

Transcript: Q&A

Chatham House Prize 2014: In Conversation with Melinda Gates

Melinda Gates

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Question 1

Just this week we celebrated World Toilet Day. I know that the Gates Foundation sees this as a priority, partly because it covers so many fields – health, obviously, but also personal safety for women and girls, as well as development, mainly through the maintenance and repair services. My question is: can we do more in terms of local capacity-building, in terms of investing in social ventures for this maintenance and repair?

Melinda Gates

Absolutely. I think if you want this whole system up and running – it's not just about the toilet, the technological toilet we're trying to build that's a non-flush toilet. You don't want to build flush toilets (just for the audience) all over the world. It's expensive and it's a waste of water. So we're trying to come up, with scientists, with a new toilet that will help families – we have to place it in the right place for women and girls, but that helps the family so not only do you not have the disease spread and you deal with the faeces in the right way, but you don't have the smell and you can actually reuse some of that waste as fertilizer or energy capacity.

But it's not just about the toilet, as you're saying. To get it up and running and to get it self-sustaining, you have to build the whole ecosystem in the country and you have to build up the people around it who will sustain it. So the partnership we're involved in with doing that is not only looking at the toilet, is looking at the ecosystem around it. It's also looking at very small processing plants, so you don't build this gigantic processing plant but you build smaller processing plants in the community and it becomes a business for people as well. And then you work at the business locally of the pickup and the storage and moving the matter around, so that's all part of it.

The place that this is happening that's pretty neat already, even without the new toilet but the ecosystem up and running, that we're pretty excited about, is Dakar, Senegal. It's the local business owners who are turning this into a business for themselves. They're using computers to find out where they need to do the emptying of the sludge around. If they can really pull the demand together, it becomes a business, because they can go out to one part of the city and there's so much demand now, instead of it being there's demand here in the city and demand over there and demand over there, so by the time I drive my truck around the fuel cost isn't worth it. But if I can group up my demand on a given day, you can actually create a business for lots of entrepreneurs and it's really happening.

Robin Niblett

Wow, that's a good news story. It's nice to have a good news story at Chatham House.

Question 2

I'm working on a petition to pressure the government in Pakistan and the Taliban to allow the polio vaccination campaign to go on. The challenge is that the polio workers are getting paid around \$2 a day and they put their life on the line, vaccination people in different cities and villages. My question is: I

know there's a lot of work done by the foundation to help that, but how do you see that work continuing, in terms of eradication of polio? Because the last thing we want is polio on the same scale as, god forbid, like Ebola. Things are not looking pretty at the moment. What's your comment on the polio situation?

Melinda Gates

The foundation has a goal of eradicating polio off the planet. It will be only if we get it – David Heymann has been deeply involved in this work, was for many years. As a human race, the only disease we've ever eradicated is smallpox. We are at the end of the mile in terms of polio. So the goal right now – India became certified polio-free, it's been polio-free now for three years and it's certified. The lessons that came out of India, getting it out of there – there were only four countries left that were endemic countries, if you look back even three years ago: India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

So what we're incredibly focused on right now at this moment, now that we've gotten it, as a world, out of India, is Africa. Africa is really interesting. We're taking the lessons from India. Nigeria, we had 53 cases of polio last year in nine states. We've had six cases of polio this year in two states, including the one that Boko Haram has been –

Robin Niblett

So despite Boko Haram?

Melinda Gates

Despite Boko Haram and despite the horrible attacks on vaccinators that have happened there and in Pakistan. So if we can get polio out of Nigeria, it will stop breaking out. We'll stop having pockets of polio then in Africa that break out – they're all from Nigeria. If we can get Nigeria done this year, then we can concentrate on Pakistan. Afghanistan – everything that comes there is from Pakistan these days, it's just the cross-porous-border. So we are working, as you said, very closely with the government. The Pakistan government does not want polio in Pakistan. They don't want to be the last place on earth that has polio. So they are highly motivated now to work on this. Again, really learning what some of the global lessons are, with GPS mapping. But they have the tribal areas that make it tough.

But I think we will get polio done in the next few years. Hopefully, we'll get down to it being just Pakistan and then we'll rid it, which will be amazing.

Question 3

First of all, I want to congratulate you on winning the Chatham House Prize. I must admit, you have greatly surprised me today by the explosively political nature of your address. I do too – I'm quite familiar with the slums in Nairobi, I have to be honest, because I was a little while ago involved in making a documentary called *Mothers Against the Odds*, which was about a very important issue you've touched on

– the very high rate of maternal mortality. The thing that really impressed me was how amazing these women are, and I regret that might sound patronizing, but the way they can organize themselves when they're given half a chance. You have touched on something – I actually thought in my naivety, I might actually be telling you that today, but in fact you have floored me by your understanding in that regard, because that's the key thing, the investments you are making because you are empowering women. The documentary – the co-producer on that was a woman called Anne Daly, a multi-award-winning feminist. It might have been done without me, maybe, but the thing is – it just reminded me, listening to you, that when a woman says what you have just said today, in the same way as Anne Daly in pressing for that documentary, it does make a difference.

Question 4

We've seen in the last few months this year the extraordinary collapse of the global response, and its weakness and lateness, the global response around Ebola and health security. People getting involved very late, in very ill coordinated ways. Maybe we're beginning to get on top of it now. Do you see any role in your foundation in starting to address some of these structural weaknesses which potentially have catastrophic consequences?

Melinda Gates

I think besides the lesson of primary healthcare, coming out of Ebola, will be this lesson that the world has learned about paying more attention to pandemic epidemics. This one is obviously liquid-based, blood-based, etc. An airborne pandemic is something that we don't want to face as a world and we need to prepare for it. I think there have been other diseases that we actually did prepare for well, like SARS, so I think there will be a lot of global discussion about how we really start to plan ahead for pandemics. That's what's to come next, I think after the Ebola piece.

But it won't be just us. We'll help convene some of those conversations but a lot of it will be convening at the WHO, at the CDC, at the partners who have worked on the ground. We'll be part of the conversations. That was true in SARS. The piece we are always trying to just remind people, even as we were preparing for SARS, is: let's really look at poor people too. Let's not just stockpile for the UK and US and Japan but everybody else. But we'll be part of that, and if it doesn't happen we'll also be part of making sure it gets on the agenda, because it's important.

Question 5

I was lucky enough this summer to be present at an event where Malala was giving a speech, a young lady who exemplifies the kind of courage and precisely the kind of things you're trying to achieve with your foundation. Malala is famous rather for the negative side of what she's been doing, and that is the threat to her life that was not only there but carried out, which she thankfully survived. I wonder if you have something to say about the dark forces in the world that are still there and that are very clearly there in the Middle East, which Malala has faced and hopefully will not have to face again.

Melinda Gates

The safety issue, the violence for women around the world, is huge, both at that scale and even in their homes. The sites we're working in, in some places, we actually are – again, because of this gender lens – we're not just measuring the outcomes that we're trying to get, we're actually starting to ask the deeper questions about violence in the household. It's astounding what we're learning about that.

The thing I want to say first about Malala is she wants to take that though and really lift all girls up. Her whole message is: don't look at just me and what happened to me. That was tragic, but she's getting her own education and her whole foundation is going to be about lifting girls up with girls education. So I think that's what she ought to do and it's miraculous. She's an amazing person.

But then I think on all of these issues about violence, there will be shifts on these things. Part of it, again, is education. Part of it is getting these issues to come out in public. We still have these issues in the UK and the US, right? There is still violence against women and girls in our own countries, and boys and men at times.

So having it be public, but where I see the most change that's coming is when you get villages to come together and plan as a village, and start to say: we're not going to allow that anymore. Some of the greatest change I've seen is when a village starts planning around women and child's health and they say: we're going to commit to getting our women to clinic when it's time for them to deliver. They start to plan differently. The men say: gosh, we didn't plan the transport. We need to make sure the money is there, or we need to make sure the motorcycle is there. Or the village will say: okay, when the river rises, we don't have a bridge. We better commit our resources to building a bridge. Those villages, as they ask themselves the deeper question, they eventually hit on violence. A village will say to themselves – and I've seen this over and over again: we don't want violence in our village, and yet we hear it in people's homes. The men will start to say: it's our job to stop it. Only we can go knock on the door and say to that man: that is not okay.

So when you get these things, when you get public commitments from a village to change things, it's amazing how deep it goes. That's what gives me optimism. I am starting to see some of these self-help groups – not just women's, but we're starting to see more that either include men or sometimes include the mother-in-law in India, because she's the power structure. We're going to start seeing them at scale. The Indian government has a commitment in the two northern, most populous, most poor states, to scale up – in the next five years, they want to scale up over 5 million women's self-help groups of 20 people each. That's when you start getting scale. Those groups will scale to other groups, and that's when you start education and you start changing things, for men and women.

Question 6

You and I, two years ago, were guest editors on the BBC for the *Today* programme. We all here admire you enormously. But I've worked a lot in Africa and the Middle East, and are you as dismayed as I am by the decision in Egypt to let off the father and the so-called doctor who had performed FGM on some girl who died? Because we are told, and I've worked a lot in Egypt, that you have to have FGM, first, because

it's Islamic (which it isn't), and secondly, because it copes with female lust. The problem is not female lust, it's male lust. So are you as dismayed by that and do you have to campaign on FGM?

Melinda Gates

First of all, let me say this. I thought what the UK government did last summer to really bring forward the issue of FGM and child marriage, and early child marriage, to the forefront was incredibly important. I think in places like Egypt, having it come out in public that somebody got off on this is really important. Just like you're seeing in India, the violence against women is coming up in the news and is being reported regularly, not just once but on a continuing basis. I think that's how you get social change. But you also have to have the people in the country say: we won't accept this.

The piece that I see that's positive, that we can get a positive change on FGM, is if you meet with the hierarchy of the Muslim leadership, they say, just as you said: it's not in the Quran that you need to do FGM, it's not. They'll tell us – we've been working with them actually in Senegal. They say: we can get it out through our whole network. We have to get it down to the village level, that imam, to tell men and women, boys and girls, that it doesn't have to be there.

Question 6

The only thing is, I would say to you, is you talk about empowering women through education. A lot of my Egyptian women friends, because you know it has a very high degree of FGM in Egypt – I think the highest there is in the Islamic world – they are people who went to Harvard, they went to Oxford. They have gone through this. They were educated. But they've said to me, particularly after this particular judgment in the Egyptian court: we can't actually get rid of this ridiculous and disgusting practice. They are empowered but the society isn't.

Melinda Gates

It's a tough issue.

Question 7

Last year I heard, and I'm sure you know, about Matt Damon fronting the big charity called Water.org. It was very enlightening in the sense that, as you well know now, individuals can make a difference in terms of being independent and going into certain African countries and really making change, without any real relationship to the government. I know you've talked about certain African governments in a very positive note. But what is your relationship to most governments? Are they emasculated by what's happening? You're being very clever and not emasculating the male population in certain villages and certain areas where you have to change culturally what's going on. What is your general relationship with governments around the world, where you're making these enormous changes?

Melinda Gates

We have to believe, as a foundation, that all a foundation or philanthropy can do is be that catalytic wedge. So a foundation can take a risk where a government can't or won't take a risk. We can try things, we can try innovations. Some will fail, we're willing to let some things fail. But at the end of the day, if you want to talk about scale, if you want to talk about lifting up – Bill and I are interested in lifting up hundreds of millions of people's lives. At the end of the day, you have to work with government, because it's government that has that scale and that can scale it across the country. Both the donor nations – the UK and the US and others coming in with money – it takes that kind of scale money, and then it takes the money and the commitment coming up from the nations that are being helped.

The best thing we can do, for instance, in health is work through the governments. Ethiopia is setting up its health system and they are very systematic. They went and learned from India, they learned from Sri Lanka, they learned from other places. So they're setting up their system and then we slot in, in the various places that the various partners can play. That's true of Rwanda as well, and that's why they're getting such change. I just don't think it's sustainable – I don't think it's scalable or sustainable if you're not working, at the end of the day, with the government.

I won't say that everything can work through the government at the get-go. The vaccination work that we're doing in polio is in concert with the government but it's not through the government. It's tricky.

Question 8

Coming from India, I relate to all that you said about women and how helping women through her health and her education can change her life, her family and her community. Not on the same scale but similarly, there is an issue in countries like India where disabled people go through maybe even more social stigma. They don't get access to any of these resources because they are even considered below the others, whether it's gender or other races. Is there anything that you might be doing in the future to work with disabled people?

Melinda Gates

We don't work on everything. On disabilities, as I said, when we originally took this death approach, we also took a disability approach. We said, that is where somebody's out of work, because they've become disabled and then they can't work. So what Bill and I always try to do is look at the disabilities and say: how can we work upstream on an issue like that? So for instance, in some of the maternal work that we do, how do we get a woman in a situation where she doesn't end up with fistula? We work upstream of that. Fistula is something you get when you birth a child and things don't go well for you and you rip, then the rest of your life you're ostracized from your village because of the smell that you have. So if we can work upstream on an issue like that and give girls family planning so they don't get in that situation – it's mostly young girls.

So on the disability issue, the way we try to work on them is work upstream of that. But we don't work on specific disabilities today.

Question 9

My question is based on Ebola, technology and feedback. I'm from Sierra Leone, of Sierra Leone origin. I've been [indiscernible] my colleagues from [indiscernible] NGOs. Most of what they come and tell me is there is a gap, a gap particularly at the bottom level. If there's a way by which your foundation can assist in filling this gap, I think it will go a great way forward, particularly through technology. Can I have a comment on that, please?

Melinda Gates

The place that the foundation is working on Ebola – we did some original – it's the biggest emergency response grant we've ever done. The first part of the grant was to move supplies as quickly as we could. That was a piece of the grant. The rest, the large majority of the grant that we're spending money on, is exactly on the technology pieces that you're talking about. We're working on a diagnostic so we can detect Ebola, do a test on Ebola much more quickly than happens today, so you know whether you have it. We're working on that piece with partners. We're working with a set of partners on the drugs, getting something in addition to Zmapp and also trying to get enough Zmapp to get it scaled. We're working with partners on vaccines.

The other piece we're doing though is we were just involved in making sure that several bloodmobiles went from the US to Africa, because if I've had Ebola and you haven't had it but you get it, if we have the same blood type we can take my antibodies and use them for you. But if you don't have a bloodmobile to do that, you don't have that capability. So that is actually work that's going on now.

The last piece is to try to get a specific, what they call an apheresis machine, an antibody machine where we can collect everybody's antibodies who's had Ebola and skim them off and create a pool of antibodies that we could get back to Ebola patients. There's only one apheresis machine that exists on the continent of Africa, and that's in South Africa. So we want to get one into West Africa so it can be used not just for this but for other diseases as well, like Hepatitis A or MERS. That's another piece we're working on.

Question 10

I read an article in *Time* magazine – I don't know how accurate it was – where you spoke about how women limit their own opportunities, especially women who come from educated and affluent backgrounds. Then you spoke a little bit about how you were reluctant to take on the role of leading the family planning initiative, but you eventually took on that role. So I'd like to ask you your advice for women like myself, who are trying to carve their own directions. What is it that allowed you to take on that role and what advice would you give?

Question 11

When you're talking about scale and money, you're talking inevitably about confrontations with corrupt governments. If you deal with the governments, that deals with the scale, but you also have to help people in the field. Going back to the Hoover period, the Carnegie, there's been an incredible – where you have that kind of money, you have corruption and money disappears. How do you train people on the ground not to create resentment? Because you're almost coming in on a level of alternative government. How can you do that – we've got the Chinese and the Russians vying now. There's a huge amount of resentment of them and the way they've built infrastructure. You're in a sense building infrastructure. How can you do that? As an American, I want you really to succeed. How can you keep the operatives in the field? You must have huge – you haven't mentioned the numbers. How many people have you got on the ground, in the field, and how do you train them to deal with local cultures, not to create that kind of resentment and conflict and loss of money?

Melinda Gates

I would just say this: use your voice. Use your voice and your leadership, in whatever capacity you have it. It makes a huge difference in the world. You never know who you're going to influence, whether you influence a room of a hundred people or you influence a room of a thousand people, or somebody on the ground to then use their voice and get their agency going. But I think it's a lesson I learned late actually in my position. I sort of wish I had learned it earlier. So use your voice, and you won't be sorry that you did.

To this issue on corruption, there is still corruption, I will tell you that. But I think this is one of the things that feeds into this message that we need to update, that foreign aid is a waste of money because it carries so much favour and there is corruption. That is true under the period that you're talking about. When Bill and I wrote our annual report last year for the foundation, we wrote about three myths. One of the myths that we wrote about is that foreign aid is a big waste. Because people have this myth in their head that it carries favour and the corruption that used to exist still exists, they think that the foreign aid investments aren't making as huge a change as they are.

Robin Niblett

It's a big debate here.

Melinda Gates

It's a huge debate. So we've cut in half the childhood mortality rate – that is children who die under the age of five – it's been cut in half since 1990. Why? Because of foreign aid, because foreign aid funded something that the British government and the US government and many others have been very generous to, this Global AIDS and vaccine immunization fund. Getting vaccines out to children that work here and creating new vaccines is the big thing that got that childhood death rate down, as well as getting out malarial bed nets through the Global Fund. Those things work, and those multilateral organizations now

have mechanisms built into their measurement to understand when there is corruption. I won't say there hasn't been any under those but boy, do we go after it as soon as we see it.

Then to the backlash question, you just have to really work on the ground and bring people in who are working with you that are partners on the ground. So it's not just a WHO representative coming in from Geneva, there's on-the-ground cultural people working. That helps a lot.

Robin Niblett

I know the foundation has invested a lot actually in local organizations and so on, so this is a key part of that message.

Question 12

I would love to hear about some of the issues you're working on closer to home. You mentioned education in the US. We obviously have a very big issue with poverty in a lot of first-world countries.

Question 13

You're obviously best known as a grant-giving foundation, on a hugely impressive scale. I'd be interested in your interactions with impact-investing funds.

Melinda Gates

Outside of the United States, which is where the most money goes from the foundation, really is global health and global development. Again, to the point of all lives have equal value, and the place we really started there was health and then lifting people up.

Inside the United States, the biggest investment we make is in the US education system, because Bill and I feel that every child in the United States ought to have the chance of a great education. That's our biggest inequity in our country. We shouldn't have a system that graduates kids from high school and two-thirds aren't ready to go on to college. It makes absolutely no sense. The biggest lever in that is getting a great teacher in front of a classroom, and if you do that it's unbelievable how much gains they can get, with the right tools in their hands as well and the right teaching instruction. The gains they can get from kids, no matter what the zip code they come from and no matter what their background is in poverty and the situation around them. It's not that you don't have to address some of the poverty issues around too, but boy, the teaching gains and getting those to stick is possible with great teaching. So we've been very involved in that work, not just at the local level but the district level and state level.

Then to the question of impact investing. So besides giving out grants, the other thing the foundation does is we make investments – PRIs, we call them – into organizations that we're trying to help. If they're creating a business, let's say, of a new drug or a new way of doing mobile banking, we'll make that kind of

investment into them. We'll de-risk it by sometimes taking the riskiest piece of the equation so they can then get funding from other organizations and institutions and banks to come in. So we're doing that actually far more and we'll use our balance sheet actually to de-risk some of the equations too, in terms of the funding. So we've done a lot more of that in the last five years. I could talk to you offline about some of the specifics, if you're interested in that. But we use that tool as well.

Question 14

I'm involved in a social enterprise in agriculture, in Africa, in Senegal. Things have been coming a bit slow in terms of getting something of scale into a country that can be prosperous in agriculture. What measures does your foundation do to speed up the way that agriculture becomes a strong foundation for prosperity?

Robin Niblett

You mentioned nutrition, so I'm pleased we're able to get a question in about nutrition.

Melinda Gates

Nutrition and agriculture go hand in hand. I'll just take the agriculture piece, so I don't have to do both. One of the things we're very involved in is we have an organization on the ground called Agra, in Africa, which is trying to take the best of the green revolution, lessons that come out of South America and China, and take those to Africa and scale them. So one of the things they're doing is re-opening the seed systems in these countries at huge scale. Then, to take the gender lens on it, we're trying to make sure that the seeds, when we get a new drought-resistant seed where you can get a bigger yield on your farm, when you're getting less rain, we're trying to make sure the agro-dealers who have traditionally just reached the men – we're trying to make sure they reach the women farmers, because there are actually more women farmers than there are male farmers in the developing world.

So we're getting new seeds coming out. We're getting a drought-resistant maize. We're working on the cassava diseases, which isn't a very popular crop in Europe or the United States but it's the predominant crop in Africa. We're working on a variety of rice that can actually stay flooded for two weeks because the rains are coming later, and when they come they're coming longer, so you have both sides of the equation. Then we're trying to get them out through these seed systems at scale.

Robin Niblett

Melinda, thank you very much indeed. You took on a lot of questions, I lost count of the number we did there. I apologize for those who we weren't able to squeeze in. You really took on every question and hammered it. I'm glad that we got to hear your voice, your vision and your impact, and the impact of you and your foundation, your husband and the whole team at the Gates Foundation. We don't often get to

talk about good news opportunities at Chatham House. Inevitably, we hear warnings about the future or warnings about what's bad going on at the moment. But there are, although a lot is bad and a lot is difficult and a lot is tragic that you have to work with, you are able to share with us stories where a difference is being made, and that's hugely powerful for a group like this.

Tonight we will have a chance to celebrate your achievements and the choice of our members of you as the winner of this year's Chatham House Prize. Tonight, those of us who are there will get a chance to have a drink and to toast you. I have to say, those of our members who are here got to hear you in action, so I'm very pleased that you came, that you asked such good questions and that you gave us such a great performance. Thank you very much indeed. A strong hand for Melinda Gates.