Mary Ellen Iskenderian
Microfinance: Empowering Women, Transforming Lives

Abstract
WWB’s network of 39 financial organizations—also known as microfinance institutions—located around the world provide small loans, sometimes as modest as $100, to people to start their businesses. WWB is focused on ensuring women have access to these loans. Customers use these loans in different ways: some purchase a cycle to transport vegetables to a market, or use the money to buy raw materials; others buy fertilizer for their crops, or a sewing machine to start a tailoring business. However, they all have one goal: to make a decent living and support their families’ basic needs. Many are able to send their kids to school for the first time, eat three square meals a day or make seemingly small home improvements that can actually have a significant effect on the household such as move from a mud floor home to a cement floor.

WWB, headquartered in New York, serves as an umbrella organization to the 39 local organizations. It advocates for the benefits of microfinance and for the need to serve women, conduct research and share best practices. But most importantly, WWB develops vital financial products, such as savings and insurance, to enable microfinance organizations to better serve their clients and achieve their mission to bring people out of poverty. Ms. Iskenderian will discuss how microfinance can help women from developing countries build successful businesses, build and protect assets and improve their lives and the lives of their family. Ms. Iskenderian is a successful role model for students interested in business, entrepreneurship, team building, leadership from a gender perspective and both local and global finances.