

May 3, 2019

Mr. Mark Green  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Green:

We, the undersigned, believe that U.S. Government (USG) investments in gender equality are critical to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives, strengthening our national security, and increasing economic opportunities both abroad and at home. As reflected in the 2018-2022 Joint Strategic Plan and the 2017 National Security Strategy, “societies that empower women to participate fully in civil and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful.”<sup>i</sup>

We understand that USAID is currently updating its Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, which seeks to comprehensively improve the lives of people around the world by advancing gender equality and “empowering women and girls to participate fully in and benefit from the development of their societies.” We hope that any changes to the policy are based on a rigorous evidence-base and made in the interest of improving the policy to reflect new evidence where it exists, and new best practice, while also maintaining the policy’s integrity and allowing for consistency.

The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (GE/FE) Policy has been a critical foundation for progress on the promotion of gender equality throughout development and humanitarian assistance efforts over the last seven years, including identifying and addressing gender gaps, needs, opportunities, and barriers for achieving development outcomes across USAID’s work. Notably, following USAID’s leadership in putting in place the GE/FE policy and ADS Chapter 205 on integrating gender equality and female empowerment, a large number of USAID implementing partners have modified their internal policies, focusing on mainstreaming gender in accordance with USAID’s direction and leadership.<sup>ii</sup>

Congress under this Administration has passed legislation that the President signed into law, bolstering this agenda, including the Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 and the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017. These laws and associated initiatives are important steps and make clear that the U.S. government recognizes that promoting gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and LGBTI individuals, while utilizing an evidence-based approach, is critical to the achievement of the U.S. government’s foreign policy objectives. Without working to achieve gender equality, U.S. aid will not be as effective as possible, and the conditions that lead to the need for aid – such as fragility and conflict – will perpetuate. The advancement of global gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.

Today, we are writing to provide guiding principles for how USAID can strengthen its approach to and promotion of gender equality through updating its GE/FE policy.

- 1. Reaffirm gender equality as a core development objective, vital towards achieving the Journey to Self-Reliance.** A strong, evidence-based, and effective GE/FE Policy is critical to the realization of human rights; effective and sustainable development outcomes and growth; and over time transitioning from assistance to strategic partnerships with capable partner country governments and civil society.<sup>iii</sup> Supporting and strengthening the systematic leadership and participation of local women’s civil society organizations in decision-making processes is key to ensuring community and country self-reliance.

2. **Maintain a holistic approach, affirming the indivisible nature of different aspects of women’s and girls’ lives and others marginalized due to their gender identity.**<sup>iv</sup> The achievement of gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment requires a GE/FE Policy that maintains a holistic approach, and looks at root causes of inequality including harmful social and cultural norms about gender. A holistic approach must include engaging men and boys and LGBTI communities in the advancement of gender equality and the promotion of positive masculinities.<sup>v</sup> It is critical to utilize cross-sectoral efforts to ensure, among other outcomes:<sup>vi</sup>
  - Access to safe, quality, and inclusive education;
  - Access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health information and services;
  - Prevention of and response to gender-based violence;
  - Access to gender-responsive child and youth-friendly services;
  - Access to paid employment and asset ownership, including youth workforce development;
  - Reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work;
  - Women’s and girls’ collective voice in governance, including through supporting their meaningful political participation and strengthening local women’s civil society organizations; and,
  - Access to legal rights and judicial mechanisms to ensure those rights are upheld.
3. **Retain core principles of the GE/FE policy, especially the explicit commitment to the principle of pursuing an inclusive approach to foster equality.** The policy must continue to be inclusive of all, regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic area, migratory status, forced displacement or HIV/AIDS status.<sup>vii</sup>
4. **Take a lifecycle approach to understanding the specific actions needed to advance gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment, with a focus on adolescents.** Gender inequality and gendered power dynamics affect individuals across their lifecycles, and therefore all humanitarian and development interventions must assess and address these dynamics to achieve their objectives.<sup>viii</sup>
5. **Integrate a gender analysis throughout the program cycle.** As USAID looks to strengthen program design and integrate best practices, evidence, adaptive management and learning throughout the program cycle, USAID should ensure that a gender analysis and the engagement of program beneficiaries informs each stage of the cycle. This includes mainstreaming a gender analysis throughout strategic planning, procurement, project design, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.<sup>ix</sup> Gender analyses are critical to understanding the realities of women’s and girls’ lives, as reflected in the Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018. They must be conducted comprehensively and consistently throughout both development and humanitarian contexts.
6. **As USAID re-organizes bureaus and establishes new ways of working, ensure that the mandate and capacity to conduct gender analyses and integrate findings is maintained or strengthened across all bureaus and missions.** The GE/FE Policy should continue to be applied to all USAID missions in the field as well as to USAID policy and programmatic operations in Washington D.C. and elsewhere. This consistent approach will continue to facilitate orientation about and implementation of the GE/FE policy.<sup>x</sup>
7. **Evaluate the implementation of the GE/FE policy in an open and transparent way.** USAID should ensure a strong collaboration, learning, and adaptation (CLA) approach by developing benchmarks for evaluating the updated GE/FE Policy with input from partner country

government and local and international civil society organizations as well as from USAID staff, partners, and leadership.<sup>xi</sup>

- 8. Commit to meaningful substantive consultations with civil society organizations in the process of reviewing the GE/FE policy.** Following USAID’s established tradition of partnerships, the Agency should commit to formally engaging the views of civil society organizations with expertise in comprehensive and holistic gender equality policy and programming via in person consultations, and provide opportunities for written input into revisions of the policy before any updates to the established GE/FE are made final. This consultation process should include a wide range of civil society voices who have proven expertise in global gender equality issues, including, but not limited to, implementing partners, advocacy organizations, and those focused on evidence-based research.
  
- 9. Ensure the development, collection, analysis, and use of sex- and age- disaggregated data and gender-responsive data metrics, including gender equality indicators and data on issues specific to women and girls and others marginalized due to their gender identity, as well as other quantitative and qualitative gender data.** USAID should strengthen the development, collection, analysis and use of sex- and age- disaggregated data and gender-responsive data metrics, including gender equality indicators and data across all sectors in order to provide a holistic picture of the status of women and girls. Topline, national metrics, and individual metrics that are age and gender blind mask deep inequalities within populations as well as missing key early warning indicators for fragility.<sup>xii</sup> Such quantitative data, complemented by qualitative data, should be used in monitoring as well as in evaluation to identify the extent to which interventions are closing gender gaps and shifting harmful gender norms, and to determine whether interventions are potentially causing unintended consequences exacerbating and/or creating new vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. Using such data and analysis, stakeholders will be best able to collaborate, learn and adapt interventions accordingly.

Further, **the full implementation of the GE/FE policy requires internal structures best suited to maximize efficiency and impact.** This should include a fully staffed and funded Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and full-time gender-dedicated positions in the pillar and sector bureaus at USAID headquarters and in every USAID Mission. All relevant positions should be trained on the GE/FE policy as well as requirements under ADS 205, including on how to effectively undertake and use a gender analysis. Having the right capacity in the right places is critical to success.

**Any updates to the Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy must align with existing laws and key, cross-sectoral policies and strategies<sup>xiii</sup>:**

- Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act (2018)
- Women, Peace and Security Act (2017)
- U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (2016 update)
- U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (2016)
- USAID LGBT Vision for Action (2014)
- PEPFAR Gender Strategy (2013)
- Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action (2012)
- USAID Youth in Development Policy (2012)

We appreciate the opportunity to provide recommendations on strengthening the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment through the update of the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure effective U.S. foreign assistance that helps create a more stable and prosperous world.

Sincerely,

ACDI/VOCA

Advancing Girls' Education in Africa (AGE Africa)

AHA Foundation

American Hindu World Service (AHWS)

CARE USA

ChildFund International

Data2X

EnCompass LLC

Faiths for Safe Water

Friends of the Global Fight against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Global Rights for Women

Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation

Global Women's Institute

GreeneWorks

Heartland Alliance International

Helen Keller International (HKI)

Human Rights Watch

I4Y (Innovations for Youth), UC Berkeley

International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law

International Center for Research on Women

International Medical Corps

International Rescue Committee

International Youth Foundation

Jewish World Watch

Mercy Corps

Mercy Without Limit

National Association of Social Workers

National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International

National Democratic Institute

National Organization for Women

Oxfam America

PAI

Plan International USA

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Project Concern International (PCI)

Save the Children

Shadhika

Solidarity Center

The Hunger Project

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

The Voices and Faces Project

U.S. National Committee for UN Women

United Nations Association of the USA

United States International Council on Disabilities

Vital Voices Global Partnership

Women for Afghan Women

Women for Women International

Women Graduates USA

Women's Global Education Project

Women's Refugee Commission

World Learning

ZanaAfrica Foundation

CC: Senator James Risch, Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Senator Bob Menendez, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Senator Lindsey Graham, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Sub-Committee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Senator Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Sub-Committee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Congressman Eliot Engel, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Congressman Michael McCaul, Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Congresswoman Nita M. Lowey, Chairwoman, House Appropriations Sub-Committee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Congressman Hal Rogers, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Sub-Committee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs

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<sup>i</sup> Joint Strategic Plan (FY2018-2022), p 23; National Security Strategy (2017), p. 42

<sup>ii</sup> See Gender Practitioners Collaborative, Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality-  
<http://genderstandards.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), p. 1

<sup>iv</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), p. 1

<sup>v</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), pp. 6, 7, 11

<sup>vi</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), pp. 6-9

<sup>vii</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), p. 2

<sup>viii</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), p. 3, fn.3

<sup>ix</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), pp. 11-12

<sup>x</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), pp. 15-18

<sup>xi</sup> USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (2012), p. 14

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Please note other cross-sectoral strategies, including at the international level such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The targets and indicators related to Goal 5- Gender Equality are particularly significant.