



# Building Brighter Futures for Women and Girls

## Findings from the CARE Learning Tour to India and Nepal

April 17-23, 2017

In April 2017, a bipartisan delegation of Senators and leaders from the public and private sectors traveled to India and Nepal with CARE to see how U.S. investments build healthier, stronger and more resilient communities. While India and Nepal have both made impressive strides toward reducing poverty and improving the health indicators of its people, both countries still struggle with high rates of poverty and persistent development challenges. On this five-day trip, the delegation saw firsthand how U.S. investments are transforming the lives of women and their families and promoting improved health outcomes, better access to nutritious food and expanded economic opportunities.



The delegation (from left to right): Front row: Senator Jeff Merkley, Ambassador Alaina Teplitz, Senator Chris Coons, Michelle Nunn, Michèle Flournoy, Mary Sorteberg, Liz Schrayser. Back row: Tom Mancinelli, Ambassador Nancy Powell, David Ray, Rahul Mehta, Scott Morris. (Not pictured: Matt Rimkunas)

### Participants

**Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE)**  
U.S. Congress

**Michèle Flournoy**  
Co-founder and CEO  
Center for a New American Security

**Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)**  
U.S. Congress

**Tom Mancinelli**  
Foreign Affairs Legislative Assistant  
Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE)

**Rahul Mehta**  
President  
Mehta Family Foundation

**Scott Morris**  
Director of the U.S. Development Policy Initiative  
Center for Global Development

**Nancy Powell**  
U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, 2009-2011  
U.S. Ambassador to India, 2012-2015

**Michelle Nunn**  
President and CEO  
CARE USA

**David Ray**  
Vice President of Policy and Advocacy  
CARE USA

**Matt Rimkunas**  
Legislative Director  
Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

**Liz Schrayser**  
President and CEO  
U.S. Global Leadership Coalition

**Mary Sorteberg**  
Registered Nurse  
Spouse of Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

## ► Day 1: Why India? Empowering Women and Girls

### Scene-Setter Briefing with Local Technical Experts

The Learning Tour began in the capital city of New Delhi with a briefing by local technical experts, including Rajan Bahadur, managing director and CEO of CARE India; Gayatri Singh, child development specialist of UNICEF India and Chakshu Roy, head of outreach for PRS Legislative Research. The panelists provided an overview of the current development challenges and successes in India, particularly related to maternal and child health, food and nutrition security and women's self-sufficiency. While India has seen ground-breaking economic growth since its independence 70 years ago, the country still struggles with extensive poverty and poor wealth distribution, poor and inconsistent recognition of women's rights and significant overpopulation. India is a country of contrasts, with growths and disparities, and a population of more than 1.2 billion people. What makes progress in India particularly challenging is the country's massive geography, diverse population and scale of the economy – reasons why continued U.S. investments are so critical; a point that was reinforced by each panelist. Yet, as Michelle Nunn pointed out at the end of the briefing,

**“the destiny of the world is inextricably linked to the destiny of India.”**

### USAID's Urban Health and Nutrition Day Program

Next, the group headed to a health center in an urban slum of New Delhi to visit the Urban Health and Nutrition Day program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). While rates of maternal and child mortality have declined in recent years, India still has the greatest burden of maternal, newborn and child deaths in the world. Through this program, specific improvements have been made in hygiene, kangaroo mother care and breastfeeding practices for mothers and their children. The delegation received a briefing from Dr. Sachin Gupta, the health office director at USAID; and Dr. JP Kapoor, the director of the Department of Health and Family Welfare for the Government of New Delhi. The delegation then met a community health worker – also referred to in India as an ASHA (which in Hindi means “hope”) – to observe the education activities they provide to mothers, including pre- and postnatal care, nutrition, hygiene and immunizations. Next, the delegation toured the health center and saw health

screenings for children in the area. The delegation heard from an expectant mother, Bimla, who plans to give birth at the hospital thanks to the information provided to her from an ASHA in her community.



*A pregnant mother receives counseling on proper nutrition and prenatal care from an ASHA at the Urban Health and Nutrition Day program in New Delhi.*

### Breakthrough Program

Next, the delegation traveled to the Breakthrough program in Delhi, which seeks to make discrimination and violence against women and girls unacceptable everywhere in all its forms, including domestic violence, sexual harassment in public spaces, early marriage and gender-biased sex selection. The program addresses these issues through the lens of gender and human rights using pop culture, multimedia, community mobilization and leadership training. In India, gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls continues to be a grave concern, where 47 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 – one of the highest rates in the world.



*Members of the Breakthrough program perform a drama on preventing sexual harassment for the delegation.*

The delegation heard from Sonali Khan, the vice president of Breakthrough, who provided background on the successes of the program. The delegation was able to meet two girls who are part of the program to learn how they have benefited from their participation in the program, including increased confidence and better communication skills with their peers and communities. After that, the delegation watched a drama performed by members of the group on preventing sexual harassment in public spaces, illustrating how they use community theatre to raise awareness on gender issues.

### Coffee Briefing with Corporate Sector Partners

Later that afternoon, the delegation attended a briefing with corporate sector partners, including Alkesh Wadhvani, director of health at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation at the India country office; Vedika Kapoor, head of corporate affairs at DuPont and Dipanwita Chakraborty, regional director of corporate responsibility for the Asia Pacific region at Cargill. The panelists provided an overview of the large role that donors and the private sector play in India to foster development and economic growth in the country. In fact, more than 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies currently invest in India. With India's growing economy and geopolitical rise, U.S. investments have shifted from traditional donor-recipient relationships into partnerships with the Indian government and its public and private sectors. The U.S. is working with India to harness the dynamism of its economy and the entrepreneurial spirit of its population in order to tackle their biggest health and education challenges. These development investments remain crucial to saving millions of lives. These investments are also key to advancing America's core economic interests and diplomacy efforts. Dipanwita said,

**“I can't underscore how vast and diverse the country is. This makes development an enormous challenge in India.”**

### Evening Reception with U.S. Mission in India

The delegation concluded the day with an evening reception with MaryKay Loss Carlson, the Charge d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy, as well as local partners in India. During the reception, Ms. Carlson gave remarks and thanked the CARE Learning Tours' delegation for taking the time to visit India and learn about the successes the country has seen in strengthening the health and agriculture sectors and what more



*Senator Coos thanks the Charge d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy, MaryKay Loss Carlson, for welcoming the delegation to India.*

can be done to continue to invest in India's future. Next, Senator Merkley and Senator Coos both gave remarks, where they thanked the U.S. Mission for their work, in collaboration with the Indian government and local partners, to improve health outcomes and economic opportunities for women in the country, and to reinforce the importance of a strong U.S. foreign assistance budget. Senator Coos said,

**“U.S. foreign assistance has helped transform the world and bend the curve of history in a direction that helps America and Americans. It's not just charity. It's a way that we help open up other societies. We promote democracy. We promote a free press. We promote open societies that are more receptive to the sorts of the things that Americans care about.”**

### ► Day 2: Increasing Access to Health and Nutrition Services

#### CARE's Technical Support Program

On the second morning of the trip, the delegation traveled from New Delhi to Bihar – one of India's poorest states – to visit CARE's Technical Support (TSU) program, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. TSU aims to support the Government of Bihar in combating maternal and child mortality by increased access to quality health services, nutrition and information for women and their families.

To reach this objective, TSU implements a set of core, proven interventions, spanning the family health continuum of services, including maternal and newborn health, nutrition, immunization and family planning. The ASHAs work closely with Anganwadis, who are also government health workers. The word Anganwadis means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi, and they are public health centers that combat child hunger and malnutrition. These centers were started by the Indian government in 1975 to provide basic services. Together, the ASHAs and representatives with the Anganwadis receive pre-service education on maternal, neonatal and child health and family planning services.

This program is critical for combating maternal and child mortality and malnutrition in Bihar, which has a population of 110 million people. Globally, one pregnant mother dies every 8 minutes, leaving India responsible for a quarter of all global maternal deaths. The delegation received a briefing on the program from Dr. Hemant Shah, chief of party for TSU. He explained that Bihar has the highest fertility rate in the country, yet also has one of the highest maternal, neonatal and infant mortality rates globally. Underlying factors that contribute to these negative health outcomes primarily include extreme poverty, gender inequality and social inequality, among many others. After the briefing, the delegation heard from two ASHAs, Rajni Kumari and Hema Devi, who explained the training they receive and the important link they make between women and the health system. They also explained the benefits of the education they provide to mothers, particularly on kangaroo care and exclusive breastfeeding.



*The delegation meets with community health workers, called ASHAs and Anganwadis, at CARE’s Technical Support program in Bihar, India.*

Next, the delegation split into two groups to visit the homes of two new mothers. One of these women, Nidhi Singh, had just given birth to her first son two weeks prior. She had gone into labor over a month early, but given the support she had from Annapurna Devi, an ASHA trained by CARE, she was able to recognize the signs of labor and went immediately to the nearest health facility to give birth. Annapurna has since made several visits to Nidhi to ensure that the baby is growing and she understands the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. Annapurna said, “I feel very satisfied and it gives me great inner happiness that the child and mother are well.”



*Michelle Nunn talks to Annapurna and new mother, Nidhi Singh, about the importance of health and nutrition education for women and their families in Bihar, India.*

### **Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia Program**

Later that afternoon, the delegation visited the Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA) program, which was established in 2009 in partnership with USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support women farmers by improving their access and exposure to modern and improved technological innovations, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. The decrease in the rate of growth of cereal production in South Asia is of great concern. Simultaneously, issues of resource degradation, declining labor availability and climate variability pose steep challenges for achieving the goals of improving food security and rural livelihoods. During the visit, the delegation heard from Dr. Ram Kanwar Malik, senior agronomist at CSISA, who explained the importance of public-private partnerships in implementing programs, including this one, in India. This program is based on four concepts: identify, knowledge, leadership and economic empowerment. To date, it has reached 8,000 women.

After hearing from several women about the impact of this program on their livelihoods, the delegation toured several demonstration plots to see how women farmers are being trained to use new tools and innovations to improve the quantity and quality of their yields. Many of the women shared that the extra income earned from their improved yields has gone to improving their children's education.



*The delegation tours several demonstration plots to see how women farmers are being trained to use new tools and innovations to improve the quantity and quality of their yields.*

That evening, the delegation traveled from Bihar, India to Kathmandu, Nepal to begin the second half of the trip.

### ► Day 3: Why Nepal? Empowerment Through Community Dialogue

#### Scene-Setter Briefing

The first morning in Kathmandu began with a scene-setter briefing from Alaina Teplitz, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal; Michael Gonzalez, the deputy chief of mission for Nepal; Peter Malnak, the USAID mission director for Nepal and Lora Wuennenberg, the country director for CARE Nepal. The U.S. officials provided a deeper understanding of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Nepal. In April 2017, the U.S. Mission celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its presence in Nepal. Alaina shared that Nepal is currently facing a vulnerable political transition with national elections occurring next month (May 2017) after years of political instability. Furthermore, the country still grapples with significant development challenges, and one-fourth of the population still lives in poverty. Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. In fact, as many as 41 percent of girls and 11 percent of boys are married before the age of 18. Further compounding some of these persistent development challenges, Nepal has also struggled

with several recent natural disasters and climatic shocks, including two devastating earthquakes in the spring of 2015, which resulted in the death of nearly 9,000 people, caused an estimated \$7 billion in damage and pushed 8 million people back into poverty. The aftereffects from the 2015 earthquakes can still be felt today, threatening the progress of reconstruction, and leaving many people still living in temporary housing. As Michael noted to the group,

**“the best investments we can make in Nepal to make effective and sustainable change are at the local level.”**

#### SABAH Program

That afternoon, the delegation visited SABAH, a social-entrepreneurship organization that works to strengthen the livelihoods of financially deprived and marginalized women in Nepal. The organization has a strong network of more than 2,500 women home-based workers all over the country and is completely owned and operated by its women members. SABAH first identifies women who are working in their home to make cash income and then offers women a wide range of trainings, facilitates cooperatives and helps those cooperatives serve and connect to domestic and international markets. The delegation heard from Sristi Joshi Malla, chairperson of SABAH Nepal, about the program and how the income of women in the group has improved by 170 percent. The delegation also heard from Nirmala, the president of the group. She told the delegation that many of the women in the program are poor and illiterate and experience violence in the home. However, through this program, many women, including Nirmala, have been empowered both in their homes and in their communities. In fact, Nirmala will be running for deputy mayor next month during the local elections.



*Women in the SABAH program support their families by processing fruit into candy to sell at local markets.*

The delegation then toured the compound to see the training the women receive on agriculture and small businesses, including a cabbage garden where they learn new skills to increase their yields and improve their production skills. The delegation then toured a storage room where the women make organic fertilizer and a candy processing room where woman make candy – both to be sold in the local market. The delegation visited the store front where the goods are sold. Lastly, the delegation heard from a woman named Sita about the benefits she has received from the program. She said, “Before this cooperative, we were not human. We were flesh, blood and bone, but we were not human. We did not have a voice. We did not exist outside of our homes. We were not really human. But we are now.” She now has two sons in college in the U.S. and said this is possible because of the program, thanks to the economic stability it has brought to her and her family.

#### Reception with the U.S. Ambassador

That evening, the delegation attended a reception with the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, Alaina Teplitz, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat and local development partners in Nepal. Alaina reinforced the need for a continued partnership between the U.S. and Nepali governments in order to promote democracy and development in the country. Michèle Flournoy gave remarks on behalf of the delegation and thanked the U.S. and Nepali governments for their continued work to empower women and girls and combat poverty in the country.



*Senator Coons and U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, Alaina Teplitz, greet the Foreign Minister to Nepal, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, at a reception in Kathmandu.*

## ► Day 4: Integrated Solutions to Women’s Empowerment

### Meeting with the Prime Minister of Nepal

On the last morning of the trip, the delegation had the chance to meet with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the prime minister of Nepal. During their visit, the delegation had the chance to gain a deeper understanding of the Government of Nepal’s development priorities, particularly those impacting women and girls. Prime Minister Dahal thanked the U.S. officials for their continued partnership in Nepal, particularly in terms of combating poverty, empowering women and girls and responding to the devastating earthquakes in 2015. Prime Minister Dahal emphasized the sensitive political transition that Nepal is facing and the importance of a continued partnership with the U.S. in order to see a more prosperous and resilient Nepal.



*Ambassador Nancy Powell meets the Prime Minister of Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal.*

### Sabal Integrated Development Program

On the last morning of the trip, the delegation drove two hours outside of Kathmandu to visit the Sabal program in Devitar, one of the areas hardest hit by the earthquakes in 2015. Sabal is a five-year project receiving \$59 million from USAID and operating in 11 districts around Nepal to improve food security and nutrition outcomes at the individual, household and community levels. CARE and Save the Children have implemented a multi-sectoral project that includes activities relating to agriculture, livelihood diversification, nutrition and disaster risk reduction. Sabal is designed to address the root causes of poverty with the aim of assisting individuals, households and communities to positively manage shocks and stresses related to natural disasters, climate change, political unrest, as well as more localized shocks like illness or death in the family.



*Senator Merkley and Mary Sorteberg learn about the REFLECT women's empowerment group from a CARE community facilitator in Devitar, Nepal.*

At the site, the delegation was greeted by Bharat Mani Devkota, senior deputy chief of party for Sabal, who provided an overview of the program and how it is empowering women to achieve better livelihoods, particularly as many of their husbands have left the area to find work in Kathmandu or outside of the country. This means that many of the tasks that men usually take on – like rebuilding their homes – is left to women in their communities. The Sabal program's success is built on community-driven development and this model drives sustainability. The delegation saw a simulation of the masonry training they receive to help rebuild homes in the area to withstand future earthquakes. The delegation heard from two women, Sangita and Nirmala, about the impact of the program on their lives and how, in particular, it has changed the perception of traditional roles for women as men are typically the masons and builders.

The delegation also saw a mapping analysis that the women's group – called REFLECT – created to help identify which homes were damaged by the earthquakes and where water and sanitation repairs are needed. Pabitra Nepal, a participant of the REFLECT group, lives in one of the regions hardest hit by the earthquakes. Pabitra joined the REFLECT women's group in hopes of receiving support to rebuild her life after the earthquakes, during which her home was completely destroyed. With two young children and her husband working abroad, she was concerned about the health and safety of her family.

REFLECT facilitators helped teach Pabitra and her group how to build latrines and they will soon start going door-to-door throughout their community to begin the reconstruction of homes and latrines. Pabitra and her children are still living in temporary housing. As one of the few women in the group with some level of literacy, she also teaches other women how to read and write.

## Conclusion

As the delegation saw, the need is great in India and Nepal for sustainable programs that place women and girls at the center. To address these challenges and build local infrastructure capable of providing quality services that respond to the critical health, nutrition and livelihood needs of women and girls, India and Nepal will require renewed political will, additional and smarter use of existing resources and strengthened partnerships to help drive both countries forward. Both countries have made significant progress with the support of the international community and the private sector – and opportunities remain for solidifying democracy, stability and prosperity throughout the region.

## Policy Recommendations

CARE advocates for the U.S. government to integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment throughout its foreign assistance programs. By placing an emphasis on empowering women and girls to exercise agency and influence through educational tools and economic opportunity, we can provide communities with the tools needed to sustainably lift themselves out of poverty. This, in turn, creates more stability and self-sufficiency at a national level and can help promote America's prosperity and security around the world. This can be done by creating strong policies and robust resources to promote women's and girls' education and leadership, prevent child marriage, combat gender-based violence and foster food and nutrition security.

Achieving these goals starts with smart investments from the international community, including the United States. The **International Affairs budget** is the U.S. government's primary funding source for international programs for emergency response and long-term development. Although the International Affairs budget remains less than one percent of the overall U.S. budget, it is routinely targeted in budget cuts.

An increasing concern is the continued erosion of base funding levels within the International Affairs budget, which has dropped to 2009 levels. CARE believes that there should be no disproportionate cuts to the International Affairs budget. U.S. foreign assistance programs save millions of lives every year, address the root causes of poverty, decrease dependency and build stronger, more resilient societies. CARE also advocates for greater accountability and transparency of these funds

CARE supports **The Reach Every Mother and Child Act, which will soon be re-introduced in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress** and leverages U.S. assistance to promote comprehensive health systems. The legislation improves *how* we provide lifesaving assistance by improving coordination and tracking results. It also improves what *type* of assistance we provide, ensuring women and children receive the proven, cost-effective interventions they need, such as vaccines, micronutrients and the resources to time and space pregnancies. This bipartisan legislation, coupled with sustained adequate funding for implementation, would advance the U.S. government's priority of ending preventable maternal and child deaths by 2035.



*A participant in the Sabal program in Devitar, Nepal.*

CARE also supports the bipartisan **International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA)**, which makes ending violence against women and girls a top diplomatic, development and foreign assistance priority. IVAWA focuses on preventing violence by transforming social norms; promoting political, legal and institutional reforms that recognize such violence as a crime and training police and the judiciary to both hold violators accountable and to respond to the needs of survivors; and reducing women and girls' vulnerability to violence by improving their economic status and educational opportunities.

If you are interested in learning more about CARE's Learning Tours program, please contact:

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