



March 16, 2009

To: Valerie Jarrett, Chair, White House Council on Women and Girls
Tina Tchen, Executive Director, White House Council on Women and Girls

From: Ruth Levine, * Vice President Center for Global Development, Washington D.C.

RE: Global Potential of the White House Council on Women and Girls

The Opportunity: President Obama’s executive order creating the White House Council on Women and Girls shows that the administration is serious about meeting the particular needs of women and girls. Although the official announcement was unclear about whether the council’s mandate extends beyond U.S. borders, inclusion in the council of the Secretary of State and the U.S. Trade representative strongly suggests this possibility.

The Action: Since U.S. policies and programs affect the lives of people throughout the world, the chair and executive director of the Council should seek an early opportunity—for example, through a public speech or Op-Ed—to clarify that the council’s mandate does indeed include attention to these impacts in countries where the United States has active diplomatic, economic, development, and/or military engagement.

Five follow-on actions would help the council create a truly global agenda:

1. Ask the U.S. executive director of the World Bank to inquire how the bank’s proposed “Vulnerability Fund” will address the particular needs of women and girls affected by the global economic crisis. Responses about the “safety net” are not enough; ask about how investments in infrastructure and small businesses will be responsive to gender issues and how the bank will monitor results.
2. Find out from the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator what PEPFAR is doing for adolescent girls. Identify what girl-focused prevention programs are in place—supported by the United States or others—and find out whether they are working.
3. Ask the Millennium Challenge Corporation to report on (a) the extent to which the 17 selection criteria incorporate metrics related to policies that foster the welfare of girls and women, (b) whether gender analysis is routinely conducted in the design of MCC programs, and (c) whether gender-specific issues are examined in MCC evaluations.
4. Invite USAID to present to the council its strategy to reduce gender-based violence, including how much money went toward implementing programs in 2008 and how much will be programmed in 2009 and 2010.
5. Challenge the president’s close advisors to find one example to highlight in the 2010 State of the Union Address of a woman in a low-income country whose life prospects were significantly improved by an American policy other than an aid program.

* Levine is coauthor of *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda*.
<http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/15154/>