

**GENDER LUNCHEON OPENING REMARKS FOR MCC SENIOR ADVISOR CASSANDRA BUTTS  
ON THE MARGINS OF UNGA  
SEPTEMBER 21, 2010**

***“Gender Inequality: A Constraint to Economic Growth, Environmental Protection, Poverty Reduction, and Sustainable Development: Linkages between MDG 1,3,7, and 8”***

Today’s discussion is an important one, and I am pleased that the U.S. Government’s Millennium Challenge Corporation can be part of it. Our efforts to improve the human condition—to fight poverty and hunger, to expand educational and employment opportunities for girls and women, to ensure environmental sustainability, to open markets for developing countries—will only succeed in the long-term if we champion **gender equality** right now. The pursuit of greater gender equality underlies the integrated approach to sustainable development embodied in *Millennium Development Goals 1, 3, 7, and 8*.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation recognizes that gender equality is fundamental to sustainability. Empowering, educating, and employing women, after all, can lead to significant long-term benefits for overall human welfare in the poorest countries, including sustaining the *natural resource base*. That is why MCC analyzes gender differences and inequalities to design and implement the best possible programs aimed at achieving our mission of **poverty reduction through economic growth**. This bottom line is clear: **Gender equality is key to poverty reduction**.

Let me take just a few moments to explain MCC’s approach to gender equality and to share some thoughts on the way forward.

First and foremost, **MCC is committed to being a leading innovator regarding gender equality**. We want to ensure the equitable participation of both men and women in the projects we fund and the outcomes we achieve. Because of a variety of policy, institutional, and social factors, this has not always been easy. Yet, our policy and approach follow international best practices. They demand the complete integration of gender equality into all stages of our work to reduce poverty and promote economic growth:

- from the selection of partner countries;
- to the development, design, and implementation of projects;
- to the monitoring of results;
- to the evaluation of impact.

Like the World Bank, MCC believes that, ***“Gender equality is smart economics.”***

- **Tanzania**, for example, hired a full-time gender specialist to develop a *Gender Integration Policy and Program*. This is to ensure that MCC-funded water, energy, and transport projects provide men and women unbiased access to the opportunities and benefits.
- In **Lesotho**, we worked to ensure that gender equality in economic rights was legally guaranteed before we made our investment. This led to the passage of the *Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act*. Before the new law, married women in Lesotho were considered legal minors and could not enter into a contract; incur a debt; register property in their name; or buy, sell, or use

property as collateral without permission from their husbands or a male relative. The *Gender Equality Project*, funded through Lesotho's MCC compact, is conducting training on this new law to explain the benefits of gender equality to the country's long-term development.

When I visited Lesotho, I spent a day in the northern region and was struck by:

- Hearing the same message: Progress is being made.
- Married women are taking out loans and purchasing property in their name.
- Legal reform is only the first step; now, the challenge is to ensure that both men and women understand what the Act means and how gender equality contributes to development for all members of the family. This is a difficult task.
- The Gender Equality Project team is carefully building awareness, knowledge and acceptance of gender equality in the economic rights of both men and women.
- They are conducting training on the new laws for government, civil and customary law judiciary, and the banking industry.
- They also have a country-wide outreach program to reach deeply into rural society and institutions, including chiefs and community councils
- I had the opportunity to meet one of the female Principal Chiefs, who is engaged in educating the local chiefs so they can disseminate information about the Act and how it can be applied.
- One councilman of a community council noted that he had seen married couples planning together, communicating, and taking each other's perspectives seriously. That is progress.
- Change takes time, and it is encouraging to know that MCC is contributing to gender equality in Lesotho.

MCC's commitment to gender integration and equality is working. This morning, for example, we hosted a roundtable discussion on gender equality that offered some new ideas. Looking ahead, we want to deepen our recognized leadership in this area. To do this, we are working to increase the capacity, the resources, and the accountability within MCC, and among our partner countries worldwide, to integrate gender analysis in every program we fund. ***This is a priority for MCC, and this is priority for me personally.*** MCC's CEO Daniel Yohannes appointed me the point person for the integration of gender equality in the programs we fund, so I firmly believe that the results we seek from every MCC project require that women and men be equal champions of their development.

We are exploring how we can "push the envelope" to make our country-led partnerships more inclusive of gender.

- How can we be more innovative with the full integration of gender equality? Even as we work to ensure that gender is considered throughout all we do, can we explore additional ways to remove the barriers that limit the contributions of women and girls?
- How can we make sure that women too are included as partners in development and beneficiaries of the results?
- Should we explore further ways to work even closer with civil society and NGOs, including women's groups, who act as watchdogs for accountability as we pursue gender equality?

I look to the table discussions to follow to give us some fresh insights into questions like these.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation recognizes the benefits of fully engaging ***all*** a country's citizens—its ***men and women***—to reduce poverty, promote economic growth, and achieve sustainable development. A non-negotiable commitment to gender equality—and to the practice of gender integration—can maximize the sustainable impact of our programs to change the lives of the world's poor for the better. MCC welcomes working with you toward this noble goal. Thank you very much.