

# Keeping Gender at the Forefront: MCC Reviews In-Country Implementation

The Millennium Challenge Corporation is keeping gender issues front and center in its pursuit to reduce global poverty through economic growth. Understanding that gender issues require a continuous and ongoing effort to ensure their effectiveness, MCC's Director for Social and Gender Assessment Dr. Virginia Seitz is leading an in-country review in various partner countries to assess how MCC's gender policy is being adopted and executed and to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

“Gender inequalities can be a significant constraint to economic growth,” explains Dr. Seitz. “Inequalities and gender differences in controlling resources play a complex role in perpetuating poverty. When we pay attention to gender, we get a better designed poverty reduction program and have a greater impact on the lives of the poor.” Dr. Seitz continues, “In 2006, MCC adopted a straightforward and comprehensive gender policy to help guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of our grants. And, our commitment doesn't fade after the signing ceremonies. MCC ensures the policy's ongoing application and that it continues to factor significantly into our poverty reduction programs.”



*Sylvia Torres (fourth from the left in the top row), from Consejo de Mujeres de Occidente, was hired by MCA-Nicaragua to develop and implement a gender strategy for the compact. To the left of Sylvia is Nora O'Connell, Vice President of Women Thrive Worldwide, on a field visit to Nicaragua*

Dr. Seitz recently returned from Mali, where she reviewed how program design and implementation of projects included in that country's \$461 million compact from the U.S. Government, provided through MCC, are consistent with MCC's gender policy. The visit to Mali is part of a wider MCC gender policy review in countries at different stages of implementing

their five-year poverty reduction compacts with MCC, including Armenia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Because of MCC's serious commitment to gender issues right from the start, preliminary findings from these reviews appear promising. When asked about them, Dr. Seitz highlights the importance of civil society engagement in the public consultation process and receptivity to the views of advocacy organizations by Millennium Challenge accountable entities (MCAs), the local institutions in charge of implementing compact projects on the ground. She also underlines the importance of MCAs having someone with gender expertise on the local staff, who can bring technical skills to facilitate significant implementation of the policy.

Of the countries reviewed, Nicaragua is one of the strongest examples of these best practices. The success of program design and implementation consistent with MCC's gender policy in that country is largely due to the crucial role played by Consejo de Mujeres de Occidente, a local advocacy NGO. Consejo de Mujeres de Occidente provided the MCA with information on the role of women in Nicaragua's agricultural sector and how best to integrate gender in MCC projects. MCA-Nicaragua was so receptive to this information that it hired a full-time gender expert from the NGO to oversee gender policy implementation.

According to Dr. Seitz, the uniqueness of MCC's gender policy lies in that "it is contextualized in MCC's mission." She explains that, "MCC requires an analysis of gender inequalities and differences in all its programs; and, where significant inequalities exist, we request measures be taken to address them."

Information gathered by Dr. Seitz and MCC teams during the reviews will be used to draft a set of recommendations as well as develop a relevant MCC Gender Action Plan to further improve gender integration in new and existing compacts. A summary report is expected to be released to the public during Fall 2008.



*Puehl (also known as Fulani) women in the village of Beldenadji will benefit from the MCC-funded Alatona irrigation project in Mali by gaining control of irrigated agricultural land that will be titled to local women's associations.*