

## **An Interview with Carla Koppell**

*On June 14, 2011, Banyan Global spoke with Carla Koppell, newly appointed senior coordinator for gender equality and women's empowerment and a senior advisor to the administrator at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).*

**Banyan Global:** In general, what are your thoughts regarding the name change of the Women in Development office to the Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and how do you feel that reflects changes in USAID's overall thinking in relation to gender?

**Ms. Koppell:** I think it's important on a couple of levels. First of all, the name change was meant to send an important signal about the emphasis being placed on rejuvenating, revitalizing, and reinforcing the focus on issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment within the agency. But going deeper than that, it really signifies an understanding that in any country, in any sector we work in around the world, questions related to women's empowerment fundamentally relate to the relationships of men and women on the ground, how they work together, how their priorities are the same and different, the dividends from working with either, and the need to move an agenda forward that encompasses all and delivers for all citizens in partner countries. That being said, I think it's not just gender equality because we are cognizant that in many places around the world women are disadvantaged, either in terms of the extent of their political and social empowerment or in terms of the developmental challenges they face: the levels of poverty, the health risks, the challenges to lifting themselves up. So in changing the name, we wanted to reflect an awareness of the need to work with men *and* women and an awareness of the need to make sure we're closing the gaps between men and women where they exist.

**Banyan Global:** To follow up, I'm curious if there's a discussion of the semantics of equality versus equity. That is something we talk a lot about in the field when we talk about gender.

**Ms. Koppell:** It's a very lively discussion. I will say, not as intimately tied to the change in name as it's tied to when you're talking about women and men as beneficiaries, what are you talking about? Are you delivering to them in proportion, equally? I think the simple answer is there is no simple answer. There is no word that is a one-size-fits-all, perfect way of encapsulating the way it is on the ground. But I think that our goal is to enable development for men and women and to do that well. That is essentially what we are trying to do.

**Banyan Global:** It sounds like you've been quite busy since taking over this position with an internal assessment of policies and procedures and operational realities with regard to women and gender. So I would love to hear from your preliminary assessment, how common is it in practice for gender to be integrated up front and in the design of USAID projects? And did you find any common lessons or best practices in terms of making this happen effectively or creating incentives to make that happen effectively.

**Ms. Koppell:** I've been with the agency around six weeks now. There was a lot of work that preceded my arrival to begin to drive this agenda forward. Obviously Secretary [Hillary Rodham] Clinton, USAID Administrator [Rajiv] Shah, Ambassador [Melanne] Verveer, and USAID Deputy Administrator Donald Steinberg are strong proponents, and they've been leading the charge. There have also been a number

of key internal changes that I think are putting us on a positive path and for which I claim no credit. For example, the amendment to our directive system that calls for gender analysis to accompany the development of strategies was undertaken first in 2009. What we've seen is an increase in the number of analyses that are being done and the extent to which those analyses are starting to infuse into the strategic process.

And I think it's important to note those have been underway for a while. I think that the key, and what will indicate success, is when we're addressing gender and incorporating it into our work organically. So that we're saying in order to succeed with a poverty alleviation program we have to differentiate between men and women and understand what the implications are of the differences in their roles in society and their activities for driving this forward.

I think it's promising to see these analyses and to see them be reflected in the design process. I think that trend will continue, and I'd like that to become an integral part of how we do business.

**Banyan Global:** Given that quite a bit of Banyan Global's work is in food security, in a couple of cases in relation to regional trade integration and economic growth integration, we're wondering how the gender empowerment index evolved and how you see it contributing to EGAT's [USAID's Office of Economic Growth and Trade] strategy in relation to economic empowerment and food security.

**Ms. Koppell:** One of our priorities in moving this agenda forward is to make sure that attention to gender is woven into the work we do in our main initiatives, and Feed the Future is one of those. I should credit Caren Grown, who is the senior gender advisor in our Policy, Planning, and Learning Bureau for working on this. She is trying to capture how you look at advances in the status of women as indicative of a more inclusive approach to agricultural sector growth. The index will look at areas like household decision making around agricultural production or women's access to productive capital, the adequacy of women's income to provide for their family, women's access to leadership roles in the community, and how women are allocating their time as being critical components of an index that in the aggregate would show us if we're making progress in terms of sector growth.

What's terrific is it enables us not only to track how well we're serving women but also to recognize that in serving women, we're serving our broad objectives relating to food security and agricultural productivity. The hope is that we're also showing some technical leadership that puts us back on the map in the work we're doing around gender equality and women's empowerment. Our goal is consistent not only with the initiative of Feed the Future, but it's also consistent with the emphasis on USAID Forward, an ambitious reform effort to change the way the agency does business, partly by using monitoring and evaluation to drive programming to fully integrate attention to women into agricultural efforts. Now, as you know, the bureau for food security is separate from EGAT, and that's relatively new. So, the question of how it relates to EGAT remains to be seen. The index will be piloted in three or four countries and that will be a collaborative effort between the two bureaus. We're working with EGAT on how to provide support on things like the implementation of the index and other innovations that allow us to mainstream attention to gender in programming.

**Banyan Global:** Can you tell us where the index is going to be piloted?

**Ms. Koppell:** The pilots are tentatively scheduled to take place in Uganda, Bangladesh, Guatemala, and Honduras, though it is not set in stone.

**Banyan Global:** That really speaks to two other questions that we're very interested in. One of which you spoke to quite a bit in terms of the integration across divisions in terms of institutionalizing a model and how that's starting to play out.

With respect to the issue of leveraging monitoring and evaluation to make the case for gender mainstreaming, I wonder if you have other comments regarding innovative ways USAID has been developing over the last several years—how things like learning networks and practice forums might be used to push that agenda forward?

**Ms. Koppell:** First of all, I'd also add to the question of EGAT's role—which includes providing technical leadership and technical support. To that end, it's perfect that the gender equality and empowerment office is located there. We are in the process of being restructured along a set of priorities that have been identified for how we move the gender agenda forward. How are we advancing attention to the economic, social, and political empowerment of women? How are we advancing our effort to protect women from sexual- and gender-based violence? And how are we integrating all the attention to these issues into all of our programs and operations? So that will be the mirror in terms of the structure for the Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

In terms of innovative learning platforms, one of the activities that is currently underway is the development of a new gender policy. We haven't revisited our policy in 30 years, and one component of that policy development process will be an evidence summit that will allow us to cull the most cutting-edge information and use that in creation of policy. But it also will enable us to have a solid foundation for providing leadership on the basis of an analysis of gaps and opportunities for greater learning. So that's one piece that relates to the agenda.

The second piece is to scale up initiatives we think are paying important dividends. So we're looking at the Safe Schools program that we piloted in Liberia which is now being scaled up through the Peace Corps; we are also hoping it will also be scaled up with AusAID [the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program]. We're also increasing the coverage for a number of programs that use mobile phone technology to do things like deliver health care information to women.

We're often doing that together with nongovernmental partners, which increases our ability to promulgate best practices and extend our reach so it's really exciting to see ways in which we can show technical leadership around programs and projects—ours and others'—that deliver results.

**Banyan Global:** When you talk about nongovernmental partners, to a great extent you're talking about public-private partnership and projects using global development alliance mechanisms. I'm wondering if there's been a specific emphasis or enthusiasm about tackling approaches that do have implications for gender equity?

**Ms. Koppell:** Yes, enormous enthusiasm, actually, both for women and for work with girls. There is a focus on moving those agendas forward. And there continue to be people coming and saying, we're interested in other opportunities.

**Banyan Global:** You mentioned models around mobile phone technology. Are there other applications of technology or pilot models of particular technologies that you see really leading the way in the next 10 to 20 years in terms of overcoming gender gaps?

**Ms. Koppell:** Yes. There are two that I think are important that come to mind. I'm sure there are others, but forgive me. One is some of the renewable energy technologies that are being promulgated to respond to the threat of climate change, to reduce vulnerability, and to provide access to people off the grid. I think there's a lot of potential there for women. The other is cookstoves. There's a big push to increase the dissemination of cookstoves, particularly with market-based mechanisms. I think it's increasingly apparent how important that is because of the enormous health consequences associated with using cookstoves and the disproportionate impact on women and children. So those are two other areas that I see as really important for the dissemination of technology that can have big implications for women in addition to mobile technologies.

**Banyan Global:** And are there specific private-sector partners leading the way in those areas?

**Ms. Koppell:** There are, but I don't know offhand who all the private-sector partners are. I believe there is the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves. There's been an initiative out of the State Department. There was an initiative out of the State Department, and its acronym was MAMA. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that, but it was around mobile technology and information dissemination related to child and maternal health.

**Banyan Global:** Looking at the demographic trends expected in the next decade, how do you think the global demography of the aging and youth populations will affect gender roles and relations? And how might that play specifically into economic growth and security issues?

**Ms. Koppell:** It's hard to generalize globally what the implications will be. I think they're very different in different parts of the world. It's a really interesting question because at the same time you do see changes in terms of the status of women and their rights in societies that interplay with demographic trends. So, first, on the youth issue: the agency is also involved simultaneously in the development of a USAID policy for youth. This effort is underway to determine how the agency engages with boys and girls and what the priorities need to be. One of the things I've been focused on has been thinking about girls and how it connects back to the youth policy and the intersection between gender and women's empowerment. I haven't had as much discussion on the issue of the aging population in certain parts of the world, which certainly does have implications for the roles and responsibilities of women. But we haven't developed, per se, a strategy for incorporating attention to that into what we're doing. I think it's an important and relevant issue. The question on employment with regard to the demographic trends, particularly for the explosion of youth, will be a function of how our economic-growth and poverty-alleviation work progress along with our work in education. USAID just released a new education policy



that focuses on the equality of education and primary education, recognizing that education has really important dividends for long-term well-being.

**Banyan Global:** How do you see EGAT's role in relation to other groups in the agency regarding stabilization and security and its intersection with gender issues?

**Ms. Koppell:** One of the processes under way is the development of a U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. This was born of an announcement Secretary Clinton made last October in conjunction with 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. USAID has been involved in an interagency process, which is led by the White House, to develop its contribution to a U.S. National Action Plan.

The process inside the agency is spearheaded by Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, but it is an all-agency process. So, we are working collectively, and this would include EGAT and others, in thinking about what are the changes that we want to make to ensure that we are taking full advantage of the experience, expertise, and strength women can bring to efforts to prevent, resolve, and rebuild post conflict, as well as efforts to provide women with protection and provide attention to their priorities and needs in relief and recovery and reconstruction. EGAT is one of the bureaus involved in the process, along with the other pillar and regional bureaus.

**Banyan Global:** We had an opportunity over the last two years to do some interesting work on a pilot basis developing a framework, look at the intersection between poverty reduction and conflict at the household and community levels in Afghanistan, and examine how support for women entrepreneurs affects both poverty and conflict dynamics at the household and community levels. This opportunity was made possible through one of USAID's learning networks. I wonder if this could be a mechanism for supporting cross-agency collaboration in terms of advancing the research and knowledge on gender and security.

**Ms. Koppell:** Well I'd love to take a look at it if that's something you could share. I would like to see what it is and have a better sense of it and then I could come back and think with you about what a potential application might be.

**Banyan Global:** Going back to our discussion on the process of institutional change that you see as USAID is articulating its gender policy this summer, how do you foresee transferring this level of institutional change into operational changes at the regional and country missions and among implementing partners? Specifically, how do you create incentives for accountability around gender equity at all those levels?

**Ms. Koppell:** So I think there are five ways in which I measure—and you'll have heard this at the Thrive conversation, but I'll mention it because I think it's important.

- Thinking about women as beneficiaries and making sure their voices are heard.

- Making gender an essential component of USAID's work: Recognizing, identifying, and evaluating the needs of both men and women, in a comprehensive way, to make gender visible throughout program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Participatory processes: Recognizing that both men and women are integral to the development process and consulting with both men and women to inform project design and implementation processes.
- Targeting gaps, such as the following.
  - Who is impoverished? Why are they impoverished?
  - Identify who needs the most assistance and, more importantly, why they need it.
- Capitalize on the different expertise, priorities, leadership of men and women in each context to help inform programs.

Are we serving women and men well? Those are the five metrics. How we go about creating incentives and disincentives will depend on which of the five we're focusing on, though they all work in synergy. With regard to gender analysis, we have the requirement that gender analysis be done; its main incentive is to improve our development outcomes, and that is always my part of departure. So the incentive is that we do a better job at our work. And that's a very powerful incentive for folks at USAID because this agency is composed of an incredible cadre of really dedicated professionals.

There are other incentives. There are awards for people who do good work at incorporating attention to gender. We're likely to revise the procurement system to talk about what the requirements are for incorporating attention to gender into programs. We want to enable people to do this better by weaving it into the training taken through the USAID University. So part of it is facilitating good work on this agenda.

If we're talking about leveraging women's leadership, in some cases it will require marshaling greater resources. Deputy Administrator Steinberg recently launched a \$14 million program to enable women's participation in peace processes. There the incentive to leveraging women's leadership in peace building is the creation, or setting aside, of financial resources to foster the creation of programs that will meet that need. So, a variety of tools and techniques that demonstrate how this is going to pay dividends for our development-assistance portfolio is necessary to enable us to drive the agenda forward.