Ms. Gloria Steele  
Acting Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  

Dear Acting Administrator Steele:

Congratulations on your recent appointment as USAID Acting Administrator during this pivotal time, particularly for global gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and others marginalized due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. The COVID-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated gender inequality, rolling back hard-won gains and decades of progress, increasing the urgency of this agenda.

Advancing gender equality and the rights of all women and girls, as well as those in the LGBTQI+ community, is first and foremost a matter of human rights and should be a goal in and of itself. It is also a critical and necessary precondition for achieving key U.S. foreign policy objectives, including strengthening our national security and increasing economic opportunities both abroad and at home, as evidence shows us that gender inequality is a root cause and driver of global poverty, hunger, poor health outcomes, increased violence, and cycles of conflict and forced displacement.

In your role as Acting Administrator, we call your immediate attention to the 2020 USAID Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy. This Policy was finalized and released in the last days of the outgoing Administration, replacing completely the 2012 USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, despite unanswered and consistently raised process and substance concerns from Members of Congress and gender experts across civil society and government. Beyond the evidence and best practice concerns around the 2020 Gender Policy, some of its substance, such as its limited definition of rights, the lack of inclusion of those in the LGBTQI+ community and the absence of an evidence-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, is no longer in line with current U.S. Government policy, as expressed by recent Presidential Executive Orders.

Given its critical and far-reaching impact, we ask for your urgent action to pause any implementation of this new policy as a matter of priority, and continue to use the 2012 policy and its operationalization under ADS Chapter 205 to ensure continued guidance for USAID staff and partners.

We further urge the new Administration to launch in 2021 a consultative process with internal and external experts – including women- and girl-led organizations, as well as LGBTQI+ organizations, in communities which receive USAID funding – to update the 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy so that it better advances gender equality and meets the needs of women and girls, reflecting existing evidence and experience.
The Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition stands ready and looks forward to working hand-in-hand with USAID to ensure the strongest possible policy and to support USAID’s efforts to drive progress on gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights across the globe.

Signed,

ACDI/VOCA

American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

CARE USA

ChildFund International

Heartland Alliance International

InterAction

International Rescue Committee

National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Oxfam America

PAI

Plan International USA

Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA)

Radiant International

Save the Children

The Hunger Project

Vital Voices Global Partnership

World Learning

CC: Senator Bob Menendez, Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
    Senator James Risch, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
    Congressman Gregory Meeks, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee
Congressman Michael McCaul, Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Michele Sumilas, USAID Acting Chief of Staff and Assistant to the Administrator of the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning

Diana Prieto, USAID Acting Director of the Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Jennifer Klein, Co-Chair, White House Gender Policy Council

Julissa Reynoso Pantaleón, Co-Chair, White House Gender Policy Council