

Speech by Carly Fiorina

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## Unlocking the Potential of the Poor

Good Morning, it is a great privilege to be with you this morning. I want to talk with you not about poverty and not about problems. I want to talk with you about possibilities and potential, and to do that I'm going to tell a couple of stories that made an impact in my life.

The first one I will tell occurred when I was 14 and had the wonderful opportunity of living in Ghana, West Africa. My father took a sabbatical and moved his family to Accra where he taught at the University there. We lived at the University campus of Legon and close to that campus was a village. Now we were something of an oddity back then as there were not many white families in Legon and so as the children would walk back and forth from their village doing whatever they were doing they would stare at our house and when I would get home from school the afternoon I would sit on the back porch and of course the people would stare at me, the kids would stare at me. I was not an expected fixture in that landscape.

There was one little boy who would come by every afternoon, and every afternoon he would get a little closer and it just so happened that one weekend we went out to the beach and we ended up buying a beautiful wood carving that was a game board. In Ghana there is, and throughout West Africa, there is a board game called Oware and it's played with seed pods- but we bought it because it was a beautiful piece of wood. And I was fiddling around with this board and these seed pods on that back porch and this little boy came closer and closer and finally he had the courage to come up and try and communicate with me over that board game. Well to make a long story short, this little boy was poor and tattered and we couldn't communicate really very well. I didn't speak his language, and he didn't speak mine, but we bonded over that game of Oware because he taught me how to play. And it became very clear to me very quickly that this was a really smart kid because he beat me every time and it was just because he was more experienced at the game than I was it was because he thought strategically about that game.

Now I'll tell you another story. This story happened in South Africa. It happened just a few years ago. When I was at Hewlett Packard we initiated a program called World elclusion where we would invest deeply in communities - very poor rural communities - for up to three years. We would invest technology but mostly we would invest the talents and energies of our employees. I was coming to visit this community because our program had been in place for two years and the president of South Africa had initiated the program and he was going to be coming to the village later that day to inspect our progress so I wanted to precede him so I knew what was going on. The employees there had told me the story of a remarkable young man named Soli George so I said I want to meet this remarkable young man. Soli George was about 20 or 21 and he came from a nearby village and you know all the statistics about those poor rural villages in Africa and all those statistics applied to Soli George. He came to the community center that we were building and wanted a job, so people hired him to move boxes. They asked him to move boxes of technology from one place to another. Well, Soli George was poor and Soli George was hungry but Soli George had a curious mind and so he started asking about what was inside those boxes. It turns out that what was inside those boxes were personal computers with Lenox software and pretty soon the employees took it as a challenge to teach Soli George about this technology and how to use it and to program it. Within a year, because Soli George was smart too, Soli George became very expert at fixing this technology. He became such an expert that Hewlett Packard employees started sending him out as a technical expert to the nearby community college.

I thought Soli George had such a remarkable story that I wanted to meet him and when I met him I said "You know, Soli George I'm so impressed with what you've done your President, President Mbeki, will be coming here later today and I would like to introduce you to your president." And this young man looked me dead in the eye and said "Good, I think you should. I think I deserve it." This young man had discovered more than a new life, he had discovered self confidence. And so later that day I had the privilege of introducing President Mbeki, but before I did I pointed Soli George out in the crowd and I briefly told Soli George's story to the community so they could see possibilities and potential. Then President Mbeki came to the lectern and began his speech. After a minute or two he said "young man I'd like you to come and finish my speech for me." And this young man came to the lectern and gave an impassioned speech about the power of possibility and how people had made a difference in his life. At the end of the speech President Mbeki told him that he would send him to college someday.

Let me tell you a third story another one of these communities that we invested in, this one in Kuppam, India. A rural community with terrible statistics like the people we learned about on those cards. In India, one has to have a national I.D. card and villagers would have to travel a long way away from their villages to places where these photographs could be taken, taking time away from their families and their work if they had any. A bright engineer from Hewlett Packard figured out that this was a printing opportunity so we invented a solar powered printer and digital camera. We provided an opportunity for two women, Seraswati and Gaury, to become village photographers. They built a very successful business going around to the villages close to theirs and taking peoples pictures. They became so successful that after a month or two their husbands gave up their work and joined their wives in building this business. And then, and here's the important part of that story, these two women came home to their village and they invested in their families by providing an education but they also put together a fund of their own to help other women in their village move ahead. You see, the data is very clear when you invest in women they invest in their families and their communities. The data is crystal clear that investing in women gives you a multiplier effect.

Next week begins International Women's Week, but actually it's a whole month. The UN will come out with a whole series of statistics that make it undeniably plain that if we want to solve any of the worlds most pressing problems, poverty -certainly, AIDS- more women are infected now than men, conflict resolution, even terrorism -after all, the young men who become terrorists go to their mothers for permission to become martyrs. If we want to solve any of the world's most pressing problems we MUST have women engaged in the solution. The data is clear. Because women invest in their communities, invest in their families.

Let me tell you one last story. I started out my business career as a secretary. My first job in business was typing and filing and answering the phones. I had no inkling that I would I would ever become a chief executive officer. Why did I achieve success? Why have any of us achieved success? It's because someone took a chance on us. Somebody gave us opportunity. Somebody saw potential. I will never forget the person who first saw potential in me when I was a secretary and said you can do something more. The people that we just learned about in this exercise. They are not poor because they lack energy or compassion or smarts or creativity. They are poor because no one is taking a chance on them. I believe as a Christian that every life is precious. As a business person, as a person who's experienced 50 plus years of life, I know that every person has potential. I know that everybody has more potential than they often realize themselves. I also know that every person in every organization achieves success because someone, somewhere along the way saw that potential and decided to take a chance and unlock it. The great joy of leadership to me, the great joy of giving to me is seeing that look in people's eyes. Everybody gets that same look when they accomplish something more than they thought they could. That's the gift you get back when you unlock potential.

Now my husband and I give a lot of money away, we have a foundation as I know many of you do and I think philanthropy is a wonderful thing. But I think making a difference in the world for these kinds of people is actually not about simply charity. It is now in our enlightened self interest. The world is now so interconnected, we are so interdependent, that we, sitting here in Florida cannot live in a world when a whole continent is at risk. And there are so many examples of this. And so I believe it truly is not just our obligation it's in our interest to do this. Certainly that is why we created the World eInclusion program when I had the privilege to lead at Hewlett Packard because we could see business potential in those communities -the potential to find partners, employees and customers. And Opportunity International is a business.

Now why do I like Opportunity International? First I had become aware of the concept of micro lending because I have had the great privilege of working with Dr. Muhamad Yunus, who as you know, perhaps, founded Grameen Bank, and is one of the founders of the concept of micro lending and now a Nobel peace prize winner. It made sense to me that if you want to help people lift themselves out of poverty and despair you must treat them with dignity and respect. Most people that I have met who are poor don't want a hand out, they want a hand up. Most people that I have met want to repay their loans. They don't want to be charity cases. They want to be dignified people that are respected for their contribution. So the concept made sense to me on a human level but at a business level I know that the problems we are facing, they are not hopeless. They do, however, require systemic sustainable solutions. We cannot solve the problem of poverty in this world unless we have systemic, sustainable solutions. I believe that Opportunity International is an organization that not only has its heart in the right place but is building a systemic, sustainable solution to the world's poverty.

I also believe in big goals. Now Opportunity International, as you know, has laid out a very audacious goal which is we are going to lift a 100 million people out of poverty by the year 2015 through a billion dollars. That's a big goal. I happen to know as a business person that you do not achieve progress against tough problems unless you set big goals. You have to have goals that are big enough that it causes people to change their behavior and big enough that it causes people to think differently about a problem. You may remember a fairly controversial thing called the HP/Compaq merger which has built the first 100 billion dollar information technology company in the world. We could not have undertaken such a difficult task as trying to pull off the largest, most complex merger in the history of the industry unless we started with a big goal, which was to become the leading technology company in the world. So for those of you who are skeptical about the audacity of 100 million people and a billion dollars what I would tell you as a business person is that without audacious goals that change people's point of view – real progress, real change certainly systemic, sustainable change doesn't happen.

I would also tell you that lots of smart people in lots of places are figuring this out. So, for example micro lending is becoming a financial instrument that big banks like CitiGroup or Goldman Sachs are using to create growth funds. Now they're going to charge higher interest rates, which may or may not be good for the people that we just learned about, and they're going to be focused on providing high rates of return in what is now viewed as a growth industry in the developing world, but never the less they've figured out that it works. And you're also going to see over the next couple of weeks a whole series of announcements from major companies to invest in women in particular because major companies have figured out that based on the data that it is inescapable and incontrovertible that if they invest in women they will get a better return. Opportunity International is ahead of that curve and in my judgment, needs to stay ahead of that curve.

I said at the outset that I didn't want to talk about problems and poverty, I wanted to talk about possibilities and potential because that is the way I think we need to think about this. Yes, these are unbelievably depressing stories, and yet think about how much better the world can be when these people who are smart, just like that little boy I met when I was 14 or just like Soli George, who are committed like the women in Kuppam, India. Just think how much better the world can be when those people have possibilities, when their potential is unlocked. It's not just going to be better because they understand the power

of compassion and the power of Jesus Christ, it's going to be a better world because they will be contributing to making it a better world.

Think about what is possible today, we can literally today grow enough food to feed the entire planet. That would have been unthinkable 150 years ago, in fact there was a whole economic theory around the fact that we could at some point not feed all the people on the planet. It was why economics came to be called the dismal science.

Think about the fact that we can shoot errant satellites out of the sky with a missile.

Think about the fact that we can send satellites into space which can take pictures of the rings around Saturn.

Think about the fact that we have decoded DNA and can now clone our food. I don't know how many of you saw this but there was a little announcement from the FDA a couple weeks ago that said that the FDA has now declared that cloned food is an acceptable product. Think about that. Think about the fact that we can go to the bottom of the world's oceans and discover millions of new life forms that we never knew existed. The truth is that this is a century where more things are more possible for more people in more places than ever before.

Think about the reality that we now have the technology so that any person anywhere can get any piece of information that they want at any time.

It is unprecedented. This is a new phenomenon in the scope of human history.

This literally is a century that we can do anything we choose. We create modern day miracles all the time and so I believe that eradicating poverty is a choice we should make and it is a result we can achieve, if we focus on the right tools the right people the right organizations and I believe that Opportunity International has all those things.

One of the things that I have said all of my career, because I believe it and because it's been demonstrated to me over and over and over again is, that everybody has more potential than we realize. The goal is to unlock potential because when we unlock potential we make the world better, we solve problems, we make progress, and lord knows we have a lot of problems that we need to make progress on. But the other thing I have always said and that I believe is real about the problem that these people we learned about face everyday in their lives is the terrible lack of choices in their poverty. This I know based on the experience in my life and the capabilities that we now have in this century, I know that when people come together, focused on a common goal inspired by a worthy purpose, particularly inspired by a higher purpose, then everything is possible. This is possible. Lift a 100 million people out of poverty. This IS possible and it will get done, and we hope you'll join Opportunity International. Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you.