

Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition

Recommendations for the forthcoming U.S. government Gender Equity and Equality Strategy

Gender equity and equality are first and foremost a matter of human rights. They are also necessary preconditions for achieving U.S. foreign policy and assistance objectives, as gender inequality is an evidenced root cause and driver of global poverty, hunger, and conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated gender inequities and inequality, so an intersectional gender analysis must be applied to all programmatic and geographic aspects of the U.S. government's COVID-19 response. Simultaneously, the increase in both slow and sudden onset climate change disasters and protracted humanitarian emergencies demand a commensurate response in terms of scale and urgency of this agenda, both globally and domestically.

As a global leader that wields a great deal of political power and influence, and the largest donor of foreign assistance in the world in terms of donor dollars,ⁱ the U.S. government has both a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to drive global progress on gender equity and equality. In order to achieve such goals, U.S. foreign policy and assistance requires a transformation and to intentionally shift the structural power dynamics that are reinforced at every level. This requires prioritizing the achievement of gender equity and equality through robust funding for gender capacity, staffing and gender data, and critically, flexible and sustained funding streams for women's rights organizations working in aid recipient communities.

This administration's strong commitments to a human rights-based approach throughout U.S. foreign policy and assistance, including meaningful engagement with civil society, is welcome and appreciated. Unfortunately, when it comes to the development of U.S. foreign policy and strategies, the vast majority of those impacted by marginalization and violence due gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation continue to be omitted from key discussions and places where decisions are made. Although U.S. foreign assistance policies and strategies will directly affect the lives of individuals most impacted by gender inequities and inequalities globally, their rights, experiences, and priorities are rarely if ever considered; their recommendations and solutions absent.

To achieve this administration's foreign policy and assistance objectives, particularly global gender equity and equality, the **Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition** urges the **Biden-Harris Administration** to ensure the gender equity and equality strategy aligns all U.S. government agencies and actors around objectives, tactics, and priority actions that intentionally take an intersectional gender and social inclusion lens, including through:

- **Recognizing and promoting gender equality as a human rights imperative and an end in and of itself;**
- **Aligning the new strategy around a specific objective and tactics that seek to address the root cause of gender inequities and inequality and to drastically transform unequal power dynamics arising from identity and external factors,** such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and class, as well as inequities and inequalities driven by historical and ongoing systems of structural inequality and oppression such as patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. Such strategies to transform unequal power dynamics and put women's rights organizations and girl-led groups and networks should be at the

center of all U.S. foreign policy and assistance efforts. These efforts must include, but not be limited to:

- Massively increasing flexible and sustainable funding for women- and girl-led and gender equality focused civil society organizations in aid recipient communities;
 - Establishing a gender advisory council in every Mission made up of grassroots women’s civil society organizations and networks, including youth-led and girl-led groups and networks;
 - Ensuring full-time Gender Focal Points in each Mission who are adequately resourced with time and budget to adequately promote gender equity and equality consultations and mainstreaming;
 - Significantly shifting procurement from “contracts” to grants and cooperative agreements; and
 - Simplifying proposal processes and requirements to allow for accelerated timelines and to create more space for local women’s organizations and others to apply.
- **Developing a coherent whole of government gender equity, equality, and social inclusion policy that uniformly applies to all U.S. foreign assistance structures and agencies**, following extensive and transparent consultations with women’s rights organizations across the globe. The government-wide gender equity, equality and social inclusion policy should seek to align U.S. foreign policy and assistance agencies around key gender definitions, and must reinforce as U.S. policy, commitments to an inclusive, holistic, and evidenced-based approach to the promotion of gender equity and equality globally;
 - **Mandating that each U.S. foreign assistance agency follow-up the government-wide gender equity and equality strategy and new comprehensive policy with time-bound agency specific implementation plans** that at a minimum include:
 - An evaluation of budgetary requirements, technical resources, and capacities needed to ensure internal gender structures are best suited to maximize efficiency and impact;
 - Assigned roles and responsibilities for executing the agency’s efforts as part of the government-wide gender equity and equality strategy and policy;
 - An assessment its gender architecture, resources, and staffing, including needed shifts and gaps to address;
 - A review of its gender data collection, maintenance, and analysis mechanism, and identification of areas for improvement;
 - An action plan and complementary accountability mechanism for institutionalizing the agency’s continuous safe and meaningful engagement with women’s rights organizations, girl-led groups and networks, and other civil society organizations working in aid recipient communities to advance gender equity and equality and promote the rights and meet the needs of those most impacted by gender inequality.
 - **Mandating that an intersectional gender and social inclusion and power analysis is a minimum requirement to inform both the design and reporting of all foreign assistance programming**. Data that identifies gender-specific and -differentiated needs, challenges, risks, power dynamics, and opportunities should be collected by engaging a diverse range of stakeholders. Findings should inform partnerships and design, as well as be incorporated into reporting to assess progress and impact.
 - **Requiring that gender equity and equality is a stated goal for all U.S. foreign assistance agencies, policies, programs, and funding**. This requirement should apply to all entities supported by Congressional appropriations under the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill (SFOPs) and any international programs through domestic executive branch agencies.

- **Calling for all U.S. foreign assistance programs and projects to report on progress toward gender equity and equality indicators as part of a robust, multi-sectoral framework, with data disaggregated by sex, gender, age, disability, and other factors of diversity.** Specific programs and projects should set clearly identified gender equity and equality goals and develop project-level indicators based on the findings of the intersectional gender and social inclusion analysis and programmatic objectives. All data should be collected and made public in line with established safeguarding and ethical standards and protocols.
- **Aligning interagency standards and guidelines on the development, collection, analysis, and use of gender data.** This will positively impact efficiency, comparability, and impact. In addition, increased commitments should be made to meeting international transparency standards in reporting development cooperation spending – including gender data – via International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
- **Committing to a specific plan for a percentage increase in U.S. foreign assistance programming with gender equity and equality as a primary or secondary goal.** This commitment should increase, in set increments over the next three years, the percentage of U.S. foreign assistance programming that makes improving gender equity and equality either a primary or secondary outcome goal. Utilizing standard gender equality markers, including the OECD DAC gender marker, the plan of action should take into account differentiation across sectors, with targets and timelines based on the sector’s history of gender equity and equality mainstreaming.
 - The Big Ideas Coalition supports calls from others in the gender equality community, including the Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the U.S., in urging the U.S. government to commit to ensuring that **100% of U.S. foreign assistance programming has gender equality and equity as a secondary outcome at a minimum, and a target of 20% of U.S. foreign assistance programming with the improvement of gender equity and equality as a primary outcome goal.**

**For more, please see the [brief](#) developed by the Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy in the U.S.*

- **Embedding “Do No Harm” as a central principle in all U.S. foreign policy and assistance efforts,** including through recommending that all U.S. funded foreign assistance projects institute mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (PSHEA), and making data on complaints received and actions taken public; increasing transparency and accountability in alignment with established safeguarding and ethical standards.
- **Aligning, reinforcing, and ensuring complementarity with all U.S. foreign policy and assistance strategies and policies.** Examples may include, but are not limited to: USAID’s Climate Strategy, USAID’s Resilience Policy, the U.S. government Global Food Security Strategy, the U.S. government Global Water Strategy, the Youth in Development Strategy, and all COVID-19 related response strategies and implementation plans. The forthcoming gender equity and equality strategy must outline how an intersectional gender equity and equality and social inclusion lens will be embedded and mainstreamed across all U.S. government foreign policy and assistance efforts.

For more information, please contact the **Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition Co-Chairs:**

Leslie Archambeault
Save the Children
LArchambeault@savechildren.org

Justin Fugle
Plan International USA
Justin.Fugle@planusa.org

Rachel Clement
ChildFund International
RClement@ChildFund.org

*** The **Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition** advocates for placing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the center of U.S. foreign policy and assistance, as both the right thing to do, and the smart thing to do. The Coalition brings together over 25 non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and unaffiliated experts who are committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls globally.

The Coalition convenes key actors on cross cutting issues related to gender equality and works with policy makers to ensure that U.S. government agencies, including their gender structures, policies, funding, and data, serve to advance global gender equality and are informed by civil society experience and evidence.



ⁱ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/45472e20-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/45472e20-en>;
<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/04/17/international-aid-record-level-2019>