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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the protection of children and youth in developing countries will continue.

I want to welcome our guests here today. We have with us Janine Maxwell and her husband, Ian Maxwell, co-founders of Heart for Africa.

Welcome. I am glad to have you here all the way from Swaziland. Thank you for joining us today.

We also have with us Tim Lambert, who is with the Egg Farmers of Canada.

I want to welcome all of you once again. I had a chance to meet with the Maxwells yesterday and hear a bit more about their story.

I am looking forward to having the whole committee hear what you are doing and what you are about. We are going to turn it right over to you for your opening comments.

Tim, I believe you have some comments as well, so let's do that and go from there.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell (Co-Founder, Heart for Africa): Thank you.

Good morning, members of Parliament. Thank you for inviting us to present to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

My name is Janine Maxwell, and I am here with my husband, Ian Maxwell. We are the co-founders of an NGO called Heart for Africa. While I grew up in Matheson, Ontario, which is between Kirkland Lake and Timmins, and my husband grew up in Crystal Beach, just down the road, we now live in Swaziland, Africa, on a sustainable farm that we call “Project Canaan”.

Swaziland is a small, landlocked country that borders on South Africa and Mozambique, with King Mswati III as the last absolute monarch on the continent of Africa. Swaziland has the highest HIV rate in the world. While statistics vary, we believe that the HIV rate is 46%. The average life expectancy is 29 years, and more than half the total population is orphaned and vulnerable children. Swaziland also has the fifth-highest infant mortality rate in the world.

Food insecurity is one of Swaziland’s largest problems, with 95% of all food consumed in the country being imported. Sixty-five per cent of all Swazi people depend on international food aid to receive one meal a day.

Furthermore, there are an estimated 15,000 households headed by orphans, where the eldest person at home is 15 years old or younger. The majority of children are severely malnourished because they do not have parents or adults to provide for them. Most of these children eat only one meal a day from Monday to Thursday, which is provided through the government-sponsored, internationally funded food program that I just mentioned. Friday through Sunday, there is often no food for these children.

To help this chronic and severe situation, Project Canaan was born. It is a large-scale farming initiative that focuses on hunger, orphans, poverty, and education—an acronym that spells HOPE. The land was purchased by the Heart for Africa charity in 2009, and it is title deed land. Our hunger initiative feeds 3,500 orphans and vulnerable children more than 74,000 hot meals every month through our network of 27 partners in the most rural communities of Swaziland.

Our orphan initiative works directly with the deputy prime minister's office, which has given us legal guardianship over 90 orphaned or abandoned children. They are all under the age of four. These children live at the children’s campus on Project Canaan and will stay with us until they complete their high school education.

Hopelessness drives women to dump newborn babies in pit latrines or place them in plastic bags and leave them on the side of the river to be eaten by river crabs. These are the children who now live at Project Canaan and are being cared for and raised in a loving community where they will grow and be educated. These children are the hope for the future of Swaziland.

Our poverty initiative is focused on employment and training. We employ more than 250 people on Project Canaan, each of them providing for an average of 13 people back at home. This means that 3,250 people directly benefit from our employment. We also train people in carpentry, jewellery-making, mechanics, child care, and agricultural practices.

Our education initiative includes the Project Canaan Academy, which was created to provide an excellent education for the children living on Project Canaan. We currently have a preschool and kindergarten, and will build a primary school and high school as the children grow up. Our medical clinic also provides education on HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and general health issues.

The Swazi government places a new baby with us every 12 days on average, so by the year 2020 Project Canaan will be home to 260-plus children. Our goal is to become self-sustainable by 2020. All of our initiatives are working towards that goal by either generating income or reducing our overall operating costs by producing food for consumption for our children, such as vegetables, dairy products, and, of course, eggs.

Food security is of utmost importance to us as an organization, and that is why the partnership with the Egg Farmers of Canada is so critical to our achieving our goals. On that note, I would like to introduce Mr. Tim Lambert, the CEO of Egg Farmers of Canada, to share more details about their involvement in our initiative.

Thank you.

● (1105)

The Chair: Before we get started, I'm just wondering, Ian, if you guys could talk briefly about what you did before you got involved. How did you end up where you are today?

Then we'll turn it over to Tim.

Mr. Ian Maxwell (Co-Founder, Heart for Africa): Janine and I had a marketing company in Toronto. Janine founded it and was there for 16 years. I joined and was there for about 10 years. We worked with packaged goods companies like Disney.

Janine was in New York City on September 11, 2001, and I was on an American Airlines flight flying to Chicago. Our worlds were turned upside-down, and we were really looking at our lives, because we had everything, but we could have lost it in a second. From that, Janine started a journey and went to Africa to see what was happening in Zambia, in Lusaka. Then she went to Kenya, saw what was happening there, and really felt that we needed to do something more than we were doing.

In 2004 we closed down our company and started focusing on working in Africa. In 2006 we started Heart for Africa, and we worked in Swaziland, South Africa, Malawi, and Kenya, just helping where we could from an agricultural standpoint. Our focus then zeroed in on Swaziland because of the great need there. The HIV pandemic there was leaving a country filled with children and elderly people. The children were hungry and starving and they needed help. We decided to combine all of our resources and efforts in that country to help them.

In so doing, in 2009 we purchased a piece of title deed land and started Project Canaan. That's how we got there.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll leave the other questions for people when we go through the rounds.

Tim, welcome, sir. We're going to turn it over to you.

Mr. Tim Lambert (Chief Executive Officer, Egg Farmers of Canada): Thank you very much. I would echo that appreciation, my appreciation and our appreciation, in regard to being able to have this time with you today.

As you've heard from Ian and Janine, they have a real message of hope, and hope in devastated areas of the world is of particular interest to us. I'm not sure how you would connect that to egg farming, exactly, but I guess it's my job to explain why.

At the Egg Farmers of Canada, the thousand regulated egg-producing families or companies in Canada, which I represent, we have a long history of involvement in a lot of socially responsible activities, such as food banks and the Breakfast Club of Canada. We sponsor CIBC's Run for the Cure and have been involved in food banks and breakfast clubs for many years.

In effect, eggs are the perfect protein, or the perfect product for a hungry world. You have the high-quality protein and all of the other micronutrients all in one package. They can be hard-cooked and stored for extended periods of time.

Also, you have an incredibly efficient little biological unit in the hen. There's only one other form of animal protein production that is more efficient at converting a pound of feed into a pound of whatever the product is, and that would be fish. Next to that, you also have a very small animal. Also, a very few birds can feed a lot of people. It's a very scalable business. In other words, you can make it as big or as small as you need to. It's absolutely simple. The humble egg is an absolutely brilliant solution for malnutrition in countries such as Swaziland and, indeed, in countries around the world that are suffering from problems of malnutrition.

In addition to our partnership with Ian and Janine, we're founding members of an organization called the International Egg Foundation. Egg businesses and company owners from around the world are putting money into this foundation. They support Heart for Africa's Project Canaan, and they also support capacity development projects in eight other African nations, mostly in the south. What we're doing there is providing some technical expertise.

We also have farmers who go over there and meet with small farmers who are looking to build their capacity, learn modern agricultural practices, and do a better job of caring for and feeding the birds, housing them, and learning to look after them. Our farmers volunteer their time to transfer their knowledge and expertise.

That capacity-building project is completely unique to what Ian and Janine have described around the orphanage in regard to what we try to do as a foundation. Our chair is a gentleman named Bart Jan Krouwel, who was formerly the head of the Rabobank Foundation, I'm a trustee, and Carlos Saviani, a vice-president at the World Wildlife Fund, is also one of our trustees. It becomes a little bit of different horses for different courses, if you will, and we recognize a fantastic opportunity with Ian and Janine.

We're doing capacity-building. We're involved in Mozambique, where they identify small landholders and have designed a little production system, a little model. They bring them in, train them, and then help them get a microloan to start their own small-scale egg production.

We're looking at doing some work with a foundation in South Africa called the Hollard Foundation. They are looking at things on a somewhat grander scale. They want to connect different businesses with entrepreneurs. In other words, they are looking for somebody who isn't going to do it just on a subsistence level or for the local villagers, but who truly wants to try to build a sustainable egg-producing company. It's all rooted in the belief that the humble egg can play a role in providing protein and improving the efficacy of vaccines, even the efficacy of antiretroviral drugs for HIV and AIDS.

That's how eggs fit, and that's a bit of our broader vision for the role that Egg Farmers of Canada can play in the process.

● (1110)

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much.

What we're going to do is start with our first round, which will be seven minutes of questions and answers. Some of the questions may be in French, so please take this opportunity, if you need translation, to put in your earpiece..

We're going to start with you, Madam Laverdière, for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank our witnesses for having come here today to tell us about their very interesting projects.

Mr. Lambert, you talked about eggs with a very special eloquence, and even defended its ecological side. I found all of this quite interesting.

You said that your organization was present in eight African countries. I was wondering if it is present essentially in South Africa or if you are also present in other areas of the world.

● (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Tim Lambert: Thank you for that question.

We are looking at a project in Pakistan and at a project in Nicaragua. This foundation was only started about two years ago. Rather than having our reach exceed our grasp, if I can put it that way, we've tried to focus on making sure we engage in projects that are going to succeed and be sustainable.

If I can relate this to Ian and Janine, before we committed to their project, Janine spoke at our international conference. Our chairman of the board, Mr. Peter Clarke, and I were quite intrigued. We had the opportunity to be on other business in South Africa and we went to see their project. What both impressed and amazed us was that what they were talking about and planning to do, they were doing. We saw dams. We saw buildings. We saw the children.

That's a long answer to a short question, but we are trying to make sure we succeed by partnering where we have a high degree of confidence that it will succeed, and as we have that success, we hope to draw funding and international interest to the International Egg Foundation's vision and mission. We don't think we can do that by having multiple projects that we just hope will succeed. We're being extremely selective, so we have two. Two may be pending, but it's too early to say if we'll take them on or not.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: If I may say so, I think that is a very wise approach.

I have another brief question. You mentioned your farmers. How many farmers are involved in those projects from your side?

Mr. Tim Lambert: Our entire board of directors has endorsed the project, but we have a project team of about seven farmers, the chairman of our board of directors, and several executive committee members. Interestingly—and it's by coincidence, because people volunteered—we have one guy who builds farm buildings and barns and another person who owns a feed-milling company. They all have egg production. They're all egg farmers. One person owns a transportation business. We've managed to grab all of the right skill sets.

We're fundraising to build our farm in Swaziland, but Egg Farmers of Canada is donating the travel costs to get there, and all the people are donating their time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Fine. Thank you very much.

Ms. Maxwell, currently the international community is very concerned with the issue of registering children, if only to allow them to have an identity when they begin their lives.

I was wondering what the situation is in Swaziland in this regard, given the challenges that country is facing.

[*English*]

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: That's a really excellent question. It's a big challenge for us. Ian and I are legal guardians over these children. In fact, we got baby number 91 yesterday, so we have one more than we had on record today.

It's a challenge. Many of the people living in Swaziland do not have identities and they do not have identity cards. From a payment perspective for our farm workers, we were paying them with cash and now we want them to have bank accounts. We're pushing them to get bank accounts, but in order to get a bank account, you need to have an ID card. In order to have an ID card, you need to have a birth certificate.

For 250 people on the farm, we are working tirelessly to provide transport, provide days off, and continue the payment for their workdays so they can go and get the birth certificate, which requires them to go home to their local chief and have someone prove that they exist. It's a bigger problem that we are addressing on a large scale on our farm. For our babies, when a baby is dumped.... Last week, a newborn was put in a plastic bag by his mother and left by the side of the river. Before the neighbours found the baby, the river crabs found him and ate a good chunk of him. The baby has lived. The baby has had a colostomy and is now with us. He will be one of the future leaders of the nation, but getting a birth certificate for that child is hard.

But the government works very closely with us, and the deputy prime minister's office is very committed to making sure we get the birth certificate of that child, so if that child needed to leave the country or, down the road, attend university internationally, which would be great, we will have that birth certificate.

● (1120)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: To become the leader—

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: To become the leader, so they can actually come to Parliament in Canada. The DPM's office is working very diligently with us, and it's not easy, but of our 91 babies, we now probably have 88 birth certificates, which is huge.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brown, please.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to our committee. We're delighted to have you here.

Ian and Janine, it was really nice to have time to chat with you yesterday and to find out about all the threads of our lives that have crossed in the past.

Mr. Lambert, you'd be interested in a little story. When I was in Ethiopia the last time, I was taken by our embassy to visit a couple of projects that Canada has invested in. For both of them, the objective was to sell eggs at market. The projects had about 1,000 hens each. I figured that the best way I could leave my money in the country was to buy the first 10 dozen eggs from each of them. They were doing very well, so it's really exciting to see this kind of project take off.

As you all know, our whole discussion here over the last little while has been looking at the issue at it relates to child protection.

Janine, you just talked about the importance of vital statistics—and I'm really glad that Madam Laverdière raised the issue—an area on which Canada is focusing between 2015 and 2020 with our maternal, newborn, and child health money.

I wonder, first of all, if you could talk a little bit about child protection in Swaziland. Could you touch on issues as they relate to how the work you're doing meshes with the larger country plan that Swaziland would have for its own growth and development, however elementary that may be right now?

Then, Mr. Lambert, could you talk a little more about the sustainability aspect and how you see yourself connecting into different countries in Africa, particularly in Swaziland? Could you tell us what the objectives are for the egg farmers and what is your involvement?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: I'll address the question of child protection first, because the issue of children at risk is a major issue around the world. As Ian was explaining, it's really why we moved to Swaziland. The farming is very important, but the farming is a means to an end. We need to be able to feed the children and we need to be able to provide incomes, so that we can care for these 91 children—soon to be 260—who are our children.

The government of Swaziland is working very hard to elevate its level of child protection to a global level. As we understand it, they're members of the UN. In order to be a member of the UN, you have to adhere to the Hague Convention.

In the constitution of 2005, Swaziland did not have a child protection act the way we would like to see it. From 2010 to 2012, they worked very diligently to get a child protection plan in place. It's called the Children's Protection and Welfare Act. It does all of the things we would like it to do. In fact, every time I'm in the social welfare office, which is under the deputy prime minister's office, the child protection act is sitting right there.

It is well used. If we're dealing with a child who has been left alone by the parents, which is very common in their culture.... At any time, day or night, I could go to the farthest reaches of the country, go to a homestead and find one of these households headed by orphans, where 15- or 13- or 12-year-old children are caring for younger children and have been alone for many days. The child protection act directly says that children under the age of 15—I'm not sure what the age is—are not to be left alone.

We can't go and collect all of the children to come and live at Project Canaan, but we can use that act. If we know that a child is being abused, or if there's a specific area of care that we can help with, or if there's a baby under the age of 12 months, we can take that act and walk in. They are very responsive to it. They know it inside out, which is great.

The other thing that's interesting about the child protection act is that it's very progressive, in a way, because it does not allow girls under the age of 18 to be married, which is very first world. Now, is that enforced every day in the country? No, in different areas and in different pockets, it's still culturally acceptable to marry off a child who's 12 years or 13 years old, because the family needs the money. They need the lobola. However, if we knew that was happening and it was reported to us, we would have no problem. Ian and I would be the ones in the car, with the child protection act, driving to a homestead with the police, and they would take action against it. It might not be a popular decision in the community at that time, but it is being upheld.

We're very encouraged by that. It's going to take time for it to be totally implemented, but it's something that we can hold onto and, through the deputy prime minister's office, we can make progress on behalf of the children of Swaziland.

● (1125)

Mr. Tim Lambert: I would like to divide this into a couple of parts.

One, how will we make the farming part of it financially sustainable or self-sustaining? We're trying to raise a little over $1 million to build a farm. We're going to start with 5,000 birds and scale it up to about 30,000. It costs us about $120,000 to provide pullets and feed for a year for those birds, so the initial part deals with fundraising. However, there is a large-scale commercial egg production company in Swaziland. Obviously, orphans don't have money to buy food so that creates a different short term, but that company has offered to help. In fact, they're currently donating eggs to the project while we gear up the farm.

They have a small I guess expatriate population that is looking for different types of eggs—free-run, free-range—and they will pay more. They're looking to partner with us in the project, and they will pay a premium for those eggs. We are also even looking in the longer term at an idea about creating a Project Canaan egg brand that we can sell at a premium. There is some long-term thinking on how we can create ongoing financial stability.

The other part that's really important is the human sustainability part. Ian and Janine do not adopt these children out. They're going to educate them and raise them. They will have them right through until they are adults. Part of that process, both for the children and for the farm workers, is to learn. If you contemplate the impact of the adults dying off, you can see that the skills of how to produce food or how to do carpentry or electrical work are all being lost, so there's a significant human education and vocational training that's part of this for the children, ultimately, and for all of the farm workers.

The impact of what they're doing at Project Canaan is rippling way beyond what the obvious benefits would be of the farm and the orphanage. We were sitting out late one evening—before the snake story arrived, which we'll tell you at some point—and we could see all these lights going on in the dark. Janine and Ian said that was something they're most proud of because they never used to see lights. There were a few cook fires, but no one had electricity. The whole standard of living is coming up. There's the financial and human sustainability on this project.

For the IEF, as we identify opportunities to tie in, every one of our projects is helping somebody do a better job of the business they have, helping somebody start a business, or helping somebody who is an entrepreneur. If I use the Hollard Foundation example—which is not a project we're doing yet, as it's at the conceptual phase—it's about matching training and expertise with a much larger vision for a bigger business.

For us, we inherently get I think that the sustainability question is imperative and that you have to work with the local people for it to be achieved. Whatever your project is, it has to fit with the circumstances on the ground, if you will, and you have to be adaptable to change.

● (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Garneau, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much. May I say that your stories are inspiring? I have great respect and admiration for what you do. If more people did what you do, the world would be in better shape, there's no question about it. That also applies to the Egg Farmers of Canada, who have done this wonderful outreach to different countries in Africa to help alleviate hunger.

I have a couple of technical questions, but I'll get to those in a second. You have described what you do. If there's one message that you want to get across to us today, in terms of a message that you really want us to understand here in the Government of Canada, what would that be? Perhaps each of you could go one after the other.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: I would say that my message...and I think each of them will be different, because my job on the farm is the children and the women, the children at risk and women at risk. My message to the Government of Canada and to the people of Canada is that there are people suffering and there are children suffering, and they don't need to suffer. We can do something. We may not be able to save them all and we may not be able to fix it, but we can do something to make a difference.

Our children of Canada will be the leaders when the children of Swaziland are the leaders. We need to do something now to help in the future, and we can do something, whether it's through government, or policy, or individual people supporting a child, or whether it's feeding children one egg at a time and saving children one egg at at time. We can do something, and we must.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Mr. Ian Maxwell: I would like to echo what my wife said, but also, if I had one message for the Canadian government, it would be that I would like to explore the opportunity for free trade with Swaziland. One thing that is a barrier to us as an organization is that it doesn't matter what we make, getting access to larger markets is always challenging. Swaziland was a part of AGOA, and the country has fallen out of that now, but if we could trade freely with Canada, that would be a big help.

Mr. Tim Lambert: In a word, I suppose that we would ask the government to help us make this a success. As you heard me say earlier, countries such as Swaziland and many others desperately need adequate nutrition. You can't learn, can't live, and can't grow without adequate nutrition. Nothing else is possible without the basic fundamentals of food and water, and part of that has to be protein. The egg just happens to be that perfect product and that perfect package.

We have the will. We have the talent and the expertise. We have people who are committing their time and will continue to do so. We're in this for the long haul. We need the resources to be able to continue the work to build the farm, but then also to extend this beyond this project, because I think this serves as a type of model for many other countries that need nutritional help.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

I have a question, Mr. Lambert.

With regard to egg farming, which I know nothing about, are there specific challenges in countries like Africa that are different from those here in Canada? I'm thinking of things like diseases that affect chickens over there but that don't exist here in Canada. Are things easier in some ways or harder?

Mr. Tim Lambert: That's a good question.

For many of the diseases they have, we have dealt with them here. They're more prevalent there because they don't have access to veterinary care, etc., the way we do. They have issues around managing temperature. They have issues around resources like electricity and whatnot.

We've found a system designed by a company called Big Dutchman that is specifically designed for use in sub-Saharan Africa. It's very simple. You don't need electricity. You don't need supplemental lighting for the birds. It's a very simple tier of cages. The water is fed by gravity from a little cistern. There's a little hand crank that moves the feed cart along, so you get uniform distribution of the feed. It's a perfect little system and it's totally scalable.

Yes, there are a lot of challenges. There are challenges with predators, which makes having free-run or free-range birds a particular challenge, but as near as we can tell from our research and work in Mozambique, we've found a model that will work extremely well in sub-Saharan Africa.

● (1135)

Mr. Marc Garneau: I have a last very quick question.

I know very little about Swaziland as well, and you have described some truly horrendous statistics about HIV/AIDS and life expectancy. For my benefit, please tell me if Swaziland was always a poor place, or has it become the way it is because of the high rate of HIV? It truly has monumental challenges. Was there a time when Swaziland was potentially a much healthier country in terms of its economy and other things?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: During the days of colonialism—and most of the countries in Africa were colonized—Swaziland was a protectorate under British law. It had the benefit of not.... There are two sides to it. They weren't colonized totally, but the British were there, and they had a deal with King Sobhuza to be in the country. When the British left, there were funds that went back and forth, There were deals that were made. I don't believe that the country was ever a strong.... Certainly, it was never a first-world nation. It has always been a small, one-tribe, one-language country. However, AIDS has totally changed the face of the country.

The difference between Swaziland and the rest of the African nations is that in most African countries, certainly in sub-Saharan Africa, people live in tribes or in villages. You've heard the expression that it takes a village to raise a child. There has been parent mortality since the beginning of time. A parent gets eaten by a lion, the village brings the children into the village, and they get absorbed. But Swazis live in homesteads. They do not live in villages. They are polygamists, so you might have a man with six wives. Each of these six wives wants to give him as many children as she possibly can because that shows honour to him, and it shows wealth. Also, it's her insurance plan. It's her savings plan for when she is old: someone will be able to tend the garden and bring water for her.

Because of the high infant mortality rate, she might end up with six of the nine children she has given birth to. The man goes off to South Africa or somewhere to get a job so that he can fund his family. He has sex while he's gone. He gets infected with HIV and brings it back. When he comes back, he infects all six wives.

If it were a different country, he might infect his wife and his girlfriend, or maybe two of his wives, but because polygamy is very much an important part of their culture, he has infected all six or eight wives. Then, when they all die, you have a homestead where there are 36, 45, or 50 children. That, I think, is the difference between what is happening in Swaziland and other nations being ravaged by HIV. Those children aren't being absorbed back into a village because they don't live in a village environment. Their village was their homestead, and the homestead is now void of adults.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, this is our second round. You have five minutes.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you for appearing here today.

Mr. Lambert, I was an executor for my brother-in-law's estate. He had a 10,000-chicken/egg farm, so I have a little of knowledge about it. I was also in Ghana a couple of years ago at a university in the northern region. There, they had hatchery machines, two big hatchery machines that could produce many chicks for the area for the farmers in the area. They're broken. They are down because of a relay, maybe, or a broken wire or something, and they don't have the capability to repair it.

When you're setting up these farms, do you also set up hatcheries for the continuation of it in order to supply them with the chicks to raise to lay the eggs? Then, of course, the other end of the cycle is that once their laying period is over, that's again more protein from the chicken. How do you replace to give the sustainability? Do you include hatcheries into your plan?

● (1140)

Mr. Tim Lambert: In the project in Swaziland we do not, because the commercial producer there, a company called Eagles Nest, has already agreed to supply out of their own. As they produce through their hatchery system pullets for their layer facilities, they will provide the pullets that we need. They also own a feed company, so we will purchase the feed from them. The work on the hatchery side is taken care of in this case.

In other projects, it will have to be built in as part of them. In fact, one of our project team members on the Swazi project is a gentlemen named Brad Lawson, who happens to own a hatchery in western Canada, so we have that expertise.

But you raise a really important point, because that can be the demise of a lot of projects: a relay switch fails and no one knows what that is or how to fix it. That's why I used the example, with Mr. Garneau's question, about creating or adapting a system so that it fits within the resources and skill sets they have.

There is another thing that there is a potential for in Africa. Where there is some commercial activity, where most of the major international breeding companies and hatchery companies, such as Hy-Line and Lohmann, are actively building their footprint in Africa, it may be possible in many projects to start the production at the point of lay. You have the chicks hatched. It's done by a professional international company. They are called pullets up until the point they start laying, at about 18 or 19 weeks. You get them delivered at that age and they go into the lay facility. You take a lot of the technical need out of the equation, and then, as you can build it, you can add it in. You don't tackle that right away.

Mr. Peter Goldring: One of the other things we had to be extremely cautious about was cleanliness for people going into the barns and all that. As a matter of fact, strangers were not invited in, period, and it was only the people who had to actually do the work in there who were in the barns. There's no tourism, if you like, because it's an absolutely clean environment.

With regard to the type of chick or pullet brought there, are they a particular breed that is resistant to some of these diseases? I would think that it would be difficult to control the environment if you don't have electricity and you don't have the air conditioning and other things to create that clean environment. Is there a particular breed that you use?

Mr. Tim Lambert: It's a breed developed by Hy-Line International, the Silver Brown. When we went to Mozambique—layers will typically lay between 19 and 52 weeks of age, say, or even go later—those birds were 60 weeks of age and they were in amazing shape. Mortality was really low. They were still producing a lot of eggs and were very healthy. I don't know that they're specifically adapted to sub-Saharan Africa, but I know they're quite robust, and that is exactly the same breed that we will use.

Also, you're absolutely right. At the end of the lay cycle, you have a whole new source of protein in the chickens, so that's where the part about sustainability comes in. You use everything.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Yes. It's a pretty efficient commodity.

Thank you.

The Chair: Welcome, Mr. Sullivan.

The floor is yours, sir, for five minutes.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you.

I too am incredibly moved by what you've done and what you are doing. It's an amazing story. I want to thank you for being, in some way, Canada's emissaries to Swaziland.

I want to ask about how you are getting money. Where is the funding coming from? In Canada, I've heard that on the part of the diaspora here it is incredibly expensive and incredibly difficult to send money to Africa. There are quite a few diasporas in my riding, not necessarily from Swaziland—I don't know—but certainly from many parts of Africa. The average cost of sending money to Swaziland is between 15% and 30% of the amount being sent. Companies that have tried to start up in Canada find that the banks here make it incredibly difficult for them because it's eating into their own profit.

How much of what you know is going into Swaziland is part of the remittance system from other countries, in particular Canada, and how much is coming from aid and charity?

● (1145)

Mr. Ian Maxwell: I'll answer that. Thank you for that question.

Heart for Africa has a foundation that is registered in Canada, as well as a charity that is registered here. We raise funds through private sources. We don't have government funding and haven't approached government in Canada for funding or grants at this point.

In Canada we have a small presence, but we are very efficient. I would say that our administrative costs are about 7%, and the balance goes to Swaziland.

When we registered the charity, in our articles, we were working in Africa, so from the CRA standpoint, we are sending money out of the country to promote these projects that we're working on in Swaziland. We haven't run into very many issues in sending money. Like I said, about 93% of what we collect goes to Swaziland. We're also on the ground in Swaziland. We have a Heart for Africa charity set up within their laws and legal system there. We manage the funds to make sure that every dime is stretched into a quarter.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Is 100% of what you spend in Swaziland then coming from Heart for Africa? Also, are you aware of the difficulties of the homesteaders in receiving remittances from other countries? Part of what you talked about was microloans. Are there any other sources of funding coming to those individuals from overseas?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: We don't do microloans. That's not part of our project. All the funds for Project Canaan come from either Heart for Africa Canada or Heart for Africa U.S. We also have a charity in Taiwan.

All the donations that come are managed by us and our board there to make sure that the funds are spent on.... If we're building an egg farm and we're putting in the pad for the foundation, 100% of the money that goes to Swaziland goes into that pad. I've not heard of the situation that you're talking about, with money going.... I don't know where it would go, because it goes from our bank account here to our bank account there.

But we're not distributing funds to people living in homesteads. We distribute food, hot food and cooked meals, so they can't take them and sell them. The children get a hot meal in a bowl for them to eat.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Is security for your operation an issue given that you're a place where there's a lot of food and there are a lot of hungry people around you?

Mr. Ian Maxwell: I think that whenever you're in a third world country where poverty is a very large problem, security is always a problem. We have 24-hour security at our children's campus and at our front gate. Violent crime is really not an issue. It's more that people are stealing things and food and stuff like that.

We employ 250 people as workers. I can tell you right now that we grow 60 tonnes of maize on the property and, yes, some of that disappears in their pockets, but on a grand scale, we don't really suffer from that kind of problem.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn, we're going to finish the round with you.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for what you're doing.

As it happens, at the end of April I'm going to be part of a little awareness-raising project with RESULTS Canada. It's called "Live Below the Line". My budget will be $8.75 for five days—to eat and drink—so I suspect chicken parts, the cheap chicken parts, and eggs will probably figure into my $8.75.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I want to go back to the HIV/AIDS thing. I spent a little time in Tanzania in this last year. It has issues with this as well. Some of it is cultural and a lack of education. In Tanzania, for example, whatever component homosexuality plays in the AIDS situation, officially homosexuality does not exist in Tanzania because it's illegal, so therefore, quote-unquote, it doesn't exist, and therefore there's a lack of education on the risks and so on. Is there the same sort of cultural challenge in Swaziland with public education in that area?

● (1150)

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: There's a lot because it's the hub right now, because it has the highest HIV rate. When Uganda was at its peak, that's where the epicentre was, and now Swaziland would be considered the epicentre for HIV and AIDS. So there's a lot of education. If students are in school, they're being educated. If they're not in school, it's a bigger problem.

On the homosexuality issue, I'm not sure whether...I've never seen that or heard.... There's really no conversation around that. I don't know whether it's illegal or not. The bigger issue, really, is rape. The bigger issue is incest.

I have a lot of people who come and say that we need to talk to them more about using condoms. There are condoms everywhere, in every government office. You cross the border and they look like candy wrappers. You have to tell the children not to eat them.

But the bigger issue is hunger, and poverty drives people to desperation. It's a hopeless nation. When people are hopeless, when men don't have purpose and they're drinking, they're raping the girls. I would say that 95% of all the women in Swaziland have been raped.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Obviously kids are going to be born with it. What's the incidence of that? It must be pretty high.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: It was high, but now there's this prevention of mother-to-child transmission program. I know that some of your funding goes to that. What it is doing to that country is a miracle. I applaud all the dollars you give to that. I'll give you an example.

I would guess that 60% to 70% of our children are exposed at birth, so that means there's a chance that as they come out of the birth canal they're exposed to it if the mother is positive. We do a rapid test. If we find the baby and we don't know the mother, we do a rapid test immediately, and if the child is positive we start treatment immediately, that day, with nevirapine, which lasts for six weeks.

If we know that the mother is HIV-positive—because they test her right before birth and on her card it says "exposed"—we immediately start the child. On this guess that 60% to 70% of our children are exposed, only 10% of our children are HIV-positive, so it's a miracle drug.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That's amazing.

It sounds like the government of Swaziland is making a sincere effort—

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: Absolutely.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: —to get their act together.

I don't know much about Swaziland. How stable is the government of Swaziland? Is it going to be there for a while?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: It's the last absolute monarchy on the continent, so King Mswati is the absolute ruler. He does have a British parliamentary system, so there's a cabinet that's been appointed and there is a parliament underneath them. It's an African country.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So the king is supreme, not parliament.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: The king is supreme.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: How old is the king?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: He's 45.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So he's outlived most of his countrymen.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: He's outlived most of his countrymen, yes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Is there a succession plan of some kind?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: It's not known to the public. When his father passed away.... It's not like in England, where we know who's next in line, or we think we know. It's not known to the public, but within the confines of the royal family and the government, they would know.

● (1155)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Do you ever get to have contact with him?

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: We do. He's very accessible. If anyone were to come there from Canada, he would welcome you with open arms. He's a very kind man. We've met with him once at his palace and at the Royal Kraal, as it's called, where his mother lives, the queen mother. We also have regular interaction with members of parliament. They're very, very supportive of us and when they come out to see what we're doing, they are all in tears. There's not a dry eye, because they see that it's a magical place.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So he's that rare benevolent dictator. The best form of government, in my view, is a benevolent dictatorship, but you have to find that benevolent dictator.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Laurie Hawn: He sounds like he might be one of those.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn, that's all the time we have.

We're going to start the third round.

Mr. Schellenberger, you have five minutes.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony here this morning. It's wonderful.

As a faith-based organization, have you experienced any difficulties in providing aid in Africa?

Mr. Ian Maxwell: Not in being a faith-based organization, no. There are a lot of challenges providing aid in Africa, but that is not one of them.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: That's not one of them.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: They're very welcoming to faith-based organizations.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: There's one thing I'd like to say. I know that hard-boiled eggs can be kept for an extended period of time, and I know that the Egg Farmers of Canada have hard-boiled eggs in refrigeration. I buy them at different times. There's a dozen in a package, and they'll have a best before date, and for a month or month and a half they'll stay good in the fridge.

In Africa, they don't have the same refrigeration. Is there a way to keep eggs for an extended period of time in that type of heat and weather?

A voice: Pickled.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: I pickle eggs too.

Mr. Tim Lambert: Yes, you can pickle them. They also can be pasteurized in shell. That's not a technique that we've looked at just yet.

With the volume of eggs they'll be going through with their hot meal program, I suspect that as they're hard-cooked, moved out, and consumed, we'll be looking at a matter of storage for maybe a week or so, rather than months. We will have the kind of facility that's part of our farm and has some cold storage capacity, so we should be okay there.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: Also, we don't refrigerate our eggs in Africa, and they last for four to six weeks. We keep them on our counter. No one refrigerates eggs there.

Mr. Ian Maxwell: They don't wash them.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: They're not washed.

Mr. Ian Maxwell: You get feathers and all sorts of things on them.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: They're not clean, but they don't go bad.

Mr. Tim Lambert: In Europe, they're not allowed to refrigerate eggs. If you go to a grocery store anywhere in Europe, you'll see them over where the bread is. They won't be in the cooler with the milk.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: I can remember going to my grandma's and grandpa's farm and gathering the eggs and taking them up to the house. Grandma would be sitting there with a cloth washing all the eggs to make sure they were good and clean when they went to the store.

I know that we've talked about this terrible situation where you find so many orphans in a country. I commend you so much for doing the small part that you can, because if everyone does a small part, it all makes a difference.

I sponsor a child in Malawi. I've had some of the same thoughts you've had about how I can help some of the people around that child I sponsor. Again, I don't know whether it's in a village situation or not, but you've given me some ideas today, and once I retire from this job, which will be at the next election, they might give me some inspiration to do some good going forward. That's just a statement.

Thank you very much for your testimony this morning, and thank you very much to the Egg Farmers of Canada in supporting this great cause.

The Chair: Madam Laverdière, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Can you tell me whether there is a serious tuberculosis problem in Swaziland? As we know, AIDS is often accompanied by tuberculosis. It is one of its serious complications.

[*English*]

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: They often say that TB and AIDS are best friends. In Swaziland, we have a national TB hospital. In the last two years, I have spent a lot of time there, because I have four babies whose mothers have passed away in the national TB hospital. In fact, if you go to the Egg Farmers of Canada website, you will see that on the very front page there's a picture of two beautiful little girls named Rachel and Leah, and they're eating hard-boiled eggs. Their mother was one who succumbed to multiple-drug-resistant TB.

I met with the doctors there and I went to visit that mother every week for almost a year, hoping that we could get her to live. I would bring her photos of her children. I would bring her short videos. I would bring her food, the protein she needed, hoping that if we could get her to live, I would have two orphans less. In the end, we moved her to our farm so that she could die with dignity.

No one knows what the numbers are, but when I sit with the doctors at that national TB hospital, they estimate that 70% of the country has active or inactive TB. They guess that 30% of that is drug resistant, which is a nightmare, because people transport all over the country in very crowded van, or what we call Kombis. These people are immune-suppressed, and it's a disaster.

● (1200)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: You've also mentioned a couple of times the fact that women abandon their babies by the river, and you talked about hopelessness on the part of people. I presume the two are tied, but I would like to better understand what drives these women to simply abandon their kids.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: I wish I knew. I've only met one mother like that, because usually when the children are abandoned, they are abandoned. We don't find the mothers. I met one mother who tried to do something. In fact, Tim was with me at the time. This young mother was 22 years old and gave birth at 11 o'clock at night. When she found out she was pregnant, she went to the man who impregnated her and he denied even knowing her. Then she was embarrassed in front of her family. She was ashamed. There's a lot of shame. The family was calling her names.

At 11 o'clock at night she gave birth and dumped the baby in a pit latrine in an outhouse. At 5 a.m. the next morning she went back to check on the baby, and the baby was alive, so she got fire and went and dumped fire in on top of the child. Her uncle heard the baby crying, and he ran and got dirt and piled dirt on top of the child to put the fire out. Then someone crawled down two or three metres and pulled the child out. The child was severely burned on her face, her hand, and her leg, and she lost her big toe. She went to the government hospital. She was there for six weeks. She lived. I don't know how, with the wounds she had.

The mother, of course, had to be there to care for her. The mother who attempted to murder the child is the caregiver in the hospital, because that's what they do. When the child was discharged, the mother was sent to the local women's prison. That day was the day that the CEO of the Egg Farmers of Canada and the chairman arrived. I said to them that I was going to pick up a baby and asked them if they would like to come. They got in the car with me. They probably would say no the next time; I'm not sure they will ever travel with me again. We actually got two babies that day and two the next day.

When we got there, I walked into the women's prison and I saw the child. The mother was there. I didn't know it was a burned baby. I immediately unwrapped her on the commandant's desk, evaluated the situation, and asked the mother to tell me her story, which she did. At the end of it I said to her—I'm sorry that I'm going on so long—that I never get to ask the mother who does this, and I asked her, "Why did you do it?" It was awkward for me to ask the question. It was an embarrassing moment, because I felt her shame. She just wept. She just wept. She didn't have an answer. She felt that she had no other solution.

So I can't answer that question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

I have two quick questions. You may not have time to fully answer the second one.

I would like to know what name you chose for the future leader of the country. Secondly, I would like to know this:

[*English*]

What's the snake story?

Voices: Oh, oh!

● (1205)

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: I don't have a name.

I can tell you that the river baby was named River, and I can tell you that the burned baby is named Shirley.

Tim, the snakes...?

Mr. Tim Lambert: After our day at the women's prison, we also had to go to the psychiatric hospital to pick up a baby, so that's a whole other story.

We were trying to relax in the evening, sitting out by a fire. They have quite a few dogs on the property. All of a sudden the dogs go into some sort of pack mode, and Janine says, "Don't anybody move." Ian gets up and gets a flashlight and shovel.

Literally right behind my chair was a puff adder. Puff adders kill more people in Africa than any other type of snake. I hate snakes. I really don't like snakes; I have a thing about snakes.

Ian's trying to hold the flashlight and kill the snake. I take the flashlight. The snake is wedged in a little stone wall. The shovel's not sharp enough, and the snake's trying to get out, and I'm trying not to wet my pants, and Ian's trying to dispatch the snake.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tim Lambert: I actually have a picture of the snake, which we finally got. I can show you later. Yes, that's the snake story.

The Chair: We're making it so welcoming for you, Tim, that you will always want to go back over and over again.

Ms. Brown, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Chair.

This has been most informative.

Janine, it's not easy, but thanks for sharing your heart. It's difficult. I've been in 22 African countries now, and the need is desperate, there's no doubt about it.

Tim, to go back to the subject of eggs, if I may, we buy powdered eggs. I don't buy them often, but we can buy powdered eggs. We take them camping with us. Is there any mechanism for doing that same kind of processing in Africa? You can hard-boil eggs, you say, but they are fragile to transport. That's a cost. Is there any mechanism for a process that could be utilized to enhance what you're trying to do? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Tim Lambert: We donate I think 16 tonnes a year to a children's charity in the form of powdered egg. That's another thing we're involved in.

I suppose part of it is that we've focused on teaching them basic agricultural production skills. When you get into further processing, you're into some of the challenges. A relay switch on the equipment stops working, or a fuse blows, and nobody knows how to look after the equipment. I think our focus has been the things I mentioned previously.

But the short answer to your question is that there's no reason that it couldn't be contemplated at some point or in some way. It's just that you get into more technology use and the challenges that go with that. That's not a reason not to do it.

Ms. Lois Brown: In cooperation with the larger-scale companies that you say are moving in, perhaps that's something that could be contemplated. I know that they're raising the pullets to send elsewhere and that's really their focus, but if there's an opportunity there, perhaps that could also be contemplated as part of sustainability. Then you would know that you are getting ready nutrition into the hands of the people who are most vulnerable. I'm just thinking down the road, I suppose.

If you were to start on a small scale—because obviously there will be people interested in small-scale farming—what would it look like? You said that you have a mechanism that will help to get the process started. I think that's a little more advanced than the small-scale farmer. How many pullets would you recommend to start off a small-scale farmer? Also, what would be the cost of this technology that you're saying is a kind of one-stop shop for farmers?

Mr. Tim Lambert: I suppose it could be as small as a handful of birds. The units we're building in Swaziland are two 2,500-bird houses. The project I referred to in Mozambique houses roughly 2,000 birds per unit, from which you're going to get—I don't know—a little less than an egg a day. They're pretty prolific producers of eggs, so probably at 2,000 birds you're going to have some 1,500 eggs. That feeds a lot of people. While 2,000 birds might sound like a lot, the average commercial flock in the U.S. is 1.5 million birds.

Ms. Lois Brown: Yes, they're big.

Mr. Tim Lambert: If you had a couple of hundred, you could be in that...

I don't know what the cost would be on a per cage basis or a per housing-unit basis.

● (1210)

Ms. Lois Brown: In Canadian dollars, do you have any estimate for what setting up one of those would cost?

Mr. Tim Lambert: Yes. For 2,000 birds, it would probably be about $15,000 Canadian to set up the system.

Ms. Lois Brown: Could they start with anything smaller than that?

Mr. Tim Lambert: Absolutely, yes. It's fully scalable. The cages all connect mechanically. You can have as few or as many as you want.

Ms. Lois Brown: So a small-scale farmer might want to start with...?

Mr. Tim Lambert: A couple of hundred birds.

Ms. Lois Brown: A couple of hundred birds, so if somebody wanted to get involved in providing something like that, if there were a reason for people to see themselves engaged for maybe $300 to $500, could they provide a small-scale farmer with something like that? Is that reasonable?

Mr. Tim Lambert: They probably could. It may be a little more than that, but it's in that ballpark, I would think.

Ms. Lois Brown: All right.

Ian and Janine, yesterday when we were talking we were just batting around some ideas. As part of fundraising mechanisms, we talked about having people think about a dozen eggs in Swaziland when they purchase a dozen eggs. You said something about maybe buying a chicken, but I think that when I buy chicken it's usually because I'm going to eat it, not because I'm really thinking about the chicken being a producer, whereas a dozen eggs is something that's tangible.

I would like to pursue that thought. I would be really happy to put some more contemplation into it and to see if my colleagues have any further ideas on that. Obviously, the funding part of this is something that you are very concerned about. I don't know how you have managed to date to do what you've done with the limited resources you've had. We talked about project money from the Canadian government, and we will keep you apprised of opportunities there as well.

For my part, I just want to say thank you for what you're doing. You never know which one of those little ones is going to be the next leader. As I've said to people before, when I've been in Africa.... My son-in-law is from Ghana. He is a brilliant young man with a doctorate in electrical engineering. If any one of these children is another Kofi, then the opportunity for the world is enormous. We do have a responsibility to help.

That's not really a question. It's just commentary, but thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a couple of minutes left. Do you guys have any final thoughts?

Or does anyone else have any questions? We've just finished our third round.

Mr. Tim Lambert: I'd like to say again how much we appreciate you taking the time and listening to the story. We really appreciate the thoughts and ideas and your obvious interest in this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll echo the committee members. It's great to see partnerships like this, because one plus one equals two, but one plus two plus three could equal many. I think that's the whole key. You get to leverage each other's experience, and it makes a big difference. It's great to see that kind of collaboration on the ground. As well, we're always proud to hear Canadian stories as well.

Mrs. Janine Maxwell: We're proudly Canadian.

The Chair: Thank you very much for what you're doing. We wish you all the best.

[*Applause*]

The Chair: We don't have other business, so I'm going to adjourn the meeting now. I wish people a good week. We'll see everybody on Tuesday.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.