

The Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition
Response to the 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy by USAID

Previous Statements for Reference:

- [Big Ideas Public Comments on 2020 Gender Strategy](#)
- [Big Ideas Statement on 2020 Gender Strategy](#)
- [Big Ideas Coalition Statement on formation of WHGPC](#)
- [Original recommendations for the WHGPC Strategy](#)
- [Community Letter on Gender Priorities for Biden-Harris administration](#)

The Big Ideas Coalition for Women and Girls Coalition (BIC) welcomes the newly updated policy on gender from USAID, which is a significant and positive update [to the 2020 version](#). We are grateful to the Administration for conducting a consultative process with stakeholders from civil society and the Global South, and appreciate their meaningful consideration of [our coalition's concerns about the 2020 version of the policy](#) and recommendations for this update. This policy is clearly a result of strong engagement with key stakeholders in civil society, USAID, and in Congress. We congratulate the Administration and USAID on the release of a holistic and strong policy that works to build upon evidence in the field and ensure we can address gender inequality globally.

In reviewing the 2023 policy update, we were pleased to see that many of the coalition's and broader gender community's recommendations were taken into consideration and are reflected in the final policy document. Specifically, we are grateful to see:

- The strong utilization of the evidence and evidenced-based programming which is critical to promote the use of best practice and data to create impactful programming for gender equality.
- The reinforcement that gender equality is key to achieving many human rights, and that gender equality in and of itself is a human right.
- Linkages to other U.S. government and USAID policies, including those on women's economic empowerment, preventing and responding to child marriage, women, peace and security, gender-based violence, empowering adolescent girls, and the first-ever national strategy on gender equality and equity, as well as guiding principles (such as intersectionality and locally-led aid) which match those of other policies and strategies.
- A recognition of life stages and that harmful gender norms can impact individuals differently at different life stages.
- A strong integration of a social norms lens and how it can impact achievement and impact on eradicating gender inequality.
- A recognition that online spheres and online violence can create virtual exclusion for many and have impacts on one's ability to engage in leadership and decision-making spaces, including in the media, as civic activists, and in peacemaking spaces, just as physical violence and threats of physical violence do. The new inclusion of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a welcome one, as is the illustrative list of types of TFGBV such as cyber-stalking, online exploitation and abuse of children, and online disinformation and misinformation.
- A training requirement for "all hiring and contracting mechanisms" to complete the Agency-standard and newly updated Gender 101 online course within one year of the release of this policy, and new hires within a year of their start dates.

- The requirements for the development of a Mission Order were extended to the Washington Bureaus showing a clear prioritizing of these issues.
- The continued impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on areas that created a backsliding in women's, girls', and LGBTQIA+ achievement of equitable rights.
- Strong inclusion and understanding of the linkages and impact of gender-based violence and strong integration of a GBV-lens throughout.

In addition to the many welcome updates that were included in the 2023 Policy, there remain some areas which the Big Ideas Coalition hopes that USAID will seek to address through its implementation plan of the Policy and in subsequent updates. Of primary concern is the downsizing of LOE for Gender Advisors: The draft Policy released in August 2022 had suggested that USAID would mandate all Missions and Washington OUs to have an advisor with a minimum of 75% LOE within a year. This seems to no longer have been included and leads to concerns that Gender Advisors will not have enough time or capacity to be able to properly implement the mandates of the Policy. Alleviating the burden of Gender Advisors within USAID would have been a monumental step forward in ensuring that the Agency could amplify and strengthen its work around gender integration. The way it is currently written (a minimum level of effort) can potentially lead to confusion and undermine the need if there is no percentage attached. Further, Washington OUs are not mentioned as having any requirement. It is our hope that subsequent plans and directives will strengthen this requirement and outline a minimum LOE of no less than 75%.

Additionally, we found the following changes to be of concern, and hope for additional clarifications or updates:

- The Policy does well to outline the existing and interlinking policies that are important for integrating approaches, but neglects to include policies including the 2022 update of USAID's Youth in Development Policy and the Indigenous People's Policy.
- The policy relies on the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, launched in 2016, for much of its linkages to the adolescent life stage rather than specific outlining for adolescent girls. It would have been a good opportunity to highlight directly within the Policy itself and with greater specificity how the U.S. government will address the specific obstacles that adolescent girls face at a disproportionate level, such as food insecurity during humanitarian crises, online sexploitation and abuse, and child marriage.
- There is little inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education and integration throughout.
- The draft had also indicated that USAID would adopt a Gender Dashboard that would allow for greater collation and analysis of existing USAID gender data and the adoption of a Gender Marker, which would allow for greater understanding as to the level of gender integration within USAID activities and programming. This has now either been removed or downgraded to strongly recommended. It is our hope that USAID will work to amplify and integrate these tools into their work and include them as required elements in subsequent updates to the Policy.
- Lastly, despite growing crises that have disproportionate impact on women and girls in all their diversity globally, there is little integration of the impact of humanitarian emergencies on named outcomes, and outside of the Global Snapshot on Humanitarian Affairs, the policy neglects to elaborate on how USAID will address gender inequality at the nexus of development and humanitarian contexts.

We remain grateful to USAID for its continued work to push forward the boundaries to achieve gender equality in our lifetime. We hope that further planning and strategies will continue to showcase that progress and integrate transformative solutions to create impact in the lives of individuals in all communities.

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

Rachel Clement, ChildFund
rclement@childfund.org

Aapta Garg, CARE USA
Aapta.Garg@care.org

Sarah Tuckey, Oxfam America
Sarah.Tuckey@Oxfam.org

Justin Fugle Plan International USA
Justin.Fugle@planusa.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 30 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.