe in the work that we're doing and want to be supportive.

Enjoy the rest of your day. And we hope that you will continue to be MCC proponents.

(APPLAUSE)

END