

Written Testimony
House Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Ritu Sharma, President and Co-Founder, Women Thrive Worldwide

My name is Ritu Sharma. I am the Co-Founder and President of Women Thrive Worldwide, and I am honored to submit testimony before you on behalf of my organization, which is a coalition of more than 60 groups that is dedicated to helping women in developing countries lift themselves and their families out of poverty. We have deeply appreciated the leadership and commitment of both Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey to improving the lives of women and girls around the world. In order to ensure U.S. assistance is used as efficiently and effectively as possible, we would like to request that programs funded under bilateral economic assistance shall include, where appropriate, gender considerations in the planning, assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such programs, with particular attention to strengthen and expand efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.

Why Does International Assistance Matter? International assistance is not only about helping poor people climb out of poverty. It is about realizing that problems around the world affect us here at home. In fact, some of the greatest challenges of the 21st century—terrorism, HIV/AIDS, and natural disasters—make a difference to our health, wealth, and safety here in the U.S. Globally, 1.4 billion people worldwide subsist on just over one dollar per day. Most of them - 829 million - are women. Women also comprise the majority of the world's hungry,ⁱ uneducatedⁱⁱ and jobless.ⁱⁱⁱ When women are poor, their families are poor because it is the mother's income that is used to support children. It means mothers cannot feed their children, keep them healthy, or provide them with a safe place to live. The support that international assistance provides is a matter of life or death to women. When poor women get just a little extra

money, they put it back into their families. They spend it on things like school, medicine, and housing – things that improve the lives of children and help them to contribute more to their communities and countries. Greater economic and educational opportunity for a woman means her children are more likely to go to school, her babies are more likely to survive infancy and her family is more likely to eat nutritious meals.^{iv} So when international assistance gets to women, it helps entire families. Helping women helps everyone, and gets us a bigger bang for our buck.

Why Do Women Get Left Out? Even though we *know* that helping women helps everyone - international aid often overlooks them. When this happens, women and their families are not the only ones who lose. U.S. taxpayers lose as well because we are not spending money as effectively as we could. Often, women get left out because U.S. projects do not take into account the very different lives that women and men lead around the world – they do not take into account *gender*. In developing countries, agriculture is predominantly women’s work. In some parts of Africa, for instance, women are responsible for producing nearly 70 percent of the food that is either eaten or sold.^v For an aid project to improve food security in Africa, it must specifically invest in women farmers and help them to access the resources they need to grow food, such as land, water, and seeds. Only by paying attention to gender - the different roles and needs of women and men in farming – will the investments women need become clear.

Gender is not the Same as Women Because women are so often left out of international aid, looking at gender often highlights a need to pay special attention to women. But sometimes it reveals a need to help men and boys. In Jamaica, both boys and girls have high primary school attendance rates, but only 88 percent of boys make it to grade 5, compared to 93 percent of females. This only became clear by looking at school attendance in Jamaica by gender, and now there are programs specifically designed to help boys stay in school, reduce their exposure to

violence, and boost their self-esteem.^{vi} In India, an aid project revealed that it was not enough just to talk to women about their health during pregnancy since men were the main family decision-makers. An innovative program talked to men about the importance of pre-natal care and symptoms of high-risk pregnancies. In the end, in families where men received extra information, women were more than 6 times as likely to go to health clinics as in families where their husbands weren't included. By looking at *gender*, the need for special outreach to men became clear and resulted in more mothers receiving the care they needed.^{vii} By taking gender into account- by figuring out what the differences are between what women and men are doing in a society- we can make sure that our aid meets the needs of entire families –mothers, fathers, and children. Making sure that gender is part of international aid ensures that we are using all the information we can to design smart projects and getting the best return on our international aid dollars –something that will reap rewards for Americans for decades to come.

One in Three Women Will be Abused in Her Lifetime A key issue that including gender in international aid will reveal is the need to consistently address the epidemic of violence against women and girls. Globally, it is estimated that one out of every three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused over the course of her lifetime,^{viii} with rates of domestic violence reaching up to 71% in some countries.^{ix} Somewhere a woman is raped, beaten, killed by her husband, trafficked or forced to trade sex for food everyday. Not only is violence against women and girls a gross human rights violation, it is also a public health epidemic and a barrier to solving global challenges such as extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and terrorism.

For example, approximately 1 in 4 women are abused during pregnancy,^x which, according to the World Health Organization, has been linked to miscarriage, pre-term labor, and low birth

weight^{xi}. Women who have experienced violence are also at higher risk for contracting HIV,^{xii} and women living with HIV may be up to three times more likely to experience violence than HIV-negative women.^{xiii} Fear of violence also prevents women from accessing HIV/AIDS information and receiving treatment and counseling.^{xiv}

Gender-based violence devastates the lives of millions of women and girls, in peacetime and in conflict, and knows no national or cultural barriers. For this reason, U.S. assistance programs must address sexual and gender-based violence consistently across aid accounts. Even within specific international assistance areas – such as international health, girls’ education, democracy-building, and disaster relief—opportunities that would both enhance those efforts and address sexual and gender-based violence are often missed.

Efficient and Effective Aid At less than 0.5 percent of the total federal budget, poverty focused international aid saves mothers from dying in childbirth, sends girls to schools, and keeps mothers and fathers living with HIV/AIDS alive so that they can take care of their children and families. Including gender considerations throughout programming will ensure these critical funds reach both women and men living in poverty around the world.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the fiscal year 2012 budget, and its impact on those living in poverty in the developing world. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that women, men, girls and boys around the world are free to live full, productive lives.

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ⁱⁱ United Nations. *MDGs Report*. 2009; UNESCO. “Education for All Global Monitoring Report,” 2008; UNICEF. *Children and the Millennium Development Goals*. 2007. http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Children_and_the_MDGs.pdf. As cited by: United Nations Development Group. March 2010. “Thematic Paper on MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.”

ⁱⁱⁱ International Labour Organization. March 2008. *Global Employment Trends for Women*. p. 7. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_091225.pdf.

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- ^v “Global Trends for Women,” International Labour Organization, 2009, cited in FAO’s 2010 “Gender dimensions of agriculture and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty,”
| <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1638e/i1638e00.htm> AND The State of Food and Agriculture Report 2010-11
- ^{vi} Evans, Jyacinth. “Gender Differences in Education in Jamaica.” 1999. UNESCO. *Education for all in the Caribbean: Assessment 2000 Monograph Series*.
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- ^x Heise L, Ellsberg M, Gottemoeller M. Ending violence against women. Baltimore, MD, Population Information Programme, John Hopkins University School of Public Health, 1999 (Population Reports, Series L, No. 11), p. 13. As cited by: World Health Organization 2005. “Addressing violence against women and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.” <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSept05.pdf>.
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<http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSept05.pdf>.
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