

**2013 THE "BORLAUG DIALOGUE"**

October 17, 2013 - 10:00 a.m.

Panel: *Betty Liu, Moderator*

**PANEL:**

**"40 CHANCES"**

*Introduction:*

**Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn**

President - The World Food Prize Foundation

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Please welcome our next panel, 40 Chances, with Prime Minister Tony Blair, Howard Buffett, Ritu Sharma, and Betty Liu. Prime Minister Blair, what an honor it is to have you at the World Food Prize. And I think today we've set a new record of filling this room. We've never had this many people packed in here before, so you've outdone Bill Gates and Kofi Annan in coming here, so it's a new record-setting all week.

Having you here and following on to all those other distinguished visitors, but I want to thank you especially for bringing Howard Buffett back to the World Food Prize. He's the toughest guy to get to come in October, because he and his son, Howard W., they're always out on the farm. And I call him and say, "Can you come, Howard?" And he'd say, "I'm harvesting. I can't, I can't." Finally I got him to come. He said, "Look, I'm going to fly in, I'm landing, I'm coming, I'm speaking, I'm speaking, I'm leaving." I said, "Okay, it's all right." And then he came and he met so many interesting people here, he was here for six hours and he's been back three times. So thank you so very much.

Our great friend, Ritu Sharma, is here. What a terrific op-ed you have in *The Register*. Everybody buy *The Des Moines Register*. And with that, I just want to say our symposium is about The Next Borlaug Century: Biotechnology, Sustainability, Climate Volatility, but the underlying big question is - the single greatest challenge in the history of the human race is whether we can sustainability feed 9 billion people by the year 2050. That's what we're about, that's what Norman Borlaug was about, and that's what 40 Chances is about. So, Betty Liu, thank you, and I'm just going to go down this way, and if I don't stumble and fall, be out of your way. Over to you.

**PANEL:**

**“40 CHANCES”**

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*Panel Moderator:*

**Betty Liu**

Anchor, Bloomberg Television

*Panel Members:*

**Honorable Tony Blair**

Former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

**Ritu Sharma**

Co-Founder and President, Women Thrive Worldwide

**Howard G. Buffett**

Chairman and CEO, Howard G. Buffett Foundation

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**Betty Liu**

Thank you very much, thank you. And thank you to the World Food Prize for asking me and allowing me to host this panel. I'm so happy and eager and excited to be listening to all the comments that Prime Minister Blair, Ritu Sharma, and Howard Buffett are going to be talking about in their work with food insecurity, global food insecurity.

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

**Betty Liu**

Howard, in your book, *40 Chances*, one of the most interesting aspects of that book was that much of your work has been a result of happy accidents and maybe some not-so-happy accidents as well. And you have met these two that are sitting beside you through some accidents. So why don't you describe first how you met Tony Blair and the accident that brought you two together on your work.

**Howard Buffett**

Well, actually Tony has a very tenacious staff, and one of them was emailing me constantly. And I was like, well, what do Tony Blair and I have in common? You know, what are we going to do together? So then I got on an airplane. I'll put a plug in - it was actually a NetJet airplane. And I read this magazine that had this really phenomenal story about Tony. And I thought I really kind of made a mistake here - I should have met this man a long time ago.

So we met in London at his home, and he's been back to Decatur several times. And it's just been a great partnership, because what we've learned over the last really two decades in our foundation and prior to that even as I was in businesses, is that, if you don't have good governance, if you don't have rule of law, if businesses don't know what to expect, if they don't have predictability, how can they invest?

And so there's no one on the world stage that can stand toe-to-toe with Tony and talk about this issue because of his history, his experience, and his wisdom on the subject. So it's been one of our best partnerships that we've developed.

Ritu and I just ended up meeting each other on a panel that DuPont had put on in Washington, and we kept getting surprised because we kept agreeing on things. And so it was like, wow, okay. And her organization and all the effort on her part is doing something that the world talks about a lot, which is empowerment of women, but empowering women is not that simple. And it's one of the greatest things that can occur in any country, but look at our history. I mean, we're pretty young at what we've done, and we still have a long ways to go in this country.

So you can think about a country like Burundi where in the culture it's completely accepted to basically abuse women, and they have no rights. I mean, think of what it takes to come from there to even get to where we are today. And so somebody has to be doing that work. And really, Ritu's organization is really unique in how they approach it and get it done.

**Betty Liu**

I want to get to that in a moment, but first, Prime Minister Blair, tell me a bit about how you came up with your initiative, with the Africa Global Initiative – it's about five years old now – where you said this really came up from an idea. Where did this idea come from and why pursue it?

**Tony Blair**

It came partly from my own experience in government, and it came partly through my own experience in trying to work with and help Africa. So in 2005 in the G8 Summit we put Africa at the top of the agenda, really the first time the G8 had ever done that. And we agreed on a whole series of commitments on aid, which at least our government and actually successive UK governments have delivered on. But we also agreed that we needed a new approach, a partnership, where the responsibility wasn't just on the developed world but African countries were going to take on the job of sorting their own issues out. And governance was absolutely central to that. So I could see that happening in Africa.

My own experience in government was really understanding that...you know, I used to think when I first came into government that if I was prime minister and I had an idea sitting in Downing Street, that if I gave an order to someone to do something, something would happen. This extraordinary naivety was replaced over time with the understanding that actually one of the biggest challenges of government today, even in our systems by the way, if you don't mind me saying so...anyway we won't go there. But for these countries, sometimes they're emerging after periods of conflict with huge problems.

Of course, one challenge of the government is honesty and transparency, but the other efficacy, is getting things done. And so, for example, if you've got a great agricultural program and you want to deliver it, unless you've got the basic capacity at the center of government to make the thing happen, it doesn't happen. So this is what we focused on.

And what we do is we put teams of people who go and live and work in the country, working alongside the president or the prime minister of the country to help deliver programs of change. And actually by the end of this year we'll probably be in about 10 different countries in Africa. And for me it's all about getting the job done, because that's the single biggest challenge. And the great thing about Howard's organization has been being able to support us in doing that. And the reason why the things we're talking about at the World Food Prize is so important is that you only have to spend a short time with the presidents of these countries to realize that they basically have three major challenges.

One is around electricity and power and infrastructure on that and related infrastructure, roads and so on. The second is around getting the right type of investment, not the wrong type of investment into their country. But the third thing is being able to deliver improvements in agricultural output because the vast bulk of their population will be dependent on that. So the types of things you're talking about here are absolutely central, but you guys can have great ideas and we can try and implement them, but unless there's capacity to do that at the central government, nothing happens.

**Betty Liu** Well, Ritu, let's talk a little bit about your work. Because as Howard said and as you have said yourself, you want to empower women, but you can't just target women only, because that will hold them back as well. You have to also bring men into this same cause.

**Ritu Sharma** Absolutely, no question. And let me just first say I'm really honored to be sharing this panel with Prime Minister Blair and Howard Buffett, and I want to thank them for including the perspective of women. So, very much appreciate that.

The truth is that women tend to like men, and we don't despise them.

**Howard Buffett** This is a new revelation. Forget the book, I mean.

**Tony Blair** We're really with you...

**Ritu Sharma** But the point is that, when I talk to women around the world, when I sit in villages and talk to women farmers, they don't want us to only target them. They don't want us to just bring the interventions or the microcredit, or the tools, or finance, or whatever it might be, just to them; because their husbands are struggling to grow food as well. Their

husbands are unemployed. Their husbands are disenfranchised. And we're not really solving the problem if we just focus on women. I mean, women who go home to men who are unemployed, frustrated and have guns is not helpful. That does more harm to women than good. So I think again it's intuitive, but it's something that, in our zeal to help women and climb on this women's empowerment train, we can forget that we need to take a very holistic approach, and that needs to in fact include everybody.

**Betty Liu**

And that's something, Howard, that you have seen yourself in your travels, not just in Africa but other parts of the world.

**Howard Buffett**

Well, you know, the poster child for – I always offend someone when I'm here – the poster child for violence against women would be a country like Burundi where it's engrained in their culture and it's okay to abuse women; I mean, it's expected. And to overcome something like that, you can't just swoop in and say, "You guys can't do this anymore, and here's why, and here's what you've got to do." It'll never work that way. So, CARE, when I was visiting Burundi once with them, they had this great program where they did these skits, and the men in the village would act out, and they would have other men who would tell them it was wrong to behave this way. And so it was kind of making it okay to talk about it. It was kind of making it okay to understand what the alternative was. And of course I jumped right in and took one of the guy's hats and became one of the drunken guys that was going to beat up his wife. And so they ran me out. But you have to find creative ways to do this, and it was actually a very engaging way, and you could see that it was an opportunity for men to think about it.

When we were in Afghanistan, we worked on a program that gave women the opportunity to farm their own land. And when we went, I said – well, of course, I want to speak to the women, but I actually want to speak to the husbands and get their perspective on it. The husband that we did speak to – because some of them didn't want to talk to us – but the one we did speak to, he said, "You know, for the first time I actually kind of appreciate my wife." And I said, "Well, why?" And he said, "Well, she's bringing home money and that helps pay for things in the household. And I never understood she could do that."

So some things are a lot more simpler than we think they are. We try to make them complicated. This is real simple. If you have a mindset that doesn't understand the value of something, you don't appreciate it and you don't allow it to flourish the way that it can. And so everywhere you go in the world, we need to make sure that policies, our programs, our actions, the consequences of our actions support equal opportunity for men and women – and that will change the world.

**Betty Liu**

Prime Minister, when you've gone and worked in the various countries that you have, the ten countries that you are now working, what's been

the most surgery? Because you mentioned capacity; we need to see governments having the capacity to execute the ideas, to execute the policies, the ideas that they want to implement in their countries. But what has been the most surprising thing about that capacity or lack of capacity in these countries that you've found?

**Tony Blair**

The most surprising thing is how little political leaders are qualified and educated about what could be out there to help them. Now, again this is not actually something that's simply a problem for African leaders. I mean, one of the things I find most shocking about my own time after leaving office is how much I've learned and therefore how much I didn't know when I was there, a bit unfortunate, but there it is.

But one of the things that you don't often understand is that there's so much innovation happening in the world today, there's so much new thinking, that you're sitting in government, you've got a thousand different things happening and there are events happening. And if you're got a free media, you're trying to battle with that too. So you live in this situation where what you really need to do is to take a step back, to be strategic, to prioritize, and then, as I say, to implement. But actually that's not what a lot of governments do. What they do is they basically exist on a day-to-day basis, coping with what they can.

Right, so for example this is one of the reasons I wanted to come to this conference and say to people – One great change, however, that's happening is that there is a new generation of leaders in Africa, actually elsewhere in the world, who want to learn. So there is a willingness, which I think is quite different. I don't think we could be doing what we're doing 20 years ago. I just don't think the ambition would be there and the openness of mind would be there. But today in the work that we're doing in these countries in an area like agriculture, I'm finding the presidents saying to me, "Okay, tell me what's happening in the world today that can make a difference?"

So one of the things, when I was coming here and I read about Norman Borlaug and his extraordinary life story, but this is someone who changed the world. But you know what's fascinating when you read about how he did it is, it didn't – he had a great idea and everyone said, that's fantastic, and they went off and did it. I mean, he struggled for decades. Right, but there was a new thinking that in the end people accessed. Now I think the difference between his time and now is that I think people are prepared to access that type of new thinking faster.

So what I would say is – where there are people with the ideas on things like crop intensification, irrigation, how do you improve the yield of the land, how do you make more effective farming practices – you know, there's a willingness in these governments to listen today. So the most surprising thing has been the lack of knowledge about what's out there.

The most optimistic thing is that I think there is a new spirit and attitude out there that says – Okay, if you’ve got something to teach me, I’m willing to listen.

**Betty Liu**

Are their goals big enough, though? Are the ideas and the goals big enough when you go into these countries?

**Howard Buffett**

Well, I think sometimes we make goals that are too big. I mean, I think you can set all the goals you want in the world, and to me it doesn’t mean very much, because usually we fail at those goals; then we have to go back and reset. And so I think sometimes we set goals that expect too much of either a system or people or circumstances or environments, or whatever it is.

So we like to be pretty focused at our foundation, and we think that if we are focused, it allows us to set higher goals because we can really zero in on them. But I think we really need to understand that we aren’t going to solve all these problems. Anybody who understands agriculture - I mean, if you take my farm that’s 15 miles away, I farm it differently. If you take the farm we have in Arizona, I farm it differently. You take Howie’s farm in Nebraska, we farm it differently. I mean, there are things we do that are completely the same and things that we have to do differently.

I mean, when you look at Africa, you have all these different agricultural growing zones, you have 54 countries. No one treats Canada and the United States the same. Why would you treat Malawi and Nigeria the same – other than that Akin is in Nigeria – that’s special.

But it’s just that you have to understand the context, and so we have to set those goals within that context.

**Betty Liu**

Has that made you then want to focus on certain countries then? You say – you know what – you can’t help all of the countries. There are only a few aspects that you can help.

**Howard Buffett**

That’s one approach. I think that’s where AGI has been really smart, because they go into countries where the government accepts them and wants them. How can you go into a country that doesn’t really want your advice? I mean, my Dad used to always say to me, he said, “Now, don’t come and ask my advice unless you’re going to take it.” I mean, and I learned that lesson early on.

**Betty Liu**

I figured that.

**Howard Buffett**

I didn’t take enough of it. But, so that is one approach. I mean, one approach is to say – you know, we try to stay very focused in three areas: agriculture, water and conflict mitigation. That’s actually almost too much, to be honest with you, but they all overlap. So where we work,

they typically all overlap. But I just think setting realistic goals and then trying to achieve those and then move to the next one. And you're always going to have setbacks, you're going to have surprises, you're going to have things you don't expect. So you can't say this is where I'm going to be at this specific time and place; it just doesn't work that way.

**Betty Liu** Ritu, what have been some of the biggest mistakes that you have seen of policymakers, nonprofit organizations do in Africa?

**Ritu Sharma** How much time do you have?

**Betty Liu** Give me your top.

**Ritu Sharma** I'll give you the top. I think to continue with Prime Minister Blair's idea about - where are the best ideas, where is the innovation? Where's the energy? And I think one thing we tend to overlook is how much of that innovation and energy is with smallholder farmers themselves. You know, yes, it's in international institutes for seed research, yes, it's in universities. But what farmers are doing and trying with their own land is also extraordinary. Women farmers, even if they had just one hectare, they are interested in experiences; they are interested in trying new things.

And I think one of the most important things where we engage on agriculture is really to say that women want choices, and they want to understand what all of their choices are for all of the agricultural methods that we might be bringing to them, not just one choice. And they want to be able to have the power to decide for themselves what method they're going to use on what part of their farm. Because women's land - I think if you're familiar with women particularly in Africa, they don't necessarily have one block piece of land. They've got little bits and pieces over here, and they're all different and they all need different things.

So I think one mistake that we tend to make in our development field in general is to think that the people that we are serving are passive recipients of knowledge, of information. They're not. They're more engaged with their farms than anybody. And we need to look for the innovation, for the insight, for the brilliance that's within those farmers, particularly women. I think male farmers, sometimes guys think other guys are pretty smart. But women, there's a lot of innovation there too.

**Betty Liu** Prime Minister, have you ever encountered resentment in your work?

**Tony Blair** Resentment generally, yes, a fair amount of it. But in respect of AGI, yes, because sometimes, there's always a feeling that people from the outside shouldn't tell us what to do, kind of a thing. On the other hand, there are also great examples that you can give people now of countries that - I sometimes give the example of Singapore once who was thrown out of



the Malaysian federation - it started as an independent state. For the first two decades it was importing intellectual capital, but today it exports it. But it did it because at the time we just wanted to know what works.

And so, yes, you do get resentment sometimes, but on the whole not, I would say. And the thing that has changed and allows us to do our work is the fact that people are anxious and eager for it.

And the other thing, because this is a very obvious thing for the world today - you know, the world is connected, Africans are actually connected. I mean, the explosion in mobile phones in Africa and actually their use in helping empower people is extraordinary. And the fascinating thing - this is why I think it is so important for people who are in positions of government today - the fascinating thing is there is a huge amount of information and ideas that are out there that you can use. And I mean I think it's absolutely right - you know, you've got to interact with the local people in order to work out how those ideas are most beneficial, but the fact is probably someone somewhere in the world is getting it right.

And one of the things I often find with countries is they'll say to me: but our problems are very different. And then you get into a proper discussion and you realize, well, yep, they've got their own local characteristics, but actually the basic processes are exactly the same. And I mean I think one of the things that we find we can do now, because there is this sense that there's a global dimension to information, we can actually take great ideas to governments.

And one of the things we find with some of our presidents now - and this is something I'm actively doing in a number of areas, and I'd be really interested to do it in agriculture - is we say to them (and this is somewhat to Howard's point earlier) - look, I don't know whether this can help or not, but why not try it in a limited way, and let's see what we can learn from it? So instead of thinking, you know, we're going to change the whole of agricultural production, let's take a certain part of the country where people are interested in it and try and experiment. And we're doing this in things like education and healthcare, in things like renewable energy, you know, small-scale projects. So this is what's exciting about this area of work today, and it's why I think if we could join up the ideas with the people out in those countries desperate to learn about them, I think we'd get some fabulous and really exciting things happening.

**Betty Liu**

Where do you think you've had the best success and why?

**Tony Blair**

We've always had the best success in countries - it actually takes us probably two or three years to get really going - so the countries we've

been in longest, countries like Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, but also elsewhere where we have prioritized.

You know, one of the toughest things about government is this process of prioritization, because you can never say anything's not important if you're a politician – right? I mean, you can't say... So you sort of say... I remember when I first came into power and I had this thing – my top three priorities were education, education, education, right? – which I was really pleased with as a sound bite. So I got out and someone says, "So you don't care about crime." And I said, "No, no. I care about crime, but it's just..." anyway, so it doesn't really work.

And often you will go to a country and they will have had some report written by "fly-in, fly-out consultants" that will say, you know, poverty reduction strategy 2030. Or I came across one that was 2060 the other day – you're hedging your bets pretty well there. And they will often have 150 different priorities. And what I say to the presidents and prime ministers is, "Look, forget that. Choose five, because in one term if you're lucky, you'll get those done, but you can get them done if you prioritize. But if you try and do the whole thing, it'll just be the usual mess."

**Betty Liu**

How about you, Howard? Where have you found your foundation to be most effective and why?

**Howard Buffett**

Well, I would answer that this way, which is – it all comes down to people. We think about investing in people, not in organizations, not in ideas. There is a guy in Virunga National Park, Emmanuel, who is the head of the park. We're investing millions of dollars in North Kivu this year and next year, I mean tens of millions, because he's there and we believe in him and we have trust in him and he trusts us, and we've done some phenomenal things there. And they may or may not work, but we're willing to try them because of him.

There's a guy, Joe DeVries, who ought to be here today, may not be, but who is supported a lot. He came out of the Rockefeller Foundation, supported a lot by the Gates Foundation, and we support him quite a bit. This guy is, in my opinion, if you want to look at agriculture, he's a modern-day hero. We invest in people that are passionate, that believe, that are focused, because that's how we're going to change something.

And there's a guy, Ed Price, and Dr. Price may be here. I met him in Afghanistan. We had flack vests on, getting in a Blackhawk helicopter, and I said, "Well, is this your first time here?" He says, "No. I've been here 18 times." I say, "Okay, I'm a novice." But you just need people who are willing to go out.

I was going to say I've never learned anything by reading a book; that's not quite true, but I mean where I really learn things is in the field. I

mean, people... When I am sitting with a farmer in Malawi, he's going to teach me something that I couldn't learn in any book, in any lecture. You've got to be there. You've got to do it. So we keep showing up - and that's most of the battle, is showing up and talking to the people. They're the ones that suffer the consequences from your good decision or your bad decision.

And Joe tells a great story in the book about how he thought he was really helping people in a village, and he found out that the hybrid he had brought had failed - there were a lot of people hungry because of him. He never forgot that, and he decided - I'm not making that kind of mistake again. So you have to make the mistakes and you have to learn from them.

But we really invest in people. I believe in people. I believe in Tony and I believe in Ritu, and we believe in a lot of people. There are phenomenal people out there that are doing great things.

**Betty Liu**

Well, speaking about your book, I mean, I don't know if everyone knows what *40 Chances* means exactly, and I'm just going to paraphrase it and you correct me if I'm wrong. But essentially you're saying that everybody has 40 years, 40 chances to make a difference in this world. And you learned that through farming.

**Howard Buffett**

Yeah, well, I went to this thing called Planters' School, which I'm sure everybody here would want to go to. And I kind of forced myself to go. It's in the wintertime - you don't have anything better to do. And there are about 40 or 50 of us sitting in this room, and there is a speaker, and I actually thought it was really quite boring.

And he started out by saying, "You know, all you guys are wrong about how you think about your farming." And I thought, well, that's a pretty bold statement. And he said, "By the time your... you think about like, I'm going to fertilize, I'm going to plant, I'm going to spray, I'm going to harvest. You know, it's just a cycle that goes on and on, and you really need to stop and back up and realize that by the time your dad gets off the tractor and you get on the tractor and then you get off, let your son or daughter get on, you've got about 40 seasons to grow the best crop you can."

It actually made me stop and think about some of the things I was doing in agriculture, to be honest with you, and changed a few things I thought about in how I did my personal farming. But I thought about it then. I thought, well, you know, that's really true in life. You get through school, you get a little bit of experience, and at some point you're ready to try to tackle something big. You've got about 40 years to do that. Now, Senator Harkin has had about 60 or 70. And he looks like he's 40 - I better say that, right? And Governor Branstad the same. But it is a mindset as much

as anything. There's an urgency to what we have to do. This doesn't go on forever. We don't get unlimited opportunities, so let's focus what we can change and try to change it.

**Betty Liu**

So we're all in the middle of our 40 chances then, if we were to use your analogy. Then what would you say? This is a room full of people who can make a difference on the issue of food insecurity around the world. What would you say to this room full of people? What should they take away to improve the welfare of people, not just in Africa but around the world around food?

**Howard Buffett**

Well, the first thing is you have to understand that what we know and our knowledge doesn't automatically transfer to other parts of the world and other people's problems. Because if you come in and you say, "Our solution is this," it'll almost for sure fail.

The second thing is - it took me a long time to learn this. I learned this through our water work, to be honest with you - is that policy matters. I mean, you've got to have the right policy. You can't get the right results if you don't have the right policies. Now, to Tony's point, it's a big deal when you say we're going to implement that. But you don't have a starting point. It's like filling a car with gas. You're not going anywhere 'til you've got it. So you've got to have that.

And then third, I think in a way, dream big but don't think too big. You've got to be able to reach the goals. You have to set goals that other people don't walk away and go, "Oh, I can never do that," or "That's never going to happen." I mean, you've got to be realistic, and I think sometimes we're not very realistic.

And the last thing really honestly is you've really got to believe in people. I mean, I can't tell you the amount of people I've met, whether it's a woman in a refugee camp or a president that we work with on our counter-LRA activity. Or the soldiers that are out in the jungle trying to track somebody down that is a bad guy. I mean, the commitment, the willingness to make personal sacrifice - it's amazing. There are amazing people in this world, and you've just got to find them and you've got to empower them.

**Betty Liu**

How about you, Ritu - would you agree with that?

**Ritu Sharma**

Absolutely. I always agree with everything. But what I will add to that is that poverty is ultimately, when you peel back all the layers, it's really about powerlessness. Right? It's about the inability to change your environment, to change your practices. There is a barrier to your getting what you need in order to move out of poverty.

And I think for the people in this room, the most important thing I would say is that, in addition to your intervention, whatever intervention you are taking out there in the world, you have to address the relative powerlessness of those that you're trying to help. And women are the least powerful among the powerless.

**Betty Liu**

Can you give us an example of that?

**Ritu Sharma**

So what I mean by that – I can give you a very, very simple example. If you go into a community in Burkina Faso, let's anyway, where I spent some time with subsistence farmers there, and you bring in your intervention methods – you bring in new seed variety, you bring in fertilizers, you bring in some pesticides, and you train all these women up on how to use all of these techniques. But you don't address the fact that they don't have the power to own their own land – right? They need to organize themselves, they need to go to the village elders. They may need to even change their national laws on ownership of property.

But if those women don't own that land, they have no incentive to pay for all of those expensive inputs. Because as soon as they improve that land and they make it better and it actually starts to grow more things, a man's going to come and take it, because now it's good land.

So, great – you got a better yield for one season, and that'll show up on your metrics, and the donor is really happy with that better yield. But what have you done for those women now that they're displaced from the good land? Right? And I've seen that happen again and again and again.

So you have to look at what is underlying that poverty. What are the power structures, what are the barriers that any farmer, male or female is facing? And address that at the same time if you really want to succeed.

**Betty Liu**

It's a good point, Prime Minister, that Ritu is bringing up, which is also the idea that – How do you know that what you're implementing is (a) fitting into the broader context of the culture of the country, but also that it's long term, that it will be there when you leave?

**Tony Blair**

Yeah, that is definitely the challenge. But on the other hand, I think you can see very clearly when it starts to happen. And what Ritu is saying about the empowerment of women is an essential part. Because I can't think of a successful country today that has got an attitude from the past about women that it doesn't work. So you have a situation in which one of the things, because one of the types of things we do with government is obviously saying – well, how are you going to make your economy successful? Women's education, the ability to own property, to be treated in the right way – that is an essential part, not just something that is

socially and morally right but that is economically essential for the development of the country.

**Betty Liu**

But does that fall on deaf ears sometimes?

**Tony Blair**

Increasingly less, because people know – I mean, they can look around the world and see which countries are successful and which aren't. I mean, you take a country like South Korea. South Korea in the early 60s had a GDP the same as Liberia or Sierra Leone – right? Today it's got a woman president – not a bad idea, by the way. But that's another matter. But I don't want to get into your stuff around this, but... So I think things are changing.

And just finally to your point about people here – I mean, I'd like to say two very direct things. The first is the work that you are doing is of fundamental importance to the development of the poorest countries in the world. They're dependent on agriculture. They have huge agricultural potential, and they need help and support. And if we do not deal with the issues to do with food production, we cannot feed the growing population of the world. We also can't deal with issues like water, which are increasingly going to dominate geopolitics and possibly in a very negative way unless we resolve some of the issues to do with the relationship between agriculture and water.

And the second thing is to say to you – those ideas that you have, there are people out there willing to listen and to learn and to take your support and your help and advice. So you're not having to beat the door down anymore – the door is open. So what I would say because I know there will be many people engaged in very exciting, innovative things here, and we need your help, we want your help, and those countries that we're working in, that Howard is working in and Ritu too, these are nations and people that can see how they can be connected today, and they want that connection, and you can help them.

**Betty Liu**

In just the time that I have left, I want to talk a little bit about developed countries and how the West can help in this and the issue of foreign aid. And we talked about this as well backstage. How do you get countries like the United States, how do you get countries in Europe to care about food insecurity, to care about bringing up countries in Africa? How do you get them to care?

**Howard Buffett**

You're looking at me. Well, yeah, Tony will pass on that one.

**Betty Liu**

...in Decatur of all places.

**Howard Buffett**

No. You know, that's always a relevant question, and it'll never change, unfortunately. Because people care about what's in front of them. They care about whether their kids are eating, their kids are getting to school,

whether their government's functioning. I mean, they care about that, and so that is always going to be their priorities. Local priorities are always going to be the priority.

So I think you have to appeal to a little bigger thinking on it, and a lot of people... America, this country is one of the most generous countries in the world. Now, that happened because of our tax system, but it happens because we are wealthy enough that we can afford to do it. I mean, it happens for a lot of reasons that aren't all completely altruistic. But nevertheless, I think as you begin to see that those behaviors are positive consequences, then you're more willing to do it, and you're more willing to do more.

So I think part of it is... We've been in countries where... I mean, I have a permanent residency in South Africa - we're very involved in South Africa. They don't have the same. It's changing, though - it really is changing. But ten, fifteen years ago, there was not so much the notion of philanthropy or giving or helping. It is really changing, and that's a great thing. But those are places where we can share our experiences that are positive to help move that along. But they have to believe that it's the right thing to do, or they're not going to do it.

So a lot of it is education, awareness. The greatest thing in the world is - and it's hard to do this on a one-on-one basis - but the greatest thing in the world is to take somebody somewhere. Take them to Malawi, take them to Nigeria, take them to Bangladesh, take them somewhere, Afghanistan. Show them what the world's about. I mean, I started taking Howie when he was 12 years old, and that was the first trip we made to Africa. And I guarantee it's changed his thinking. It's changed his vision of what the world could look like or what it should look like.

So I think we shortchange ourselves in terms of just looking at our own little world. It's bigger than that. And I guess I would just add that we're learning that it's bigger than that. I mean, whether it's terrorism or something else that can hit the home, we're kind of learning. And the United States is learning - we're not the only guys on the block anymore. The cold war is gone. We're in a different era. And even if the United States and Russia got together and decided something, it might not happen. So you've got big, emerging powers. The world is changing. And I do think most people understand that.

**Betty Liu**

Well, and you took the prime minister on your combine in Decatur - right?

**Howard Buffett**

That's probably one of the most dangerous things I've done. Forget Somalia. Yeah, and actually the mistake I made was corn was worth about \$8 when he was on the combine; now it's worth about \$4. So next

time he comes... I'm waiting for the price to drop, and then I'm going to invite him back and let him drive again.

**Tony Blair**

That's not a great advertisement for my governance initiative.

**Howard Buffett**

It has nothing to do with that, Prime Minister, no. You are the absolute top in the world when it comes to what you do in your governance initiative - there is no question about that.

**Betty Liu**

But you do that too, because you want people to see where food comes from, that it's not, as we talked about, packaged all nicely in a supermarket aisle.

**Howard Buffett**

Well, the primary thing is, you can say that about, when Americans come out there, because they all think their food comes from the supermarket. But the biggest thing of value to me is to get... we had a few people come out from ONE a couple years ago, and none of them had been on a farm before. And they're in a \$350,000 combine on \$12,000 an acre land today. The expense to operate, the access to capital, the access to inputs, all the things that it takes to farm this land - I said, "Do you really think you can farm this way with tens of millions of farmers in Africa?" You can't.

The magic map for me, to be honest with you - and I don't know how you do this, because the information isn't good enough to do it - the magic map for me is to take Africa and to draw the little places where our farming system works, because it is productive, we can do it better. We can absolutely do it better, but it does work. It feeds a lot of people, it produces a lot of crops.

But then there's a whole lot of big circles where you need crop diversity, where you don't have affordability, accessibility, knowledge. I mean, knowledge is one of the biggest. You can throw money at a problem, but if people don't understand how to solve it, it doesn't matter how much you spend, you're not going to succeed. And knowledge is really missing. If I had another magic wand, I would say the first thing I would do if I could do it magically is I would put a land grant university or something like it in every single country in Africa and establish a network. I mean, it built this country. It built this country. And it works. And basically Brazil has done it a little differently, but they've done it in a similar way.

And so we have to empower farmers to make good decisions, and we have to empower farmers to make decisions they can afford to make. And so that does come down to government policy in the end. I mean, we can give all the money away. We can work with all the organizations in the world, but in the end - you know, I learned it the hard way - we can't change much.



So it's a big challenge, but as I always say, the alternative is to give up, and that's unacceptable.

**Betty Liu** Well, take me back, because I am curious. Take me back, Prime Minister, to the time when you did visit Howard on his farm, and he not only taught you how to operate a combine but...

**Tony Blair** I think that would be to exaggerate the level of instruction.

**Howard Buffett** Listen, listen – his biggest benefit was the fact that he could run most of the combine hands free on the satellite system.

**Betty Liu** But what did you come away with from that conversation or from your visits with Howard, and how did that shape AGI?

**Tony Blair** Well, I came away with a firm conviction that I made a wise career move in not becoming a farmer. I mean, it helped focus me and my organization on the issues to do with agriculture. But I think it also educated me to another thing that I think is very important when we talk about how do we get our own political systems to focus on development.

I mean, Howard is absolutely right. People in my politics and your politics, they're going to think about the end of their own street first, and that's natural. However, the fact is, if you look at these countries in Africa as they develop, it is massively in our interest, in our self-interest that they develop in a peaceful way and a prosperous way with the populations there that are growing all the time with a decent stake in the future. And the alternative, as we can see in some parts of Africa is conflict, extremism and obviously poverty amongst the people.

But one of the things that I took away from that first encounter there with Howard was – part of the problem with our government systems, I mean, a lot of the government aid has worked. It's important that people realize that. There's been massive reductions in deaths from HIV-AIDS and malaria, partly as a result of the work of the Gates Foundation, Clinton Initiative and so on, but also as a result of the funding by governments. So aid does work.

However, if you want to take countries to the next stage of development, you need our governments in the support they give these countries to be far less bureaucratic, far less interested in our priorities rather than their priorities, and far more willing to be creative about the solutions that we put forward. And this is where Howard's organization, which operates fast, effectively, with the urgency that these countries require – you know, these organizations are important in their own right. They are also a lesson for government because this again is something I learned in government.

The great thing about government is they can always give you a thousand reasons for not doing something – right – but to find a reason for doing something is quite difficult. I know you probably never got the TV series, “Yes, Prime Minister.” Did you ever get that? Have you had that? You got that here? Right, some people. Anyway, it’s really not a comedy show. It’s really a documentary about government. But if we wanted to make a difference... and there are, you know, the new leader of USAID, Rajiv Shah, is a great example of the new generation of leaders in this area. But we need to get our own governments to be smarter, quicker, and far more attuned to what people in the country are saying – because, by the way, they might just know better than you do what their priorities are.

**Howard Buffett**

When he mentions Raj, I think of one thing. You can take... this is something we’ve learned the hard way, and Raj is phenomenal, but I know some of his stories. And you can take a great person and put him in a terrible process, and unfortunately most of the time the process wins. And that’s part of what we have going on in government. And I’m not just talking about what just happened here, but I just mean overall, is you have this process. And the criticism of our foundation would be that we don’t have as much process, but we do move quickly, and we are willing to take risks. So we just have to empower those people and somehow help them beat the process so that they can have success.

**Betty Liu**

So how do you do that?

**Ritu Sharma**

I’ll try to answer that. And also on your question, Betty, about how do we get Americans to care. Because I think Americans really caring and understanding these issues is part of beating the process. I think it’s part of getting to a place where America is, where Britain was, where when you cut the budget, you don’t cut aid. And this is a lot of what we do at Women Thrive is trying to connect American women to women farmers overseas to the stories of people. If you can’t get them on a plane, the next best thing you can do is engage them in a conversation about what’s happening with women around the world.

And I think that one of the things that Americans are longing for is meaning. We have our SUVs, we have our nice houses. We are only concerned with what’s at the end of our street. But one of the things that we have lost in our lives is meaning. And this fight, this fight against poverty, this fight against hunger, is a place where I think we can introduce meaning into people’s lives again and get them excited about these issues.

So I think our hope is that that’s a role that we can play as we go out into the world and we connect women to other women. It is ultimately the power of citizens, I believe, to force a change with governments. I think maybe we’ll see that happening with our own government in the years

ahead, we can only hope. But it really does come down to people caring enough to demand that the systems and the processes change.

**Betty Liu** Prime Minister, you must have some governance advice for us here.

**Tony Blair** Not really. What do you want me to say?

**Howard Buffett** I'm off the hook then.

**Tony Blair** I gather things are getting sorted out. By the way, it is important for the world that America gets some stability in its process back. So I mean how you do it is up to you, but from the perspective of the international community, people want America strong and focused and hopefully not going from one crisis to the other – because that's important for all of us, because you're such an important part of the world. It's interesting that...

**Betty Liu** Well, you need a stable United States.

**Tony Blair** That is an essential prerequisite of a stable world. And even in these countries that we're talking about out in some of the more remote parts of the world, believe it or not, they are quite focused on hoping that you guys find a way through these issues.

**Betty Liu** On that note...

**Tony Blair** I should have a medal for diplomacy on that one.

**Betty Liu** Well, on that note I wanted to thank our panel today for a fantastic conversation with Prime Minister Blair, Ritu Sharma, Howard Buffett. Thank you.