

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT 2020 POLICY





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision is of a prosperous and peaceful world in which women, girls, men, and boys enjoy equal economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights and are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) achieves greater and more sustainable development outcomes by integrating gender equality and women's empowerment throughout our work.

At USAID, we are committed to empowering women and girls across the globe to advance communities in our partner countries on the *Journey to Self-Reliance* because we know no country can succeed if it excludes the talents and voices of its female population. Ensuring women and girls can reach their full potential in society is critical not only to attain gender equality and women's empowerment, but also to meet sustainable development outcomes.

Under this Policy, and consistent with Public Law 115-428, the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act (WEEE Act) of 2018, USAID's investments in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment aim to achieve the following five strategic objectives, which reflect the spectrum of activities we undertake across all sectors and fields to advance this Policy's vision and increase self-reliance:

- Reduce disparities between women and men in access to, control over, and benefit from economic, social, political, educational, and cultural resources, as well as wealth, opportunities, and services;
- Strive to eliminate gender-based violence (GBV), which affects women's abilities to thrive and succeed,¹ and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities, so all people can live healthy and productive lives;
- Increase the capability of women and girls to exercise their basic and legal rights fully, determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies;
- Support strategies and activities that secure private-property rights and land tenure for women; and,
- Improve the access of women and girls to education, including opportunities for higher education and workforce development.

Eight principles underpin our commitment to equality between men and women and the empowerment, protection, and participation of all women, girls, men, and boys in their societies:

- ① Integrate equality between women and men and women's empowerment into all of USAID's work;
- ② Engage men and boys;
- ③ Address the unique challenges of crises and conflict;
- ④ Build partnerships across a wide range of stakeholders;
- ⑤ Drive decision-making and investments by using evidence and data;
- ⑥ Hold ourselves accountable;
- ⑦ Do no harm; and,
- ⑧ Pursue an inclusive approach.

The goal of this Policy is to improve the lives of people around the world by advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls to participate fully in, and equally benefit from, the development of their societies on the same basis as men.

This Policy supersedes and replaces the 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy in its entirety.



Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) believes that gender equality and women’s empowerment are fundamental for the realization of unalienable human rights²—that is, rights inherent in all persons and that are universal and non-transferable—and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. For societies to thrive, women and girls must have equal and safe access to resources, such as education, health care, capital, technology, water and sanitation services, land, markets, and justice. They also must have equal rights and opportunities as business owners, citizens, peacebuilders, and leaders. Equality among women, girls, men, and boys improves the overall quality of life for all people across their lifespans.

INVESTING IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT CAN UNLOCK HUMAN POTENTIAL ON A TRANSFORMATIONAL SCALE

Societies with greater equality between women and men experience faster economic growth; increased agricultural productivity, resilience, and water security; and, improved food security and nutrition. Empowering women to participate in and lead public and private institutions makes these institutions more representative and effective. Increasing women’s and girls’ education and access to resources improves the health and education of the next generation. Additionally, women play critical roles as effective advocates for peace, community leaders, and champions of civil and human rights. We know that nations, communities, and families are more secure and prosperous when women can participate equally in all aspects of life and when they have the ability and agency to achieve equal outcomes to those of men. For example, when women meaningfully participate at the negotiating table, peace agreements are more likely to succeed and result in lasting stability.³

Similarly, USAID has also shown the importance of engaging men and boys not only for their own well-being and to become better family and community members, but also as allies and positive agents of change for women and girls to improve development outcomes.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT ARE FOUNDATIONAL DRIVERS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

USAID is committed to supporting communities in our partner countries along their *Journeys to Self-Reliance*, with the engagement of governments, civil society, faith-based organizations, and the private sector. Self-reliance is a country’s capacity to plan, finance, and implement solutions to its own development challenges, and includes a commitment to see these solutions through effectively, inclusively, and with accountability. To be effective, individuals within societies must have equal access to opportunities, resources, benefits, and legal protections. This, in turn, empowers and enables them to help shape their lives and contribute positively to their families, communities, and countries. Simply put, societies that demonstrate a commitment to enabling, empowering, and taking advantage of the full participation and skills of women are more likely to achieve self-reliance by strengthening local institutions; improving human and institutional capacity; fostering sustainable economic growth; and, moving toward inclusive, citizen-responsive, and democratic governance.

For example, women-led businesses can significantly outperform their peers: female entrepreneurs in some studies grew their revenues 1.5 times faster and created jobs twice as fast as male entrepreneurs.⁴

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT SUPPORTS AMERICAN VALUES AND FOREIGN-POLICY PRIORITIES

The President's 2017 *National Security Strategy* (NSS)⁵ states the United States, "will support efforts to advance women's equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and promote women and youth empowerment programs." The NSS clearly identifies women's equality and empowerment worldwide as both American values and foreign-policy priorities, by noting that, "governments that fail to treat women equally do not allow their societies to reach their potential."⁶ Further, the *Joint Strategic Plan* (JSP) of the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and USAID for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018-2022⁷

recognizes, "societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful." The JSP also endorses the transformative effects of women's economic empowerment for families and communities and commits to supporting women's economic empowerment as a driver of development, including by championing girls' education and striving to eliminate gender-based violence, which affects women's ability to thrive and succeed. Through this Policy, USAID supports the JSP, which directs USAID and the DOS to strengthen democratic, transparent, representative, and citizen-responsive governance, and to include women in political and economic processes.



Photo: USAID

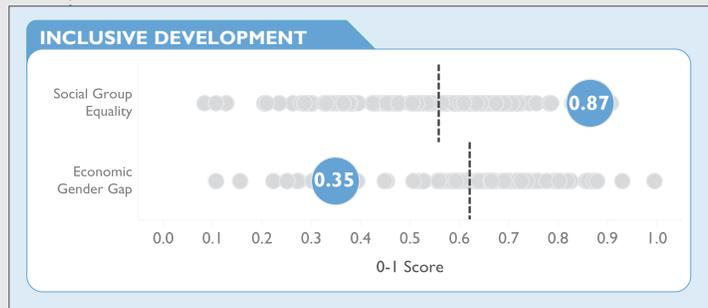
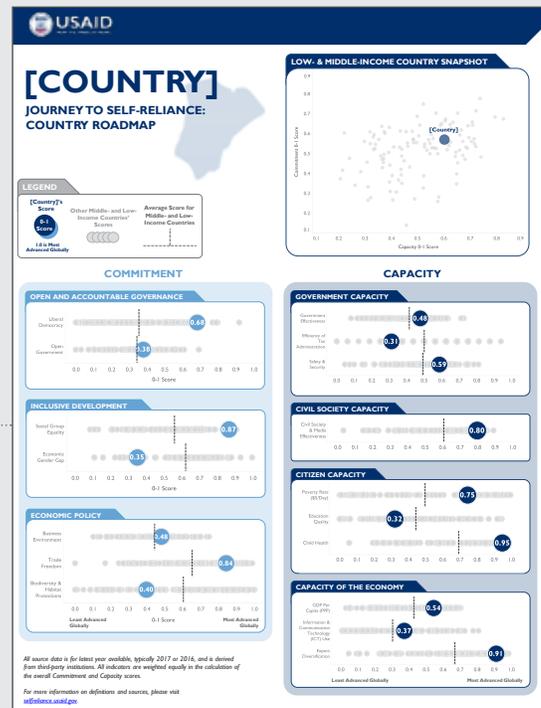
Country Roadmaps and Self-Reliance Indicators

The **Country Roadmap** is the analytic tool developed by USAID to visualize where each country is in its *Journey to Self-Reliance*, both as an individual country and relative to the rest of the world. The Roadmap uses 17 publicly available, third-party indicators that measure a country in terms of its commitment and capacity. “Commitment” is the degree to which a country’s laws, policies, actions, and informal governance mechanisms—such as culture and norms—support progress toward self-reliance. “Capacity” measures how far a country has come in its journey across the dimensions of political, social, and economic development, including the ability to work across these sectors. The indicators include the **Economic Gender Gap**, which is one of two metrics used to measure a country’s commitment to inclusive development. The Index includes five components:

1. Wage equality between women and men for similar work;
2. The ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income;
3. The difference between female and male rates of participation in the labor force;
4. The ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials, and managers; and,
5. The ratio of women to men among professional and technical workers.

To complement the 17 primary self-reliance indicators, the Agency curated a compendium of roughly 300 secondary metrics that include a range of gender-specific indicators of self-reliance. Prioritizing gender-specific metrics helps USAID better assess how the efforts of governments, civil society, and the private sector are supporting our partner countries’ progress toward self-reliance.

The Roadmaps inform the development of USAID’s country strategies and budgetary allocations, our engagement in dialogues on development policy, and our decisions concerning when to consider countries for possible strategic transition.



Recent Key Policy and Strategy Priorities

Recent U.S. Government policies and initiatives address aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment that reinforce the foreign-policy priorities articulated in the NSS and the JSP, including the following:

- The **Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act** (WEEE Act) promotes women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in developing countries, and calls for the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout USAID's Program Cycle.
- The **U.S. Strategy To Support Women and Girls at Risk From Violent Extremism and Conflict** aims to limit the destabilizing effects of violent extremism, including the risks it poses to women and girls, by supporting women and girls as actors in countering terrorist ideology and propaganda to prevent radicalization and recruitment in their families, communities, countries, and online.
- The **U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security** (WPS Strategy) responds to the Women, Peace, and Security Act, and is the U.S. Government's approach to promote women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict; countering violent extremism and terrorism and building post-conflict peace and stability; increasing women's physical safety and access to humanitarian assistance in areas that experience conflict or disaster; and, working with partner governments to adopt policies and capacities that support these objectives.
- The **Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative**, established by **National Security Presidential Memorandum-16** (NSPM-16), is the first whole-of-Government effort to advance global women's economic empowerment. The NSPM-16 also established the W-GDP Fund, managed by USAID, which was established to source and scale the most innovative programs and partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as faith-based and local groups, to advance the three pillars of W-GDP: women prospering in the workforce, women succeeding as entrepreneurs, and women enabled in the economy.
- The **Presidential Memorandum on Addressing Legal and Society Barriers to Women's Global Development and Prosperity** directed Federal Departments and Agencies to prioritize action, identify and reduce the binding constraints to women's full and free participation in the global economy by addressing W-GDP's five foundational legal barriers: women's abilities to access institutions, build credit, own and manage property, travel freely, and work in the same jobs and sectors as men. **The W-GDP Index**, a report by the White House Council of Economic Advisors, estimates that addressing these five foundational legal barriers could increase annual global GDP by \$7.7 trillion.



Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID

VISION, OBJECTIVES, & DEFINITIONS

VISION

USAID's vision is of a prosperous and peaceful world in which women, girls, men, and boys enjoy equal economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights and are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries. USAID achieves greater and more sustainable development outcomes by integrating equality between women and men and women's empowerment throughout our work.

OBJECTIVES

While USAID works to reach all people within our partner countries, women and girls are often the most vulnerable, marginalized, and/or excluded from society.⁸ Under this Policy, and consistent with the WEEE Act (Public Law 115-428), USAID's investments in supporting equality between women and men and women's empowerment aim to achieve the following five strategic objectives, which reflect the spectrum of activities USAID undertakes across all sectors and fields to advance this Policy's vision and increase self-reliance:

- Reduce disparities between women and men in access to, control over, and benefit from economic, social, political,

educational, and cultural resources, as well as wealth, opportunities, and services;

- Strive to eliminate GBV, which affects women's abilities to thrive and succeed,⁹ and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities, so all people can live healthy and productive lives;
- Increase the capability of women and girls to exercise their basic and legal rights fully, determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies;
- Support strategies and activities that secure private-property rights and land tenure for women; and,
- Improve the access of women and girls to education, including opportunities for higher education and workforce development.

USAID deliberately sets these objectives at a general level to allow for adaptation in varying country contexts. During strategic planning and the design of projects and activities at the global, country, regional, or sub-national levels, and based on a gender analysis, USAID's OUs should adapt and associate targets and indicators for tracking and measuring progress. In fulfilling the above five objectives, USAID should engage men and boys as champions and allies to achieve this Policy's vision.

DEFINITIONS

To achieve USAID's vision and objectives, this Policy uses the following definitions:

GENDER ANALYSIS: (1) Means a socio-economic analysis of available or gathered quantitative and qualitative information to identify, understand, and explain gaps between men and women, which typically involves examining— (A) differences in the status of women and men and their differential access to, and control over, assets, resources, education, opportunities, and services; (B) the influence of gender roles, structural barriers, and norms on the division of time between paid employment, unpaid work (including subsistence production and care for family members), and volunteer activities; (C) the influence of gender roles, structural barriers, and norms on leadership roles and decision-making; constraints, opportunities, and entry points for narrowing gender gaps and empowering women; and, (D) potential differential impacts of development policies and programs on men and women, including unintended or negative consequences; and, (2) includes conclusions and recommendations to enable development policies and programs to narrow gender gaps and improve the lives of women and girls.¹⁰

GENDER EQUALITY: The state in which women, girls, men, and boys have equal access to opportunities, resources, benefits, and legal protections, and which recognizes their equal, inherent human dignity, worth, and unalienable rights.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: The state in which women have the ability to act freely in society, exercise their rights equally to that of men, and fulfill their potential as equal members of society, such as to determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.

GENDER INTEGRATION: The process of identifying, and addressing inequalities between women and men during the creation of USAID's strategies, the design of all our projects and activities, and their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.



Photo: Karen Kasmauski / USAID



Photo: Morgana Wingard / USAID

OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Eight principles underpin our commitment to equality between men and women and the empowerment, protection, and participation of all women, girls, men, and boys in their societies:

- ① Integrate equality between women and men and women's empowerment into all of USAID's work;
- ② Engage men and boys;
- ③ Address the unique challenges of crises and conflict;
- ④ Build partnerships across a wide range of stakeholders;
- ⑤ Drive decision-making and investments by using evidence and data;
- ⑥ Hold ourselves accountable;
- ⑦ Do no harm; and,
- ⑧ Pursue an inclusive approach.

INTEGRATE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INTO ALL OF USAID'S WORK

Achieving the objectives of this Policy requires integrated, effective approaches and intentional actions to advance gender equality and women's empowerment throughout USAID's Program Cycle, and across sectors, which include the development of Agency policies and strategies, the creation and iteration of *Regional and Country Development Cooperation Strategies* (CDCS) or Strategic Frameworks, the design and implementation of projects and activities that engage a wide range of stakeholders, and in monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

New Agency or Bureau-level initiatives developed outside of the Program Cycle should also include strategies designed to address the specific needs of women and girls and/or to close targeted gaps. The roles and power relations between women and men can affect the design, management, implementation, and evaluation of projects and activities; it is essential that project managers address these issues continuously and iteratively and make improvements through collaboration with beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into USAID's strategic planning and design processes for projects and activities can help improve sustainable development outcomes, regardless of the type of award used. However, integration alone does not ensure that Agency activities address the most critical gender disparities or direct resources where they are most needed to empower women. Therefore, as needed, OUs should develop specific Development Objectives (DOs) in their CDCS or Strategic Frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, all USAID's OUs may invest in stand-alone projects and/or activities identified as strategically important to strengthening local institutions; building national commitment and capacity; and, assisting governments, the private sector, civil society, and faith-based organizations to strengthen the enabling environment for gender equality and women's empowerment.

ENGAGE MEN AND BOYS

Transforming the ways in which we engage men and boys to recognize and promote gender equality and women's empowerment is essential to achieving development objectives and long-lasting social change. All men can play a critical role in challenging inequitable norms and power dynamics, given their positions in households, communities, institutions, and in their relationships with peers and others. Men and boys would benefit from positive models that emphasize their important roles and responsibilities in helping to strengthen their families and communities.

Men and boys face different challenges and vulnerabilities imposed on them by harmful definitions of masculinity and societal expectations that limit male roles. For example, society has defined expected roles or negative stereotypes for women and men, which can restrict how each earns income and cares for family members. In addition, men and boys often are not taught the importance of shared responsibility in the home, or the productive value of domestic work. As a result, they might not value such work, and it can fall disproportionately on women and girls. Further, societal expectations and risk-taking behavior as a way of demonstrating masculinity can inhibit men from seeking health or other care in a timely manner and can lead them to participate in practices that do harm to themselves and their families.

USAID supports efforts to engage men and boys as positive agents of change within their communities, and as champions and allies for equality and empowerment for women and girls throughout their lives. Our programs aim to enlist the support of men and boys for the empowerment of women and girls across their lifespans, and also to encourage them to challenge the harmful cultural and social definitions that can limit their ability, as well as that of women and girls, to achieve their full potential. All societies benefit from the elimination of inequality and harmful gender norms.

ADDRESS THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF CRISIS AND CONFLICT

Women are uniquely positioned to play powerful, effective roles as peace-makers in societies that are conflict-affected or transitioning out of crisis; in high-crime and violent situations; and, in fragile states. Increasing the legal capacity and social ability of women to participate meaningfully in peace and political processes often results in more effective and enduring outcomes. Furthermore, by facilitating women's participation in decision-making; promoting women's roles in the prevention of, and recovery from, conflict; and, strengthening effort to prevent gender-based violence and provide survivors with timely and appropriate support, USAID can help ensure that investments in relief and recovery are effective and responsive to the different needs and priorities of women and men, and also support safe and equitable access to assistance for women and girls.

Consistent with the [Women, Peace, and Security \(WPS\) Act of 2017](#) and the [U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#), the [USAID WPS Implementation Plan](#) and the [U.S. Strategy To Support Women and Girls at Risk From Violent Extremism and Conflict](#) outline specific actions the Agency is taking to advance women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism and terrorism, and building post-conflict peace and stability.



Photo: Dave Cooper / USAID

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS

USAID is committed to fostering more flexible, adaptive, and creative approaches to engaging new and potential partners, including the private sector and faith-based organizations, because we recognize that no one organization or sector alone can solve gender disparities. To discover new and sustained approaches in achieving the vision of this Policy, USAID will continue our efforts to work with a diverse array of individuals and organizations around the world, including the following:

Educational Institutions: USAID will look for ways to harness the creativity and pioneering work of U.S. and international universities more effectively to contribute toward improving gender equality and empowering women across all the sectors where we work.

Local, Faith-Based, and Transformative Partnerships: Working with local individuals and organizations, including faith-based; civil society; women's organizations; and youth and disability organizations, USAID is building long-term capacity on the ground in our partner countries. This includes engaging with our partners and beneficiaries much earlier in our planning process as co-designers, co-implementers, and



Photo: Morgana Wingard / USAID

co-owners of their own development objectives. The [New Partnerships Initiative](#) (NPI) will allow USAID to work with a more diverse range of partners and provide entry points for organizations to work with us. The principles behind NPI appear in the Agency's [Acquisition and Assistance Strategy](#). By engaging local champions and organizations, we can capitalize on, and leverage, their passion, experience, and achievements, while building their capacities as advocates, leaders, and voices for change. In particular, USAID is committed to identifying and removing barriers to including community and faith-based organizations in our programming and partnerships.



Multilateral Institutions, Donors, and International Organizations: Fundamental to USAID's value proposition is our ability to convene and leverage assets, resources, and relationships. Solving complex challenges to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is a joint, ongoing, and collaborative effort that involves members of the wider development community.

Private Sector: Private enterprise is one of the most powerful forces for lifting lives, strengthening communities, and helping advance our partner countries on their *Journeys to Self-Reliance*, and plays a critical role both in solving global development problems and in creating sustainable solutions. USAID works with private-sector partners to address challenges that require resources and innovation beyond governments. Involvement of the private sector is fundamental to eliminating discriminatory practices, addressing restrictive norms, expanding employment opportunities for women, and ending the need for foreign assistance. Our efforts focus on tapping into opportunities to identify and work with private-sector actors to deploy innovative solutions, as outlined in the [USAID Private-Sector Engagement Policy](#).

U.S. Government and Partner Governments: USAID aims to increase collaboration and coordination with other U.S. Government Departments and Agencies by aligning and combining defense, diplomatic, and development investments and efforts. Our ongoing collaborations with partner governments also foster and sustain progress made in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.



DRIVE DECISION-MAKING AND INVESTMENTS BY USING EVIDENCE AND DATA

USAID is committed to a data-driven and evidence-based approach to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in our programming. Data, including sex-disaggregated data, play a critical role as a diagnostic tool in our ability to understand development impact, adapt our strategies and programs, and communicate results. Conducting a gender analysis, and using its findings, will help inform the design of our programs at the earliest stages. As technical experts and thought leaders, we work to ensure our investments build on evidence, data, and continuous learning across the Agency.

USAID continues to learn and lead actively from successes and challenges, as we distill, iterate, showcase, and circulate the broader development research, data, and best practices on gender integration and gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the Agency. Learning and leading involves using standard Foreign Assistance indicators to report whether USAID's programming has achieved the intended results. Along the way, we also implement rigorous monitoring and evaluation and adaptive evidence-based approaches to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in different contexts. In addition to allowing us to monitor the

results of our programs, quantitative and qualitative data should also be used to help USAID identify where gender gaps are greatest, and to target and modify the design of our projects and activities appropriately. Ultimately, data gathered over time drive the learning that allows the Agency to adapt and pursue course corrections as needed, consistent with the Agency's Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting approach.

HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE

Promoting equality between women and men and women's empowerment is a shared Agency responsibility and depends on the contributions and collective commitment of all of our staff. Gender Advisors and designated Points of Contacts (PoCs) work throughout the Agency to champion and advance gender equality and women's empowerment programming in our Bureaus, Missions, and OUs. Senior officials, Mission Directors, Bureau leaders, and others are accountable for implementing this Policy across their portfolios, as well as for defining specific goals within the Agency's strategies and programming that align with the objectives of this Policy.



Photo: Dave Cooper / USAID

DO NO HARM

USAID's Policy Framework emphasizes the principle, “Do no harm,” which means the Agency strives to mitigate any potential unintended consequences of our assistance that could inadvertently harm the people and communities we seek to support and empower. Closing gender gaps and supporting women’s empowerment involve challenging entrenched roles, norms, and practices. When confronted with changes to the *status quo*, some can react in unexpectedly harmful ways. USAID works to consult key stakeholders on the potential for harm, and engages with communities as we design projects and activities that reinforce the value of gender equality and women’s empowerment, and we monitor for unintended consequences throughout our development and humanitarian-assistance interventions.

Additionally, as outlined in the *USAID Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy*, the Agency also works to ensure its beneficiaries have safe access to USAID-funded services and activities. USAID has a zero-tolerance stance on the sexual exploitation or abuse of beneficiaries, as sexual misconduct of any kind strikes at the very heart and credibility of development and humanitarian assistance. In pursuing any allegations, we must respect and observe due process in evaluating any allegation of sexual misconduct, exploitation, or abuse by beneficiaries.

PURSUE AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

As articulated in the *Additional Help Document on Inclusive Development for ADS Chapter 201*, an inclusive development approach ensures that all people are included and can participate fully in, and benefit from, development efforts. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that an inclusive development approach leads to better development outcomes.¹¹

Additionally, understanding how different individual characteristics and vulnerabilities overlap is important for recognizing the full picture of a person’s needs. For example, the risks faced by an older man with a disability are distinct from those of an adolescent girl with a disability who is also part of an ethnic minority. Addressing these overlapping needs and vulnerabilities are essential to designing, targeting, and implementing USAID’s programming appropriately.

Therefore, USAID promotes a non-discriminatory, inclusive, and integrated development approach that ensures that all people, including those who face discrimination and thus might have limited access to a country’s benefits, legal protections, or social participation, are fully included and can actively participate in, and benefit from, development processes and activities. Consistent with this approach, USAID advances gender equality and women’s empowerment to address different sets of development challenges appropriately and effectively at the country, project, or activity level in the process of designing and implementing our investments.



Photo: Dave Cooper / USAID

GLOBAL SNAPSHOTS

On the path to achieving equality between women and men and empowering women and girls globally, every sector has a key role to play. While many countries have made progress in reducing gender disparities and advancing the status of women and girls, significant gaps remain. USAID must adopt a more strategic approach across our portfolios that leads to self-reliance, and ensures that our programs and activities are relevant and effective.

Ensuring women and girls can reach their full potential in society is critical not only to attain gender equality and women's empowerment, but also to meet a wide range of development goals. For example, women might not be able to gain access to capital and resources, receive high-quality health care, control their own economic assets, run for political office, and enjoy their unalienable rights. Women also might be expected to carry out often-undervalued caretaking responsibilities on a disproportionate basis, which could limit their ability to thrive further. With technology, innovation, and close collaboration among diverse partners, the world is poised now more than ever to work across multiple sectors and turn commitments to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment into action.

The following illustrative global snapshots examine gaps and opportunities across 13 sectors:



Agriculture & Food Security



Conflict & Insecurity



Democracy, Human Rights, & Governance



Economic Growth



Education



Energy & Infrastructure



Gender-Based Violence



Global Health



Humanitarian Assistance



Land & Property Rights



The Management of Natural Resources



Digital Access & Technology



Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene



AGRICULTURE & FOOD SECURITY

When women are empowered in the agriculture sector, their success leads to more inclusive growth, better nutrition and health, and less hunger—all of which build resilience and self-reliance. Despite their roles as the backbone of agriculture/agricultural production in many countries, women remain limited in their access to critical resources and services such as land (see “Land and Property Rights” section), labor, agricultural inputs, training, and extension, which can contribute to a gender gap in agricultural productivity. For example, while lack of access to credit is one of the most pressing constraints for both women and men in agriculture, women are more negatively affected.¹² Therefore, it is critical for agricultural programming to engage women in their multiple roles often informal or less visible, as farmers, paid or unpaid agricultural laborers, agricultural and food-processors, traders, livestock keepers, entrepreneurs, and employees, and agriculture/agricultural production.

As women's incomes rise and as women have greater control over expenditures, child nutrition improves through better diets and health care¹³ and stunting declines. In addition, engaging men—who often decide on or influence family food consumption—in child care and health care can improve the well-being and nutrition of both women and children.¹⁴ Finally, interventions in agriculture are more likely to improve nutrition when they target women and promote women's empowerment, for example, through increasing control over income or improving women's knowledge and skills.¹⁵

USAID has a 65-year-long leadership history in providing emergency food assistance and setting priorities for livelihood programs. The Agency is a key contributor to Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's initiative to combat global hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. Feed the Future's work to empower women in the food and agriculture sector supports the goal of the [Women's Global Development and Prosperity \(W-GDP\) Initiative](#) to advance global women's economic empowerment. [The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index](#) is the first-ever comprehensive and standardized measure to capture women's empowerment and inclusion levels in the agricultural sector.



Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID



CONFLICT & INSECURITY

Around the world, conflict and disasters adversely and disproportionately affect women and girls, yet women remain under-represented in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, and in post-conflict peacebuilding or recovery efforts, as highlighted in *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (WPS).

The following themes highlight how gender inequality affects security for women:

State Insecurity. The security and empowerment of women is closely linked to the security of states, including their ability to prevent and recover from conflict and to build resilience to threats of terrorism and violent extremism.¹⁶ Higher levels of gender equality are also associated with a lower risk of conflict between and within states, and women's meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict improves outcomes for peace and security.¹⁷ Moreover, official State actors, militaries, paramilitaries, and security forces, as well as organized crime, gangs, and other non-state actors around the world often use violence as a tactic, and may be exasperated during conflict and instability.

Peace-building. Women remain significantly under-represented in decisions related to peace and security, despite evidence of their critical contributions to stability. Since 1992, women have made up only 13 percent of negotiators, four percent of signatories, and three percent of mediators in major peace processes.¹⁸ Excluding women from efforts to prevent, resolve, and recover from conflict results in overlooking differences in the ways that conflict and violence affect women and men. However, when women participate in peace processes, the resulting agreements are 35-percent more likely to last at least 15 years¹⁹ because women's participation helps broaden the range of conflict-drivers and potential solutions under discussion.

Countering and Preventing Violent

Extremism. Terrorism and violent extremism contribute to insecurity and conflict in many regions of the world, and affect women and men in different ways. Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) frequently use GBV to terrorize and control populations, and exploit gender roles and stereotypes to recruit and radicalize individuals.²⁰ The systematic rape, enslavement, and trafficking of women and girls is entrenched in the ideology and practices of certain VEOs, while they often subject men and boys to forced recruitment and compel them to commit violent acts aimed at severing ties to their families and communities.²¹

Though under-recognized, women play many different, active roles related to violent extremism. Some women are leaders, informants, recruiters, or enforcers in VEOs, while other women work effectively to counter the ideology and actions of these groups.²² Women also help influence their families and communities to resist recruitment by VEOs, and work with local and national authorities to act as a part of early-warning response systems. Increasingly, recognizing the diverse roles and contributions of women and men to countering violent extremism is critical for designing effective interventions.

USAID is committed to the full implementation of the *WPS Strategy* because we know that investing in women's leadership and empowerment can help break cycles of conflict and violence that threaten global security and undermine development progress. USAID continues to support communities in our partner countries on a path to self-reliance through a focus on WPS in our development and disaster-assistance efforts.

U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security

Recognizing that countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women have full and equal rights and opportunities, the **Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017** called for the first-ever **U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security** (*WPS Strategy*). Investing in women's empowerment and leadership helps break cycles of conflict and instability that threaten global security and undermine countries' abilities to move beyond assistance.

To work toward this end state, the *WPS Strategy* identifies three separate, yet interrelated, strategic objectives, through which the U.S. Government aims to make demonstrable progress (defined below) by 2023:

- Women are more prepared and increasingly able to participate in efforts that promote stable and lasting peace;
- Women and girls are safer, better protected, and have equal access to government and private assistance programs, including from the United States, international partners, and host nations; and,
- United States and partner governments have improved institutionalization and capacity to ensure WPS efforts are sustainable and long-lasting.

USAID IMPLEMENTS THESE OBJECTIVES BY:

LINE OF EFFORT 1 – Participation: Seek and support the preparation and meaningful participation of women around the world in decision-making processes related to conflict and crises;

LINE OF EFFORT 2 – Rights, Access, and Protection: Promote the protection of women and girls' human rights; access to humanitarian assistance; and, safety from violence, abuse, and exploitation around the world;

LINE OF EFFORT 3 – Internal U.S. Capabilities: Adjust U.S. international programs to improve outcomes in equality for, and the empowerment of, women; and,

LINE OF EFFORT 4 – Partner Capacity and Commitment: Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacities to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.

Since 2017, USAID's WPS activities have funded and supported the participation of more than 70,000 women in peace-building processes and provided access to health care, as well as critical psychosocial, legal, and economic services to more than six million survivors of GBV.



DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, & GOVERNANCE

Over the last 20 years, women have made significant strides in political representation and leadership, but much remains to do to achieve parity in power and representation. Today, women hold 25.2 percent of parliamentary seats and 21.2 percent of ministerial positions. Yet at this rate, it will take another 95 years to close the gender gap in political representation,²³ and because some of the representation is symbolic, rather than substantive, even longer to achieve parity in power. Women's lack of equitable representation in local and national politics constrains progress toward parity in other sectors—educational attainment, health, economic participation and opportunity—at great cost not only to individual women, but also to the welfare of their societies. However, evidence demonstrates that early intervention can reduce societal constraints on women's political participation and encourage more women to enter the political sphere.

The following two themes examine how various factors have improved women's civic and political participation, but access to decision-making roles is still a work in progress:

Political and Civic Participation. Today, women have the right to vote in all countries where men do. Nevertheless, women continue to face significant legal, social, cultural, and economic barriers to their civic and political participation at all levels—as voters, civic and political leaders, candidates, and elected officials. Discriminatory laws and harmful cultural practices, including unequal property and inheritance rights, family laws, and forced and early marriage, inhibit women's abilities to participate in public life. GBV, and specifically violence against women in elections and politics, deters women's civic and political participation and inhibits their access to decision-making roles. Further, women's lower levels of education, lack of access to information, lack of political experience or female role models, and

unavailability of financial resources or mentoring also often limit their abilities to engage fully in political processes in countries throughout the world. By identifying the key constraints to participation in a given country, we can apply evidence-based and context-appropriate approaches to facilitate women's civic and political engagement.

Political Leadership. To help redress imbalances in politics, 130 countries currently have provisions that promote or require a minimum level of women's representation in legislatures at the national or sub-national level, in cabinets. These and other similar measures, are often merely symbolic representation, which cannot fully address disparities in power if women are not meaningfully engaged or have the same levels of agency that male representatives have. Women must also be empowered to shape policy agendas and oversee their implementation and enforcement once in office; to achieve this requires overcoming ingrained social and cultural barriers. Women are rising to political leadership positions within some key institutions; they now comprise 19.7 percent of parliamentary speakers, chair key committees in many legislatures, and lead core ministries beyond the realm of women's or social affairs. Yet, more must be done to address their underrepresentation in other roles in key sectors of government, including in local governance (such as city halls and city councils); the courts; prosecutors' offices; and police and security forces.

Legal Reform and GBV. In recent years, 47 countries introduced laws to address domestic violence.²⁴ Thirty-five countries across the globe made reforms to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace.²⁵ Another form of GBV, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), has also seen government reforms in those countries where it is practiced. Overall, the chance that a girl will be cut today is about one-third lower than it was around three decades ago.²⁶

However, although numerous countries have publicly declared their commitment to end GBV, implementation of laws and policies have lagged. In addition, private-sector companies, including multinational corporations, have struggled with proactively addressing sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

USAID works to enhance justice, accountability, and the elimination of impunity for GBV, trafficking, and other abuses through rule-of-law and human-rights programming.

USAID works to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in politics and governance through addressing fundamental legal, social, and economic constraints, and has emphasized the importance of removing these barriers through, among others, our Implementation Plan for the *WPS Strategy* and aspects of the *W-GDP Initiative* to grow women's leadership and political empowerment worldwide.

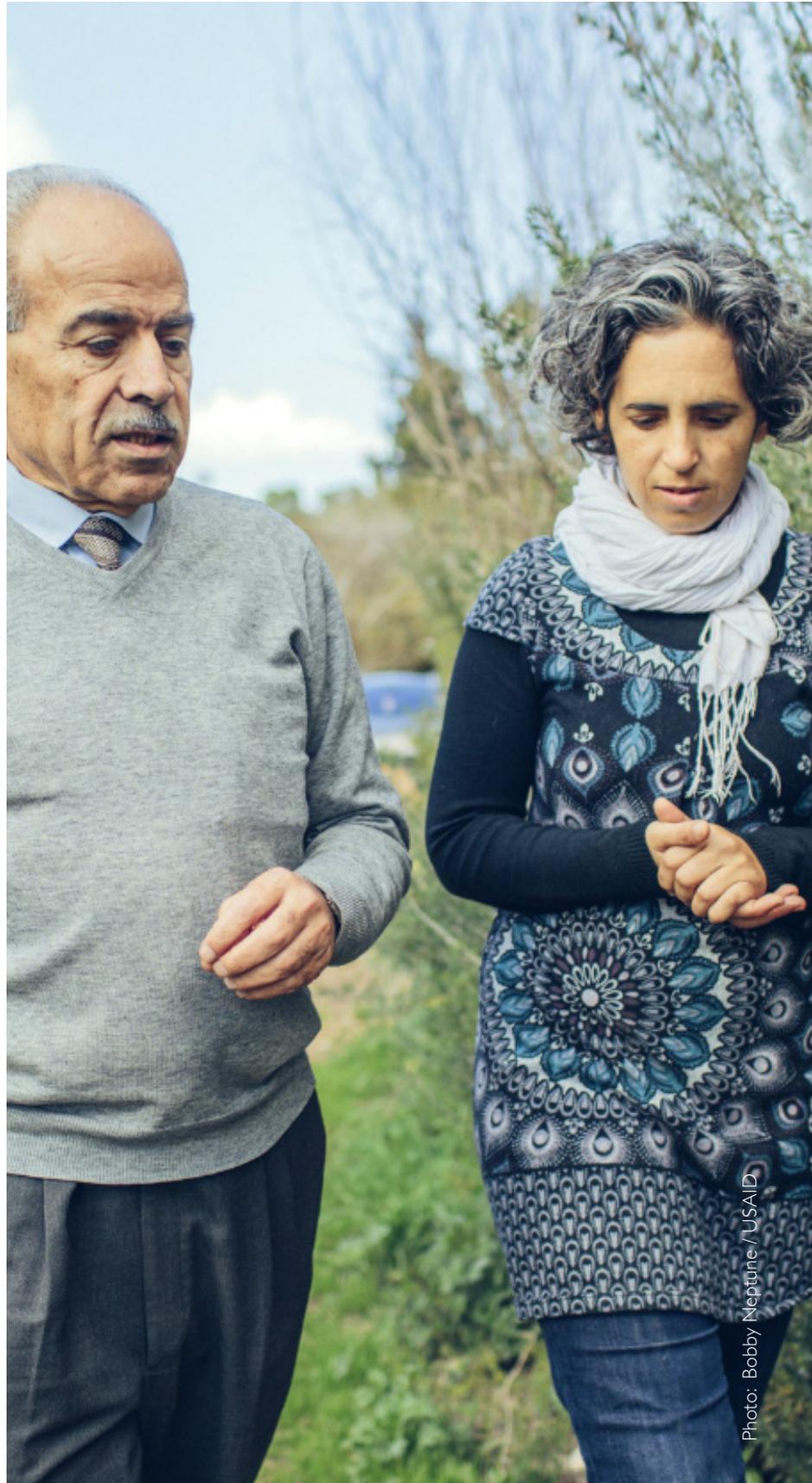


Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID



ECONOMIC GROWTH

Women's economic empowerment is fundamental to partner countries' success in achieving the *Journey to Self-Reliance*. When women are economically empowered, they not only re-invest in themselves and their families and communities, they also increase the effectiveness of businesses, economic stability, and produce a multiplier effect that spurs economic growth and contributes to global peace and stability.

While economic gender gaps have been narrowing over the past decade, women continue to face greater constraints to economic activity than men. Overall, they often are marginalized into less-productive sectors, disproportionately expected to carry out often undervalued caretaking responsibilities, earn less money than men for similar work, own less property, have higher rates of informal employment, experience greater harassment in the workplace, run smaller companies, face greater legal restrictions on their work, and have less access to markets and commercial finance than men.

With the W-GDP Initiative, the first-ever whole-of-Government approach to women's economic empowerment, USAID aims to empower women economically through enhanced opportunities to participate meaningfully in the economy and advance both prosperity and national security. Working through U.S. Government activities, private-public partnerships, and an innovative W-GDP Fund managed by USAID, W-GDP focuses on three pillars: Women Prospering in the Workforce, Women Succeeding as Entrepreneurs, and Women Enabled in the Economy. See *W-GDP Inset*.

Economic Impact of GBV. Research indicates that the cost of violence against women could amount to around two percent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The economic effects on women include increased absenteeism; decreased participation in the labor market; reduced productivity; lower earnings, investment, and savings; and, lower intergenerational productivity.²⁷ Studies at the individual company level suggest that violence outside the workplace can reduce firms' revenues by as much as four percent because of the reduced productivity of both the victims and the perpetrators.²⁸

The U.S. Government recognizes the critical role of women's economic empowerment in achieving prosperity and peace, as the *National Security Strategy* makes clear: "Societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful." At USAID, we believe investing in women's economic empowerment can help eradicate poverty, build vibrant economies, and unlock human potential on a transformational scale. To do this effectively requires deliberate and thoughtful reduction of barriers to grow women's economic activity across the full range of USAID's portfolio: agriculture, health, education, democracy, human rights, and governance—not just economic-growth programming. To accelerate women's empowerment across sectors, USAID works with the private sector to attract, retain, and promote women throughout the corporate hierarchy and open markets for women-owned businesses, while assisting governments to reduce legal and regulatory barriers, and to repair weaknesses in systems that limit women's access to finance, property, and economic opportunity.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Fully closing gender gaps in work could add up to \$28 trillion in global annual GDP by 2025.²⁹
- Women entrepreneurs own a third of the world's formal businesses, yet estimates note that more than 70 percent of these women owners report that they are unserved or underserved by financial systems.³⁰
- [Research](#) indicates that fully removing the legal barriers to women's economic activity could increase annual global GDP by \$7.7 trillion, or 8.3 percent.

Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative

The **W-GDP Initiative** is the first-ever, whole-of-Government approach to global women's economic empowerment, which seeks to economically empower 50 million women by 2025 through programs and partnerships. Established by [National Security Presidential Memorandum-16](#), W-GDP focuses on three pillars for increasing women's full and free participation in the economy:

1. Women Prospering in the Workforce: Advancing women in the workforce by improving access to quality education and skills training.

2. Women Succeeding as Entrepreneurs: Increasing women's access to capital, markets, networks, and mentorship; and.

3. Women Enabled in the Economy: Working to identify and reduce the legal and regulatory barriers that constrain women's full and free participation in the global economy by promoting the following foundational legal reforms:

A) Accessing Institutions—Lifting restrictions on women's authority to sign legal documents, such as contracts and court documents, and by addressing unequal access to courts and administrative bodies for women, whether officially or through lack of proper enforcement.

(B) Building Credit—Ensuring women's equal access to credit and capital to start and grow their businesses, and prohibiting discrimination in access to credit on the basis of sex or marital status.

(C) Owning and Managing Property—Lifting restrictions for possessing and managing property, including limitations on inheritance and the ability to transfer, purchase, or lease such property.

(D) Traveling Freely—Addressing constraints on women's freedom of movement, including restrictions on obtaining passports on the basis of sex.

(E) Removing Restrictions on Employment—Eliminating barriers that limit working hours, occupations, or tasks on the basis of sex.

The Initiative promotes the integration of women's economic-empowerment programming across the development portfolios of the participating Federal Departments and Agencies, while allowing for a wide range of interlinked and targeted interventions.

NSPM-16 also established the W-GDP Fund, managed by USAID, which is geared toward partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, as well as faith-based and local groups, to advance the three pillars of the W-GDP.

The [W-GDP Index](#), a report by the White House Council of Economic Advisors, estimates that addressing these five foundational legal barriers could increase annual global GDP by \$7.7 trillion. To see the number of women reached, and for more details about how the U.S. Government is contributing to W-GDP, read the latest [W-GDP Annual Report](#).



EDUCATION

The positive effects of education for both girls and boys are far-reaching. Over the past 25 years, sustained efforts to improve girls' education, in particular, have resulted in substantial progress toward achieving gender parity across the globe. Yet, despite this overall global progress, in some regions girls of every age group are more likely to be excluded from education than boys, and girls with disabilities are especially unlikely to access an education. An education system that is inequitable and discriminatory cannot be considered of high quality. Dimensions of educational quality that affect equality between girls and boys include curricular content, classroom-management, teacher-student relations, school infrastructure, and the safety and security of the learning environment.

Moreover, school-related GBV negatively affects educational outcomes for all children—boys are more likely to be absent from school as a result of bullying, and girls are more likely to be absent from school as a result of sexual violence.³² School-related GBV toward boys and girls can be associated with the loss of one primary grade of schooling, which translates to a total yearly cost of around \$17 billion to low- and middle-income countries.³³

Gender equality and women's empowerment issues become especially salient during puberty, when harmful norms, culture, and safety issues cause young and adolescent girls' lives and opportunities to narrow, while those of boys keep widening. Harmful gender norms and expectations around young and adolescent girls' societal roles and inadequate or inaccessible infrastructure—including poor water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities—combined with social pressures to drop out of school, often prevent girls from continuing their educations and limit their access to training and employment.³⁴

USAID recognizes that understanding the constraints that prevent access of girls and boys to high-quality education is critical. In certain circumstances, girls outperform boys in matriculation, but this differs at varying levels of education. For example, girls might learn to read faster than boys in pre-primary school, but might drop out for other reasons; additionally, if girls persist in school through the tertiary level, they often do not have the same opportunities as boys. Therefore, as outlined in the 2018 [USAID Education Policy](#), we work with governments, faith-based organizations, civil society, and the private sector in our partner countries through a combined set of interventions to develop and enforce laws, policies, and procedures that promote equitable access and equality between boys and girls at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels, and in workforce-development programs for young people.

DID YOU KNOW?

- When girls have equal access to education, the positive impact on their lives as well as their families and communities is far reaching: each extra year of secondary schooling can increase a girl's future earnings by ten to 20 percent.
- Each year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of a child's marrying by five percentage points or more.³¹
- Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be educated on the topic of HIV and AIDS, and their children are more likely to be educated and resilient toward adversity.

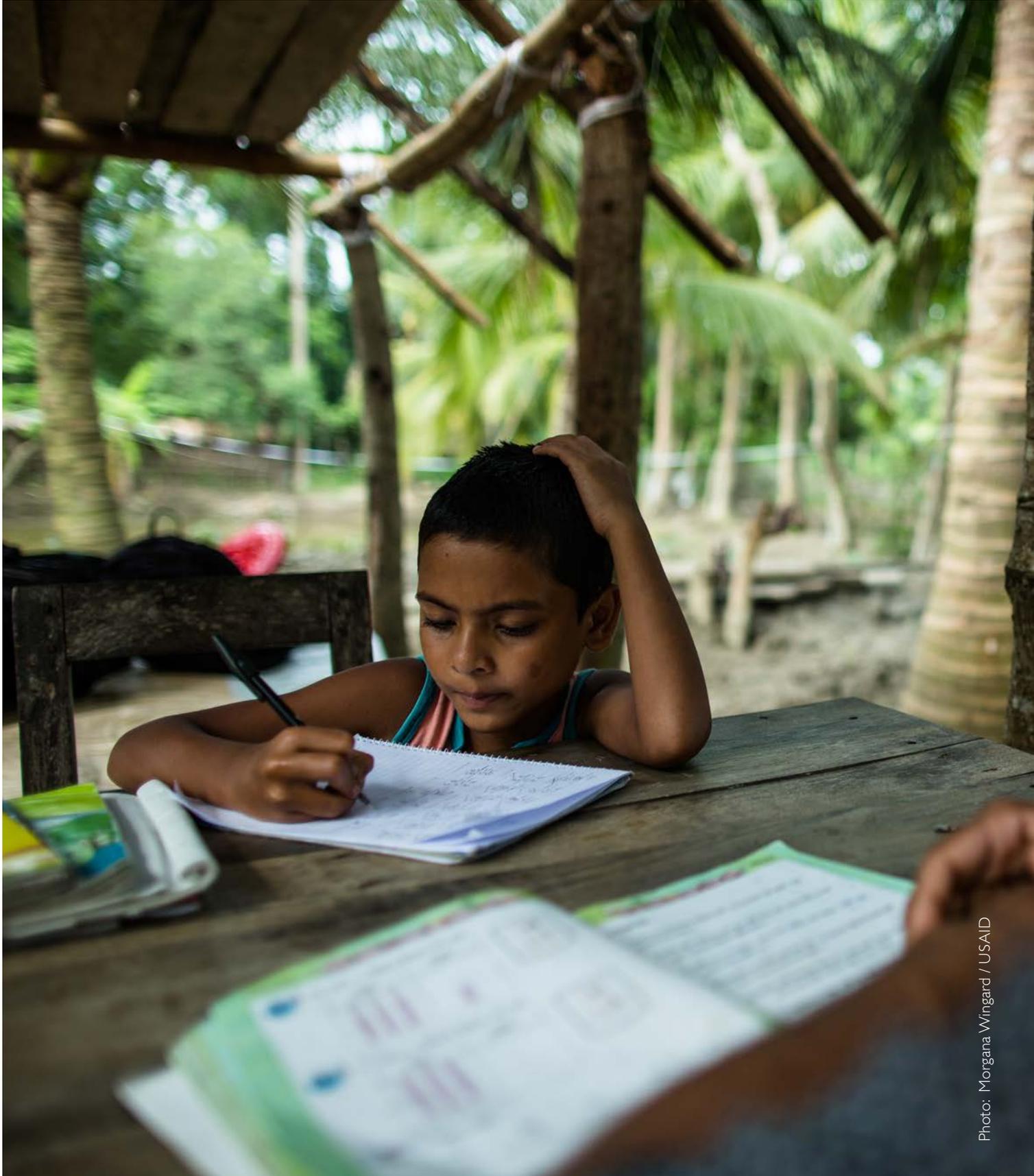


Photo: Morgana Wingard / USAID



ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Lack of access to energy can lock women and girls into poverty and affect all areas of their lives. The following two themes demonstrate how energy and equality between women and men and women's empowerment are closely intertwined:

Wellbeing and Safety. Access to electricity leads to improved income, health, and education outcomes, and can reduce poverty. It also improves safety for women and girls when their homes and public spaces are well-lit, and they have access to clean cooking solutions. Women and girls can spend hours each day collecting firewood for cooking and lighting needs, and to earn extra income for their families. During these trips, they are vulnerable to GBV. Also, household air pollution from inefficient cooking and lighting causes premature death in over four million people per year; because women and girls are primarily responsible for cooking in the home, this pollution has a disproportionate impact on their health.³⁵

Workforce. Women are transforming the energy sector in their roles as entrepreneurs, innovators, and decision-makers. Numerous institutions now recognize the value of integrating women into the formal energy workforce. Yet, despite this recognition, women still make up only a small percentage of the workers in energy—women represent only 32 percent of the renewable-energy sector's workforce, and only 22 percent of job-holders in the energy sector overall.³⁶

Across energy and infrastructure, USAID is using targeted approaches that focus on increasing equality between women and men throughout the employee lifecycle, from recruiting and retaining female employees to addressing systematic barriers—such as sexual harassment—that prevent women and men from fully contributing to the sectors. These efforts are demonstrating concrete results toward increasing gender equality, women's economic empowerment, energy access, and business benefits.³⁷ All USAID-funded energy programs should integrate and consider these approaches not only to increase benefits for women and girls, but also to increase their overall effectiveness.

Engendering Utilities: Advancing Women's Leadership

The **Engendering Utilities program** strengthens the energy and water sectors by implementing best practices in gender equality and women's empowerment, which fosters enterprise-driven innovation and inclusive economic growth. The program helps utilities meet their core business goals of attracting and retaining more women leaders while providing women tangible opportunities for economic empowerment and leadership.

Engendering Utilities worked with EKEDC in the Federal Republic of Nigeria to develop an action plan for its technical training to explore female-only courses through a pilot training program; the company experienced a 557-percent increase in women's participation in training programs, and, in 2018, hired the first female line workers in its history.

With support from the W-GDP Fund, USAID has expanded and scaled the Engendering Utilities approach through continued coaching for the original seven utilities, added up to ten new energy and water utilities, and applied the approach to other male-dominated sectors. The program directly contributes to all three pillars of the W-GDP Initiative.



Photo: Ryan Kipathick / USAID



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GBV is a pervasive violation of unalienable human rights and a barrier to civic, social, political, and economic participation. It undermines not only the safety, dignity, overall health, and agency of the millions of individuals who experience it, but also the public health, economic stability, and security of nations.

The scale and scope of GBV are staggering, and USAID must consider it in developing programs and activities across sectors.³⁸ An estimated one in three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, and young women with disabilities can face up to ten times more violence than women and girls without disabilities.³⁹ Multiple protection challenges are unique to women and girls, including child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and FGM/C. They are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, abuse, intimate partner violence, and early and high risk pregnancies. More than one in ten girls under age 20, or approximately 120 million worldwide, have experienced forced intercourse, or other forced sexual acts, at some point in their lives.⁴⁰ Additionally, women killed by intimate partners or family members account for 58 percent of all female homicide victims reported globally.⁴¹ When children witness or experience violence, they are more likely to repeat it, which thus reinforces the harmful cycle of GBV. Global data show boys are also at risk for sexual violence, and are at higher risk for physical violence, including fights and peer bullying. Engaging men and boys is critical to achieve transformational change.⁴²

The consequences for individuals, families, communities, business, institutions, and countries are devastating and evident in different spheres:

GBV in the Home and Family. Children who witness or experience GBV are at a significantly increased risk for health problems, anxiety disorders, and poor school performance and violent behavior; and are at heightened risk for later victimization and/or the perpetration of interpersonal and self-directed violence.⁴⁴ An important factor associated with men as perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV) was having witnessed violence against their mothers, or having been subjected to violence during childhood. Harmful gender norms can contribute to IPV; sexual exploitation and human trafficking; violence against children; “honor-related” crimes; homicide; and, femicide, including female infanticide.

Girls and boys can experience violence differently, face different vulnerabilities to varying degrees, and have different needs that arise from abuse because of harmful gender and cultural norms and expectations at the household and community levels.⁴⁵ Programs to prevent violence and support both boys and girls, and which focus on breaking the cycle of violence, can effectively reduce future sexual violence. Holistic programming and sound laws to provide legal protection can promote dignity and equality, protect girls and boys, and help them reach their full potential.⁴⁶

DID YOU KNOW?

Violence against older women is widespread, but mostly hidden, inflicted by a variety of perpetrators, including intimate partners or spouses, family members, caregivers (both in homes and institutional settings), and community members. Older women are more likely than their male counterparts to live in poverty—which increases their vulnerability to violence and curbs their abilities to leave an abusive partner or household.⁴³

Support and Mental Health Care for Survivors of GBV.

Accessible, survivor-centered, legal, health, psychosocial, and financial support as well as other specialized care for GBV survivors, is needed to address the life-threatening, pervasive needs around the world. Such resources help create security and protection, including shelters, for the well-being of survivors, and those at risk of GBV; safety planning; activities to empower women; and, support survivors with gaining access to justice or safe legal assistance. USAID should

adapt and tailor these to be accessible to, and meet the specific needs of, children, including adolescent girls, persons with disabilities, and other survivors who might be more vulnerable to GBV.

For more than two decades, USAID has worked with a wide array of partners to increase the awareness of the scope of GBV and its impact, improve support to survivors of GBV, and strengthen prevention efforts.

A Global Issue: Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

CEFM is a form of GBV perpetuated by harmful gender norms, poverty, and lack of access to free and equitable education. CEFM is a violation of human rights that undermines efforts to address maternal health, education, food security, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and inequality between women and men, and girls and boys.

- Over the last ten years, CEFM has decreased by 15 percent.⁴⁷ Although the rate of CEFM is declining, the number of girls married before the age of 18 remains shocking. Every year, one in five girls are married before the age of 18, which equals nearly 12 million girls worldwide.
- Family and social structures can be particularly vulnerable in conflict-affected and fragile states, and during mass migration and resettlement. In times of political and social uncertainty, as well as humanitarian disasters, family, social, and legal networks tend to break down. Without reliable income-generation opportunities, educational opportunities, access to land, or support systems, families could feel added financial pressures to marry their children to provide greater security for them.
- Married girls are at a higher risk of domestic violence and social marginalization, and more likely not to complete their education, have access to health care or information, or have access to skills building or other opportunities. These negative outcomes not only affect the girls themselves, but also their children and households.
- A large percentage of adolescent pregnancies occur in the context of CEFM, and these girls are at increased risk for adverse maternal and newborn outcomes, in particular obstructed labor, pre-term birth, hypertension in pregnancy, and infection.⁴⁸ Girls are also more likely to suffer sepsis or obstetric fistula postpartum. Children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to die during or after childbirth, or to be small for their gestational age.
- Over 200 million women and girls are living with the consequences of **FGM/C**. In the 29 countries where the practice is most concentrated, girls who undergo FGM/C are cut before the age of 15. In half of the countries where data are available, a majority of girls are cut before they turn five. The Agency has found that the process of positive social transformation can occur when programs and policies focus on enabling communities to make their own collective choices to abandon FGM/C, enhanced by educational campaigns and policy change.



GLOBAL HEALTH

Although the health of women and girls has improved globally, gender inequality continues to have a serious negative impact on the health of many, and also has a negative affect on other cross-sectoral outcomes, including education attainment and workforce contributions for women and girls. Over recent decades, significant improvements have occurred in the health and well-being for women and girls, particularly in life expectancy, overall health, and mortality. Men and boys also face health inequities, as they experience higher rates of tuberculosis and other conditions, and lower access to health care. Key challenges persist that worsen the health and well-being of women, men, adolescent girls and boys, children, and families. The following examples demonstrate the strong links between equality between men and women and women's empowerment and health outcomes:

HIV and Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs). Harmful gender norms, inequalities, and GBV increase women's and girls' risk for acquiring HIV and STIs and increase its impact. Based on the U.S. Government-funded Violence Against Children Surveys in sub-Saharan Africa, girls are up to 14 times more likely to be infected with HIV than boys their same age,⁴⁹ and they account for two-thirds of new infections among young people in sub-Saharan Africa. Preventing violence against children can exponentially improve the lives of adolescent girls and contribute to ending AIDS. Women's limited abilities to negotiate the timing and circumstances of sex, including the use of condoms, GBV, transactional sex, and a curtailed ability to undergo testing and access treatment, increase their risk for HIV and STI acquisition as well as undiagnosed and untreated HIV. Harmful gender norms also can encourage risk-taking behaviors for men and boys, and inhibit their demand for, and use of, prevention, care, and treatment for HIV.

STIs are highly prevalent in some adolescent populations and associated with significant morbidity and, less commonly, mortality. Pelvic infections from gonorrhea and chlamydia are associated with severe, and sometimes life-

threatening, infections, infertility, chronic pain, and increased risk for acquiring HIV/AIDS. The human papillomavirus (HPV), an STI, is the causative agent for cervical cancer. Parental engagement is crucial to promoting adolescent well-being and healthy decision-making, and youth benefit from caring, informed families that support delayed sexual involvement; protect them from exploitative relationships; and, help them gain access to health care and immunizations, including the HPV vaccine.

Moreover, some health care providers embrace harmful gender-related beliefs and biases that can ultimately affect health outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

Infectious Diseases and Pandemics.

There are important differences between men's and women's vulnerabilities to infectious diseases. Pregnancy increases the risk for morbidity and mortality associated with malaria and Zika. Twenty-five million pregnant women are currently at risk for malaria, and malaria accounts for more than 10,000 maternal and 200,000 neonatal deaths per year.⁵⁰ Cultural practices, norms, and roles, including burial preparation and associated practices, can increase women's risk for Ebola infection.⁵¹ Cultural and societal roles that surround workplace exposure and caregiving roles have a differential impact on the transmission of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) to humans.⁵² The impact of stigma-related barriers associated with a diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB) also differs between men and women, insofar as such barriers relate to health-seeking and treatment-retention behavior and outcomes. Men are more likely to experience stigma in the workplace and community after a TB diagnosis, while women experience more social isolation or shunning and stigma from family.⁵³

During pandemics, as seen with COVID-19, women can experience exacerbated inequalities, job losses, economic stress, intimate partner violence, and unmet health care needs. They also experience higher rates of violence, including CEFM, and intensified psychosocial distress.

Globally, because women make up to 70 percent of front-line workers in the formal and informal delivery of health care, they are disproportionately at risk of exposure. They need sanitary medical supplies, properly fitted personal protective equipment, hygiene supplies and facilities, and livelihood support to meet their professional and household needs.

Maternal and Child Health, and Voluntary Family Planning.⁵⁴ Inequality between women and men contributes to increased levels of female morbidity and mortality across much of the lifespan: before birth (including prenatal sex selection); at the time of birth, during infancy, early childhood, and adolescence; throughout the reproductive years; and, beyond. Adolescent pregnancy is associated with significant risks for both mother and child. Women who experience IPV in pregnancy are 16 percent more likely to suffer a miscarriage, and 41 percent more likely to have a pre-term birth;⁵⁵ and they are more likely to experience depression, anxiety disorders, and suicide attempts compared to women who have not experienced this type of violence. Injuries from sexual violence, as well as complications from labor and delivery, can contribute to reproductive-track fistulas, which profoundly undermine a woman's health, well-being, employment or education, and social status.

Voluntary, informed family planning empowers individuals and couples to delay pregnancy or plan for healthy pregnancies so women and their babies have opportunities to thrive. Communication between spouses regarding fertility, finances, and household issues has been positively associated with the use of voluntary family planning. Conversely, harmful gender norms, violence, and abuse, can limit couples' communication related to, and their voluntary use of family-planning options.⁵⁶ Fertility-awareness,⁵⁷ including a better understanding of anatomy and physiology, and effective, voluntary family planning can help reduce adverse health outcomes. Through caring families and education on avoiding sexual risk, girls and young women benefit from education, communication skills, decision-making, goal-setting, and support systems that can equip them to delay of sexual involvement, and refuse exploitative or coercive sex and relationships. Equality and empowerment for women and girls leads to increased educational and career opportunities, and helps promote safe, respectful, nurturing, and stable marriages and families, relationships, and communities.

Nutrition. The nutrition and food-security needs of women and children are often neglected at the household level because of social, cultural, and economic inequalities between men and women. In communities where gender inequality is pervasive, women and girls tend to eat smaller quantities and a more limited variety of foods that are generally less nutritious than the food eaten by their male counterparts. Twice as many women suffer from malnutrition as men, and girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys.

Menstruation. Menstruation is a normal bodily function that indicates the completion of puberty in girls, but remains a sensitive topic in many countries. Unhygienic menstruation practices are associated with increased risk for infection in girls. There is evidence that better access to menstrual pads, water and soap, separate toilet facilities, discreet disposal options, and education and mentorship regarding menstruation (including for boys and men) can improve girls' hygiene, school attendance, confidence, and health.

Half a century of experience has shown that health programs that address sociodemographic and other factors, as well as barriers to the access and utilization of care, and that engage men and boys to understand how these important aspects of women's health affect women and girls, can help improve health outcomes. For example, when women are educated, household income rises, maternal and infant mortality declines, child health and nutrition improve, economies expand, and poverty rates decline. Increasing women's participation and decision-making, while engaging and including men in the conversation, are critical to improving outcomes in maternal, newborn and child health, nutrition, and HIV and other infectious diseases, and will enhance the effectiveness of USAID's policies and programming.





HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Crises and natural disasters affect women, girls, men, and boys of various ages and backgrounds differently. When women and girls are empowered, they have the ability to contribute greatly to humanitarian efforts, and in rebuilding their communities. The following two themes take a closer look at the importance of prioritizing equality between men and women and women's empowerment in humanitarian interventions:

Crises and Conflict. More than 130 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance for their survival, security, and protection.⁵⁸ Global forced displacement has nearly doubled in the last two decades, topping 70 million as of June 2019, and roughly half of those displaced are women and girls.⁵⁹ Societal and cultural norms, and other factors—such as age and disability status—have a significant impact on what women and men experience during a crisis, because they shape the roles they play in their communities, their access to resources, and the coping strategies they have available. Crises often exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and can result in increased levels of GBV, especially against women and girls; exclusion from life-saving care; and, under-representation in decision-making processes related to relief and recovery. Harmful gender norms adversely affect men and boys as well; for example, in crises, men and boys are frequently vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, and to trafficking for the purposes of sex or labor exploitation.

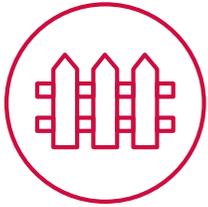
Women and Emergencies. Natural disasters, on average, kill more women than men, and kill women at an earlier age than men.⁶⁰ In some countries, flooding affects women and girls disproportionately, as many cannot swim or are unable to leave their homes because of cultural barriers. Meanwhile, a majority of preventable maternal deaths occur in situations of conflict, displacement, or natural disasters. Additionally, in emergency settings, women and girls are more likely to suffer from food-insecurity and violence, and face inequitable and/or unsafe access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, including menstrual hygiene.

USAID recognizes the critical role that women play in responding to humanitarian crises. Despite their heightened vulnerability in disasters, women often serve as first responders and play a central role in the survival and resilience of their communities. It is therefore critical that, in addition to addressing their needs, humanitarian actors should meaningfully engage women and girls in planning for, and responding to crises.

Community-engagement mechanisms must meet the needs and concerns of women and girls in keeping with girls' current and developing capacities and their parents/family. USAID invests in tools that capture women's and girls' voices and improve their access to humanitarian services. This support amplifies women's strategies to protect themselves from violence and fosters their communication with response leadership, which enables the aid system to support what they identify as necessary and effective. Only through this meaningful dialogue will responders be able to mitigate and respond proactively to the unique protection risks that women and girls face during emergencies.



Photo: David Rochkind / USAID



LAND & PROPERTY RIGHTS

Globally, women are often the primary laborers and users of land, yet their rights to land and resources are rarely formally recognized. Formalizing and protecting women's land and property rights translates into higher economic gains, increased empowerment to make household decisions, more efficient use of land, increased agricultural investment and production, and improved food security.⁶¹ Pillar 3 of the W-GDP Initiative (Women Enabled in the Economy) recognizes the lack of women's abilities to own and manage property as a key barrier to women's economic empowerment. The following two themes explore the importance of land and property rights:

Women in Agriculture. Despite the positive effects, women are significantly less likely than men to own or control land. In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise nearly 50 percent of agricultural labor, but account for 15 percent of landholders; in Asia, women comprise 42 percent of agricultural labor and 11 percent of land holders, and across the Middle East and North Africa, women comprise 40 percent of agricultural labor, but five percent of landowners.⁶²

Women and Land Rights. Women's secure rights to land are essential for food production and sustainable, more stable livelihoods. However, globally, land rights often depend on natal and marital affiliations. Either law or practice in at least 60 percent of countries still discriminates against daughters' rights to inherit land and non-land assets.⁶³ The resulting insecurity undermines economic and social stability, as land rights provide economic access to key markets and social access to non-market institutions, such as household and community-level governance. Secure land and housing rights also can help address GBV, including as it relates to contracting HIV/AIDS. Land rights can support women's economic independence and bargaining power, which reduces vulnerabilities to harmful behaviors, such as transactional sex.⁶⁴

USAID is playing an active role in empowering women by helping them to secure their land rights, a key necessity to integrate women fully into a nation's economy. The Agency also funds coordinated policies and programs, such as the W-GDP Initiative, that clarify and strengthen women's land rights, including legal frameworks that give women equal rights to own, register, use, profit from, and inherit land and property; legal literacy programs to enable women to exercise their rights; and, capacity-building to enable law enforcement and community leaders to enforce such rights.

USAID's Mobile Applications to Secure Tenure Approach

USAID's **Mobile Applications to Secure Tenure** (MAST) trains women and men to understand their property rights and formal titling, and engages women and men as community surveyors and land committee leaders.

Using locally adapted technology tools, users are able to map and document land and resource rights efficiently and affordably. This approach has been effective in empowering women by strengthening their ability to secure land tenure, which leads to greater economic stability and decision-making power among women. Prior to MAST, data from the United Republic of Tanzania indicated that only 27 percent of landowners were women. Using MAST has increased this proportion to 45 percent in target Tanzanian villages.



THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Significant changes in ecosystems affect women and men in different ways. Women are regularly excluded from decision-making processes related to natural resources, despite being responsible for critical areas of daily natural-resource management, such as securing household water and fuel. The following two natural-resource themes highlight how women's engagement and leadership can both empower women and deliver sustainable results:

Fisheries. The fisheries sector plays a key role in food security, as an estimated one billion people depend on seafood as their primary source of protein. The sector employs 40 million people,⁶⁵ and women are 90 percent of the fisheries-processing workforce and 15 percent of those employed in fisheries harvesting.⁶⁶ When women are engaged as stewards of key fish resources, projects have seen improved enforcement of

regulations, and women's access to processing technology has resulted in reduced loss and increased value of products, and stronger women's livelihoods without over-fishing.⁶⁷

Forestry. In forestry and natural-resource supply-chains, women smallholders typically focus more on the quality of their crops than their male counterparts. Exclusionary practices in natural-resource value-chains can lower productivity and have a negative impact on the health and well-being of all community members.⁶⁸

USAID recognizes that women's engagement and leadership can play a significant role in delivering sustainable results across natural-resource sectors, including increased food security, improved health, and better economic security. The Agency works with communities in our partner countries in these and other sectors to ensure the active engagement of women.



Photo: Balaram Mahalder/WorlIdFish Bangladesh



DIGITAL ACCESS & TECHNOLOGY

Digital technology is transforming how people worldwide gain access to information, goods, services, and opportunity and has the power to accelerate the *Journey to Self-Reliance* in developing countries rapidly. However, those transformative opportunities are not equally available to men and women. A report from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2019 concludes that the digital divide has continued to widen from 2013 to 2019 in developing, and, particularly, in least-developed, countries. Men are adopting digital technologies at a faster rate than women, and the problem is only worsening.

USAID works to close the gender digital divide and address the disproportionate harm women and girls face online. Empowering women economically and socially is a core tenet of development policy, but persistent—and growing—gaps in women’s access to, and use

of, digital technology⁶⁹ significantly hamper the ability of digital technology to help women improve their lives, the stability of their families, and the resilience of their communities.

Once online, women and girls face harm at a disproportionate rate, which further discourages their engagement with the digital ecosystem. USAID commits to closing the gender digital divide through projects like the W-GDP Initiative and the WomenConnect Challenge, and requires that all programming that involves digital technology will address the digital inequities and digital harms women and girls face.⁷⁰

When women and girls are excluded from the benefits of digital technology access and use, they are further marginalized, and equitable development is impossible to achieve. As the world becomes increasingly more digital, USAID’s interventions will align with our Digital Strategy in closing the persistent gender digital divide.

The Nexus of Women’s Empowerment and Digital Technology

Launched in 2018 the WomenConnect Challenge (WCC) is a global call for solutions to improve women’s participation in everyday life by meaningfully changing the ways women and girls gain access to and use technology.

WCC is currently working in 14 countries to address the social and cultural norms that keep women offline and under-empowered. WCC awardees work with individuals in positions of power and influence to promote women’s use of, and confidence with, technology, and develop innovative technologies that help low-literacy users.

Through WCC, women also address societal concerns with technology to help spur economic growth, promote the dissemination of correct information, and identify and discourage harmful behaviors like gender-based violence. While USAID continues to address the gender digital divide actively through these efforts, we must do more. USAID’s projects should directly confront the gender digital divide, especially in those that seek to use digital tools.



WATER, SANITATION, & HYGIENE (WASH)

Inadequate water supply and sanitation continue to be a problem for a significant number of people, and disproportionately burden women and girls. At least 2.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water in their homes, and 4.4 billion people lack access to proper sanitation. In many countries, women and girls spend up to an hour each day fetching water. Improved delivery of safe water and sanitation is a key factor in reducing the mortality of girls and women in infancy, early childhood, and reproductive years. Additionally, in conflict and crises, children who are living in areas where there are protracted crises were three times more likely to die from WASH-related diarrheal diseases than from violence, and in children under five, this increases twenty-fold.⁷¹

The following two themes take a closer look at the significant role WASH plays in achieving women's empowerment:

Women's Leadership. Including women in decision-making roles has the potential to help address governments' under-investment in WASH. Emerging evidence shows that women leaders in local government are more likely to invest in drinking water and sanitation than their male counterparts, and the presence of women leaders increases the willingness of women and men to contribute money toward public goods.⁷² Involving women in all stages of the community-level planning process enhances the sustainability of interventions in both water supply and sanitation.

Economic Opportunities. Expanding access to water supports the improvement of economic outcomes for women as they rely on water for productive activities such as agricultural cultivation, livestock raising, and small-scale enterprises. Access to, and the control of, water resources, are equally important in relation to non-WASH activities. The provision of adequate and safe water can serve as the means of promoting economic opportunity within partner-country societies, which, in turn, contributes to the establishment of equality and the erosion of long-standing discrimination and norms that have reinforced traditional roles and expectations.

For example, while women play an important role in agricultural productivity, the design and implementation of small-scale irrigation systems does not reflect this reality.⁷³ Women are equally important in the management of natural resources, such as watersheds. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and girls, since they are the primary collectors of water and firewood but are nonetheless often not involved in the community response.

As a result of USAID's programs, women and girls around the world are benefiting from access to improved water and sanitation and the promotion of key hygiene behaviors. USAID works to empower women and girls to champion their perspectives and priorities effectively, and to ensure that they can engage fully as managers, partners, and entrepreneurs in water-related activities and enterprises.

Menstrual Hygiene Management

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a critical aspect of addressing women's and girls' empowerment by alleviating a major constraint to their participation in education and public life. USAID's work in this area includes developing design standards for public facilities, creating educational resources, ensuring MHM-related supplies are available, and de-stigmatizing menstruation.

In addition to increasing access for women, girls, and other vulnerable communities, USAID's sanitation activities promote equality between men and women by increasing women's participation in leadership, consultation, and training in technical skills. The provision of adequate and safe sanitation can serve as the means of promoting equality and opportunity, which, in turn, contributes to women's empowerment and the erosion of long-standing discrimination and harmful societal norms.



Photo: Kelly Ramundo / USAID



Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID

AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

This Policy applies to all USAID's OUs (Missions, Bureaus, Independent Offices) and covers policy and programming in Washington and the field. Successful implementation of this Policy will continue to require changes to the Agency's culture and practices. This section outlines key requirements for fulfilling both the letter and spirit of this Policy.

For a more detailed and complete description of the organizational roles and responsibilities required of various Bureaus, OUs, and Offices related to implementation of this Policy, see [Chapter 205](#) of USAID's ADS.⁷⁴

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Mission Order (MO) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: USAID's Missions, Regional Missions, and Country Offices must adopt or revise, and periodically update, a MO on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. This MO should describe how a Mission will implement this Policy, including by applying gender integration throughout USAID Program Cycle; outlining the intended contributions to this Policy's objectives; affirming the budget attributions in OU's Operating Plans (OPs) reflect the suite of Gender Key Issues; reporting the appropriate indicators for equality between women and men and women's empowerment in Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs); assigning specific and detailed roles and responsibilities related to gender equality and women's empowerment to Mission staff; and, ensuring all staff who are required to do so receive training on gender equality and women's empowerment. A template for this required MO is available on ProgramNet.

GENDER ADVISORS

Missions, Regional Missions, and Country Offices: All Missions will designate a Mission Gender Advisor, who has the technical skills, competencies, and experience necessary to provide appropriate, in-depth guidance to technical and program staff to ensure the integration of equality between

women and men and women's empowerment in meaningful ways across USAID's Program Cycle, and especially in the development of our CDCs and Strategic Frameworks and the design of our projects/activities. In all cases, Gender Advisors will have responsibilities explicitly included in their job descriptions, including an allocation of time sufficient to carry out the work. Missions will determine the appropriate personnel category (e.g., Foreign Service Officer, Foreign Service National, Personal Service Contractor) for the Gender Advisor position and to whom the incumbent will report. Offices or teams within Missions are also encouraged to appoint one or more staff members to serve as PoCs on issues related to this Policy to ensure the integration of equality between women and men and women's empowerment across sectors.

Washington Pillar and Regional Bureaus: OUs will appoint or hire a Gender Advisor. Regional Bureaus will have at least one Gender Advisor with regional expertise and appropriate technical and programmatic competency to provide guidance for successful policy implementation. All Pillar Bureaus must have at least one Gender Advisor with appropriate sector expertise and technical and programmatic competency to provide guidance for the successful implementation of this Policy. Individual offices within Bureaus might also name additional Gender Advisors or PoCs as appropriate.

REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO USAID'S PROGRAM CYCLE

Chapter 205 of USAID's ADS, *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle*, serves as an in-depth guide to the operationalization of this Policy, with an emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of all OUs for and gender integration across our Program Cycle. The Agency will revise this Chapter periodically to ensure harmonization with related ADS Chapters (such as ADS Chapter 201) as well as other changes in USAID's operations or applicable U.S. Government laws. Among the key requirements related to gender integration in our Program Cycle are the following:

- A gender analysis must inform all strategies, projects (where applicable), and activities.⁷⁵ Technical teams and Program Offices in all USAID's Bureaus, Missions, and Independent Offices must reflect the findings of these analyses in CDCSs and Strategic Frameworks,⁷⁶ Project Development Documents (PDDs) or their successors, Action Memoranda, and solicitations.
- Design teams must reflect the findings of the gender analysis in the different components of a solicitation and must include a statement that clearly indicates how it incorporates the results of the gender analysis or gives a rationale for why gender inequality is not an issue for the particular activity the requested action would implement. If neither of these is in the request, the cognizant Contracting Officer (CO)/ Agreement Officer (AO) must notify the activity team that she or he is unable to take further action until she or he receives the required documentation.

REPORTING

Planned Funding: All OUs must attribute funding in each Fiscal Year to one or more of the four Gender-Linked Key Issues to track planning and progress against U.S. Government priorities and Congressional directives: (GE/WE-Primary, GE/WE-Secondary, GBV, and GBV-Child Early or Forced Marriage), and the two data-only Sub-Key Issues designed to gather attributions to women's economic empowerment, and/or the Women, Peace, and Security Independent Key Issue, as applicable.

Internal Reporting of Results: In Annual PPRs, OUs must report on results realized during the reporting Fiscal Year, including by using the Standard Indicators maintained by the Office of Foreign Assistance (F) at the U.S. Department of State, which are required as applicable. The Master Indicator List (MIL) includes cross-cutting indicators that cover gender equality, women's empowerment, GBV, women's economic empowerment and W-GDP, and WPS. All USAID OUs should work with implementing partners to collect data and report on one or more of the standard indicators on gender if the OU's programming produces data that contribute to the measurement of these indicators. In addition, all USAID's people-level standard and custom performance indicators must be sex-disaggregated.

External Reporting of Results: USAID will report on the results of the Agency's efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through a range of required and *ad hoc* reporting processes, including, but not limited to, Congressional, interagency, and donor reporting requirements and requests. Data and information collected through the OPs and PPR will also inform USAID's external engagement, communications, and learning efforts.

TRAINING

Gender 101, an introductory online course on gender equality and women's empowerment is required for all Agency staff across all hiring mechanisms within one year, including new hires.

Similar to training for other competencies, USAID should continue to develop and offer advanced training that meets the needs of Gender Advisors and PoCs. Bureaus, Missions, or Independent Offices also might wish to establish advanced gender training for other relevant positions or technical backstops. OUs should also incorporate specific content on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment into broader technical or sectoral training they manage.

ASSESSMENT OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Following the requirements of [ADS Chapter 200](#), USAID will assess the implementation of this Policy periodically, approximately once every five years, by using appropriate performance benchmarks such as our staff's knowledge of, and experience with, the Agency's gender requirements; gender integration in CDCSs, Strategic Frameworks, PDDs, activities, and solicitations; budget attributions to the gender Key Issues in OPs; and, the use of the standard indicators for gender in PPRs.





Photo: Bobby Neptune / USAID

CONCLUSION

Equality between men and women and women's empowerment are vital to achieving USAID's development goals and successfully providing humanitarian assistance. This Policy underscores USAID's dedication to improving the lives and status of women and girls worldwide, to engaging men and boys to help achieve this Policy's objectives, and to upholding our commitment to protect the dignity of all people. Wherever USAID works, we are committed to empowering women and girls to realize their full potential and become capable leaders for future generations. Societies that prioritize, elevate, and empower women and girls create strong communities, stable economies, resilient countries, and long-lasting, positive change. We know investing in women and girls is essential to strengthening self-reliance in our partner countries. This Policy provides the foundation and guidance for USAID's investments in gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors.

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