![USAID - FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE]

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

2022 POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) affirms that gender equity and equality and women's empowerment are fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. For societies to thrive, women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals must have equal and safe access to and control over 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. Gender equity and equality improve the overall quality of life for all people throughout their lives.

Gender equality is a human right. Gender equality has been a tenet of international human rights law since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, with its recognition that all people are born free with equal dignity and rights, without distinctions of any kind. Over 75 years, the right to gender equality has been recognized through additional international legal instruments. The United States of America prioritizes the advancement of gender equality because it is a fundamental right and foundational to a just society.

Investing in gender equality and women's empowerment can unlock human potential on a transformational scale and drive sustainable development. Societies with greater gender equality experience faster and more inclusive economic growth, increased agricultural productivity, water security, and improved and equitable food security. Empowering women and girls in all their diversity 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 enables them to meet their own aspirations and improves the health and education of the next generation. Furthermore, women are effective community leaders, advocates for peace, and champions of civil and human rights. Nations, communities, and families are more secure and prosperous when all women can participate equally in all aspects of life and with the ability and agency to achieve equal outcomes to those of men.

USAID recognizes the importance of engaging men and boys as positive agents of change for gender equality. Rigid gender norms negatively impact men and boys, potentially leading to harmful behavior, greater likelihood of engaging in violence, poor health outcomes, lower enrollment in higher education, and other gender-based disparities. Adopting gender-equitable norms and behaviors not only enables men and boys to reach their own full potential, but also to contribute to the rights, well-being, and positive development of their partners, families, communities, and societies at large.

USAID affirms that the promotion of the rights of gender diverse individuals is integral to the advancement of gender equality. People who do not fit within binary notions of gender are targets of gender-based discrimination, exclusion, and violence. While data is limited, research shows that countries that discriminate against and restrict LGBTI rights are also the least democratic.[1] More generally, there are clear correlations emerging between higher levels of human rights protection for all citizens and achievement of democracy.[2] This growing evidence highlights that increasing gender equality for all people is an imperative for global democratic resilience.[3]

Countries that demonstrate a commitment to enabling, empowering, and taking advantage of the full participation and skills of all people, including women and members of marginalized or underserved groups, are more likely to achieve sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development.

BOX 1. KEY POLICY AND STRATEGY PRIORITIES

U.S. Government law, policies, and strategies address aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment that provide a foundation for the concepts and approach outlined in this document. These include the following:

- The Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act (2018) calls for the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout USAID's Program Cycle and promotes women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in developing countries.

- The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 (WPS Act) promotes the meaningful participation of women in mediation and negotiation processes seeking to prevent, mitigate, or resolve violent conflict. The U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (2019) responds to the WPS Act, outlining the U.S. Government's approach to promoting women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism and terrorism, building post-conflict peace and stability, increasing women's physical safety and access to humanitarian assistance in areas experiencing conflict or disaster, and working with partner governments to adopt policies and capacity that support these objectives. The Strategy is also supported by the U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict.

- The U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (2021) is the first-ever national gender strategy to advance the full participation of all people—including women and girls—in the United States and around the world.

- The forthcoming third iteration of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (2012; revised 2016, 2022) highlights evidence-based approaches for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) across a range of thematic areas; prioritizes inclusivity and addresses specific social identity factors that increase the risks of GBV for various populations; and recommits to strengthening the work of the U.S. Government.

- The forthcoming U.S. Global Women's Economic Security Strategy (2022) provides high-level guidance on four key lines of effort: promoting economic competitiveness and reducing wage gaps through well-paying, quality jobs; advancing care infrastructure and valuing domestic work; promoting entrepreneurship and financial and digital inclusion, including through trade and investment; and dismantling systemic barriers to women's equitable participation in the economy.

- The U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (2016) brings together four U.S. Government agencies, including USAID, to tackle barriers that keep adolescent girls from achieving their full potential.

- The USAID Vision For Action: Promoting and Supporting the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals (2014) (currently being updated as a policy) reflects USAID's commitment to protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ people in all programming and provides guidance to the Agency to that end.

- Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action (2012) reaffirms USAID's commitment to ending child marriage and provides guidance to USAID staff on how best to combat child marriage and address the needs of the more than 50 million children already married.

- The USAID Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) Policy (2020) seeks to prevent SEA and ensure people are able to access USAID-funded services and activities safely; provide robust feedback to USAID implementing partners to mitigate risk; and facilitate the secure reporting of SEA violations when they occur.

- In addition to the above, many USAID policies and strategies emphasize the importance of advancing gender equality as integral to the achievement of sectoral and population-specific outcomes globally, including but not limited to the USAID Youth in Development Policy, USAID Climate Strategy, and USAID Digital Strategy.

USAID is building on its longstanding commitment to advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. As a brief history of USAID's commitment to gender equality makes clear (see Annex 1), the 2022 USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy ("Gender Policy") builds on decades of foundational work, field experience, strong evidence from global research, and key legislative and policy advancements. The Gender Policy reflects promising approaches, the most recent and relevant evidence, and organizational learning to direct USAID's priorities and work in advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment across our Missions and Operating Units (OUs).

BOX 2. ASSESSMENT OF USAID'S GENDER POLICY

The initial 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (GEFE) Policy required USAID to carry out an assessment of the policy's implementation from 2015 to 2016. The primary purpose of the assessment was to:

1. Examine whether and to what extent the requirements of the policy were being implemented
2. Identify successes and challenges encountered in implementing the policy
3. Identify gaps and lessons learned that can be used to strengthen the Agency's work on GEFE moving forward

The results of the assessment suggested that the policy and its mandates were widely adopted and supported across the Agency and that the policy was seen as "having teeth."[4] There was strong agreement that the GEFE Policy and ADS 205 had:

1. Raised awareness of and changed attitudes about the importance of gender equality issues
2. Made USAID staff more gender-aware than they were prior to the release of the policy
3. Contributed to making USAID's work more gender-sensitive

Agency leaders were credited with enabling policy implementation by advocating for and helping institutionalize processes that deepen gender integration, providing resources, and holding staff accountable. Gender Advisors were seen as fundamental to successful policy implementation and as key advocates for the importance of gender equality issues but also, in some cases, in need of additional capacity-building. The assessment suggested that strong gains had been made in integrating gender into the Agency's programming processes. Specifically, gender integration was strongest in the early stages of the country strategy Program Cycle, somewhat weaker in project design, and weakest in solicitations, suggesting that the Agency still had a ways to go before the requirements of the policy would be fully met. The findings of the assessment have informed this policy.

Experience has also shown that USAID's efficacy lies not only in the rigor of our programs, but also in our unique positioning within the larger development ecosystem working toward gender equality. Sometimes this means exerting leadership and other times it means taking a backseat in support of and learning from our partners, such as local women-led movements, civil society organizations, or governments.

Effectively deploying USAID's resources and relationships in support of this policy requires a commitment to listening, reflecting, and learning, and an embrace of complexity and systems thinking. It also requires a commitment from all USAID staff to ensure that programming addresses the distinct needs of women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals so that all can contribute to the sustainable development of their communities and countries. USAID must be as humble as we are determined, so that we can continue iterating and adapting to achieve the greatest impact for those most affected by gender-based inequalities and to ensure we do no harm.

2. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION

USAID's vision is of a prosperous and peaceful world in which women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals, through their life course, enjoy equal civil, cultural, economic, legal, political, and social rights; have the agency to secure better lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries; have equitable access to quality education and health care; accumulate and control their own assets and resources; exercise their own voice; live free from restrictive gender norms, beliefs, and practices including intimidation, harassment, discrimination, and violence. In this world, power differentials have been transformed to advance the well-being of individuals in all their intersecting identities.

OBJECTIVES

Under the Gender Policy and consistent with Public Law 115-428, the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 (WEEE Act), USAID investments in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment aim to achieve five strategic objectives.[5] These objectives, as framed in the WEEE Act, reflect the spectrum of activities USAID undertakes across all sectors and fields to advance the Gender Policy's vision.

USAID's Strategic Objectives to Support Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

1. Reduce gender disparities in access to, control over, and benefit from economic, social, political, legal, educational, and cultural resources, wealth, opportunities, and services.
2. Strive to eliminate gender-based violence (GBV) and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities, so all people can live lives free from violence.
3. Increase the capability of women and girls in all their diversity to fully exercise their rights, determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.
4. Support strategies and activities that secure private property rights and land tenure for women.
5. Improve the access of women and girls to equitable education, including higher education

and workforce development opportunities.

These objectives are purposely broad to allow for adaptation in varying country and regional contexts. Based on a gender analysis, OUs should adapt targets and indicators for tracking and measuring progress towards these objectives during strategic planning and project design at all geographic levels.

3. OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Seven principles underpin our commitment to gender equality and the empowerment, protection, and participation of all women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals in their societies:

1. Integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment into all USAID policies and programming
2. Apply an intersectional lens to all of USAID's gender equality programming
3. Apply a gender transformative approach to USAID's gender equality programming
4. Center local actors, including women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals, as drivers of gender equity and equality
5. Build partnerships across a wide range of stakeholders
6. Hold ourselves accountable
7. Do no harm

Integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment into all of USAID's policies and programming

Achieving the objectives of the Gender Policy requires integrated, impactful approaches and intentional actions to advance gender equality and women's empowerment throughout USAID's Program Cycle and across sectors, including in development and iteration of Agency policies and strategies; creation and iteration of Regional and Country Development Cooperation Strategies; design and implementation of projects and activities that engage a wide range of stakeholders; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

The identification of specific gender equality results to be achieved is based on the findings of the required gender analyses and other relevant analyses (e.g., inclusive development analysis, political economy analysis, sector-specific analyses). 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 to close targeted gender gaps.

Integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into USAID's strategic planning and project/activity design processes can help improve sustainable development outcomes. However, integration alone does not ensure that Agency activities are addressing or directing resources to the most critical gender disparities. Therefore, OUs should consider developing standalone Development Objectives (DOs) or Intermediate Results (IR) on gender equality and women's empowerment. All USAID OUs are encouraged to invest in standalone projects and/or activities identified as strategically important for achieving gender equality. These DOs, IRs, and related interventions will depend on the specific country context and should link to broader sectoral and country programming, invest in local institutions and organizations, and strengthen the enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity.

BOX 3. DRIVING DECISION-MAKING AND RESULTS USING EVIDENCE AND DATA

USAID is committed to data-driven and evidence-based approaches to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, while balancing strong ethical considerations in data collection. Qualitative and quantitative data are equally important in understanding the drivers of gender inequality. For quantitative data, sex disaggregated data, which is required by the ADS, is, at minimum, a data source for understanding the population. Other data sets like social identity (e.g., gender identity, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, caste, etc.), socioeconomic, and geographic information play a critical role in designing and implementing gender-sensitive and transformative programs. Qualitative data through key informant interviews and focus groups are also crucial to sustaining results, adapting effective approaches, and communicating the effectiveness of our work. The findings of a gender analysis should inform the design of context-specific programs to address, target, and eventually close the identified gender gaps.

The Agency implements rigorous monitoring using standard foreign assistance indicators and gender-sensitive quantitative and qualitative indicators. This includes performance and impact evaluations to assess whether USAID's programming is achieving intended results and closing gender gaps. We do this by: 1) Employing adaptive, evidence-based approaches to target and modify the design and implementation of our programs and pursuing any needed course corrections to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in different contexts; 2) Encouraging participatory processes to ensure youth, gender diverse people, and marginalized groups are meaningfully involved in data collection, design, analysis, and dissemination; and 3) Using third-party indicators, national statistics, and other data sources to understand operating environments, track contextual and programmatic assumptions, and inform decisions.

Apply an intersectional lens to all of USAID's gender equality programming

Central to the advancement of gender equality is the recognition that all individuals have multiple social identities shaping their lived experiences including, but not limited to, their place in society, privileges they may or may not enjoy, the level and types of protection from human rights violations, and the impact of complex forms of discrimination. This intersectional analytical lens acknowledges that singular oppressions exist, but is primarily focused on the ways in which overlapping identities (e.g., sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, class, race, age, disability, nationality, etc.) interact with systems of oppression and/or discrimination and the need to address the impact these have on systemic privilege and access. Rooted in feminist legal scholarship, intersectionality was originally focused on the ways legal systems doubly disadvantaged women of color in the application of laws based on gender and race. More recently, however, the concept of intersectionality has been applied across a range of intersecting social identities.

USAID promotes a nondiscriminatory, inclusive, and integrated development approach that ensures all people, including those who face discrimination, are fully included and can actively participate in and benefit from development processes and activities.[6] As part of this approach, USAID will ensure that programming understands and addresses intersectional systems of oppression and injustice based on people's overlapping identities, and the impact this has on access to rights and opportunities for women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals. This includes incorporating an intersectional focus into gender analyses.

BOX 4. GENDER DIMENSIONS ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

A life course approach considers human needs across the lifespan, including the complex interplay between gender, age, social norms, life events, and physical, emotional, and brain development. While experiences of life events differ based on culture, norms, and environmental factors, social expectations around gender shape people's experiences and outcomes.

For example, vast gender differences exist in employment opportunities, pay, expectations, and working conditions, which have different impacts at different ages, costing economies billions of dollars.[7] Similarly, becoming a parent is a significant life event that impacts the development, opportunities and life course of parents in ways that often differ markedly based on their gender and life stage and has differential impacts on their children.

USAID's approach to programming analyzes the unique but intertwined experiences, challenges, and opportunities people experience during different ages and life stages (see USAID's Youth in Development Policy.)[8] Understanding the changing implications of gender across life stages is a priority for USAID because it helps inform contextually relevant programming that minimizes risks and improves development outcomes.

Although stages of human development may look different depending on context, the following examples illustrate how life course and gender dimensions can interact to impact outcomes:

Early years: Sex and gender impact both physical development and cognitive, social, and emotional development of very young children. Globally, conditions common in childhood such as diarrheal diseases, malaria, and preterm birth are all more common in boys than girls.[9] Gender transformative investments in childcare and other early years services yield multigenerational impacts by improving child health and development outcomes, parents' employment and productivity, and economic development.

Adolescence: As children and youth physically change during puberty and transition to adulthood, they begin to solidify their gendered beliefs and roles, which affects their long-term economic, educational, physical, and mental health outcomes.[10] In many cases, gender disparities in access to basic services, such as education and health care, widen during adolescence. Adolescents who lack an education are less able to participate meaningfully in stable economic ventures or hold well-paid jobs. In some countries, for example, girls are more likely to be out of school and in others boys are more likely to be out of school. The drivers are often different for girls and boys with increased pressure to engage in other activities during adolescence (e.g., child early and forced marriage, child and household responsibilities, different socioeconomic pressures, pressure towards gang involvement, etc.).[11,12,13]

Later years: Age and the cumulative impacts of lifelong gender disparities lead to differences in poverty rates, health outcomes, access to needed care, and abuse of and violence against older adults. For example, the negative consequences of age-related mental and physical health considerations often combine with gender-related norms and laws (e.g., lack of land or inheritance rights) to make it more likely that older women, particularly widows, will experience oppression and abuse at the hands of caregivers.[14]

Apply a gender transformative approach to USAID's gender equality programming

Achieving sustainable results requires critically examining and working to fundamentally transform norms, relations, structures, and systems that sustain and perpetuate gender inequality at the individual, familial, community, and institutional levels. This includes recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support an enabling environment for gender equality.

Truly transformational development depends on the contributions of an ecosystem with multiple and inter-connected sets of actors in a country, and often works best by engaging local champions at all levels and strengthening their roles and the institutions in which they work. We will engage the key actors in local systems who have a role to play in addressing prevailing power dynamics and enhancing gender equality. We will support them to achieve effective, equitable, and inclusive solutions that transform harmful gender norms, remove entrenched root causes of inequality, address social, economic, and legal barriers, and promote equal opportunities and outcomes for all.

BOX 5. BOYS, MEN, AND MASCULINITIES

Gender constructs shape the lives of men and boys in all their diversity across their life course. This includes power relations and societal expectations of what it means to be a man or boy in a particular society, community, and family. In most contexts, men are expected to be physically and mentally strong, in control, and provide financial security, familial protection, and leadership. Some of these expectations can encourage the development of positive attributes; however, they can also negatively impact men and their families and communities.

Men and boys can experience sanctions for not meeting expectations in socially ordained roles. The pressure to conform can manifest as bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and abuse from peers.[15] Men and boys who do not adhere to masculine gender stereotypes (displaying empathy, compassion, or vulnerability, serving in caregiving roles, non-violence, etc.), including those who identify as LGBTQI+, face substantial risk of stigmatization, harassment, abuse, and violence. Age, class, race, ethnicity, and disability also influence how gender norms govern behaviors and determine the level of agency men and boys may have to address these and other vulnerabilities.

Because of these expectations, men and boys experience vulnerabilities that limit their well-being and overall development (e.g., risk-taking behaviors, decreased pursuit of health or other care,[16] reduced secondary and tertiary educational attainment, being pressured into violence, heightened risk of injury or death during conflict, and increased risk of death by suicide). Positive forms of masculinity can decrease the likelihood that men engage in risky behaviors like smoking, drinking, and violence,[17] and can encourage better relationships and improved outcomes for themselves and their children.

Gender norms and power dynamics shift across the lifecycle, and individual men and boys have limited control and influence over these norms and how they affect their lives. Promoting positive norms and gender dynamics earlier in life provides an opportunity to create sustainable and positive changes in the lives of women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals.[18] Addressing men and boys' unique needs using a gender and intersectional lens can help shine a light and transform how gender norms, power, and social dynamics affect their lives, relationships, and communities, as well as efforts to address gender inequality more broadly.

Center local actors, including women, men, and gender diverse individuals, as drivers of gender equity and equality

USAID supports localization efforts that reduce the chances that programs perpetuate, rather than dismantle systemic inequalities and power imbalances in the contexts where we work. USAID's localization agenda redefines USAID's relationships with local communities and institutions as they identify development priorities, develop solutions, and bring capacity, leadership, and resources to accelerate gender equality.

In line with the localization agenda and the goals of this policy, USAID supports an intentional approach to engaging local organizations, particularly those led by women, girls, and gender diverse persons and those dedicated to promoting gender equality. USAID also supports government and other institutional actors who are working to dismantle gender barriers. USAID will emphasize direct engagement with individuals and informal networks, who are often overlooked on the basis of gender, to catalyze sustained systems change and improved development outcomes.

Build partnerships across a wide range of stakeholders

USAID is committed to fostering more flexible, adaptive, and creative approaches to engaging new and diverse partners. This includes, but is not limited to, private sector, civil society organizations, locally led networks and collectives, academia, local researchers, and faith-based organizations. We recognize that no one organization or sector alone can dismantle gender inequalities. These partners should include those that represent or are comprised of marginalized, vulnerable, and under-represented populations, including women's and girls' rights and LGBTQI+ rights organizations. The New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) accelerates USAID's work with a diverse range of partners and provides entry points for organizations to work with us.[19]

Hold ourselves accountable

Accountability is how the Agency moves its commitment to the advancement of gender equality from rhetoric to responsibility. It means ensuring that the commitments within the Gender Policy are carried out, contribute to meaningful impact on gender equality and women's empowerment where we work, and reflect the priorities and perspectives of the people we mean to serve, especially those marginalized by gender inequality. It also means enabling systems and processes to assess the degree to which these conditions are being met and adjusting our approach to improve the execution and impact of the Gender Policy.

Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is a shared Agency responsibility and depends on the contributions and collective commitment of all staff. The USAID Administrator, senior officials, Mission Directors, Bureau leaders, and program and technical staff are accountable for implementing the Gender Policy across their portfolios and for defining specific goals within the Agency's strategies and programming that align with the Gender Policy's objectives. The Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Gender Advisors, and designated points of contact work throughout the Agency to champion and advance gender equality and women's empowerment programming in our Bureaus, Missions, and OUs. The roles and responsibilities for USAID's Bureaus and OUs in implementing this policy appear in ADS Chapter 205.

Do no harm

USAID 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 involves 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 local stakeholders about the potential for harm and engage with communities to design projects and activities to reinforce the value of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Agency monitors for and addresses unintended consequences throughout our development and humanitarian assistance interventions, including ensuring that sector interventions do not inadvertently exacerbate, deepen, or further entrench gender gaps and inequalities. USAID also has rigorous protocols in place to ensure confidentiality and data security.

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. 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 of beneficiaries.

4. AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

The Gender Policy applies to all USAID Operating Units (Missions, Bureaus, Independent Offices) and covers policy and programming. 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 OUs and Offices related to implementation of the policy, see ADS Chapter 205[1]

Operational Requirements:

These requirements are intended to provide the minimum levels of institutional responsibility, capacity, and support needed to enable the Agency to meet its commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Fulfillment of operational requirements is a precursor to the execution of programmatic requirements.

- ***Mission Order on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:***
  - Missions, Regional Missions, and Country Offices must adopt or revise a Mission Order (MO) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within one year of the release of this policy and every five years thereafter, or subsequent to the release of a future revision of the policy if that occurs sooner than five years after the MO is drafted or revised. The MO must describe how a Mission will implement this policy, including by: ensuring gender equality is integrated throughout the USAID Program Cycle; outlining the intended contributions to the policy objectives; describing how the OU will ensure that the budget attributions in the Operational Plan (OP) reflect the suite of Gender Key Issues and reporting the appropriate indicators for gender equality and women's empowerment in Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs); assigning specific and detailed roles, responsibilities, and authorities related to gender equality and women's empowerment to Mission offices, staff, and leadership; and ensuring all staff who are required to do so receive training on gender equality and women's empowerment. A template for this required Mission Order is available on ProgramNet.
  - It is strongly recommended that Washington Regional and Pillar Bureaus also develop or update standard operating procedures that address similar issues addressed in the MO.

- ***Gender Advisors:***
  - *Missions and Country Offices:*
    - All Missions and Country Offices will hire or appoint a Mission Gender Advisor, who has the technical skills, competencies, and experience necessary to provide appropriate, in-depth guidance, and capacity-building to technical and program staff to ensure the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in meaningful ways across USAID's Program Cycle, and especially in country strategy development and project/activity design. In all cases, Gender Advisors will have responsibilities explicitly included in their job

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[1] ADS 205 supplants the "Roles and Responsibilities" noted in the 2012 USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy.

descriptions, including a minimum allocation of 75 percent of their time dedicated to work on gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-based violence.[2] Missions will determine the appropriate personnel category (*e.g.*, Foreign Service National, Personal Service Contractor) for the Gender Advisor position and to whom the incumbent will report.[3] Missions that do not already have a Mission Gender Advisor must hire or appoint one within the first year after the release of the Gender Policy.

- ■ All Regional Offices will hire or appoint a Gender Advisor who has the technical skills, competencies, and experience necessary to provide appropriate, in-depth guidance and capacity-building to technical and program staff to ensure the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in meaningful ways across USAID's Program Cycle, and especially in regional strategy development and project/activity design. In all cases, Gender Advisors will have responsibilities explicitly included in their job descriptions, including a minimum allocation of 75 percent of their time dedicated to work on gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-based violence.[4] Missions will determine the appropriate personnel category (*e.g.*, Foreign Service National, Personal Service Contractor) for the Gender Advisor position and to whom the incumbent will report.[5]

- ■ Offices or teams within all Missions, but particularly large Missions and Offices that design a large number of activities, are also strongly encouraged to appoint one or more staff members to serve as a point of contact (POC) on issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment to ensure that gender considerations are integrated across sectors. These Missions are encouraged to have a dedicated Mission-wide Gender Working Group under the leadership of the Mission Gender Advisor to promote a coordinated approach across offices.

- ■ Missions are also strongly encouraged to hire or appoint a well-qualified GBV Advisor or ensure that the Gender Advisor has appropriate GBV-related experience and technical knowledge.

  ○ *Washington Pillar and Regional Bureaus and Independent Offices:*

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2 Overseas operating units classified as Limited or Non-presence as defined under ADS 102.3.1 are exempt from this requirement. As feasible, USAID Offices, defined as countries in which USAID does not have a bilateral Mission, must maintain a gender point of contact and are strongly encouraged to ensure that those staff are provided the opportunities to receive access and opportunities to ensure the OU's capacity to comply with this Policy. FSNs should be given preference to serve as points of contact in these OUs.
3 Note that this Gender Advisor requirement exists independently of any requirements for Inclusive Development Advisors.
4 Overseas operating units classified as Limited or Non-presence as defined under ADS 102.3.1 are exempt from this requirement. As feasible, USAID offices, defined as countries in which USAID does not have a bilateral Mission, must maintain a gender point of contact and are strongly encouraged to ensure that those staff are provided the opportunities to receive access and opportunities to ensure the OU's capacity to comply with this Policy. FSNs should be given preference to serve as points of contact in these OUs.
5 Note that this Gender Advisor requirement exists independently of any requirements for Inclusive Development Advisors.

- All Washington Operating Units will hire or appoint a Gender Advisor. Regional Bureaus must have at least one Gender Advisor with regional expertise and appropriate technical and programmatic competency to provide appropriate, in-depth guidance and capacity-building to ensure the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in meaningful ways across USAID's Program Cycle, including Agency-wide and regional strategies and policy development. 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. Gender Advisors in Washington Bureaus must have a minimum 75 percent of their time dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-based violence.

- To support the work of the Gender Advisor, individual offices within Bureaus, especially large Bureaus that cover a number of sectors, diverse technical areas, or regions, should name a Gender POC and are strongly encouraged to appoint or hire a Gender Advisor.

- Any task forces created to address emerging or pressing issues, or implement initiatives are required to include a Gender Advisor or POC who has a technical background in gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-based violence, for the duration of the task force or initiative.

- *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 of the release of this policy, and for new hires, within a year of start date.

  - All Gender Advisors and POCs are required to take a minimum of two additional gender courses beyond Gender 101, over a five-year time period starting either from the release of this policy or the date they were hired (e.g., courses on gender integration, LGBTQI+ issues, GBV, and sector-specific gender issues). It is strongly encouraged that all AOs/COs/AORs/CORs/POs/MEL Officers take a USAID-facilitated course in gender integration (such as the ADS 205 course).

  - Similar to training for other competencies, USAID should continue to develop and offer advanced training that meets the needs of Gender Advisors and POCs and supports the onboarding of Gender Advisors and POCs.

  - Bureaus, Missions, or IOs are also strongly encouraged to establish and provide opportunities for gender training for other positions or technical backstops and incorporate specific content on gender equality, women's empowerment, and gender-based violence into broader technical or sectoral training they manage.

Programmatic Requirements:

USAID's ADS Chapter 205, *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 gender integration across the Program Cycle. The Agency will revise this chapter periodically to ensure harmonization with related ADS chapters, as well as other changes in USAID operations or applicable U.S. Government laws and policies. Among the key requirements

relating to gender integration in the Program Cycle are the following:

- *Gender Analysis*
    - USAID must conduct a gender analysis prior to or during the design of all country, regional, and global strategies, projects (where applicable), and activities.[6,20] Technical teams and program offices in all USAID's Bureaus, Missions, and Independent Offices must reflect the findings of these analyses in Regional or Country Development Cooperation Strategies (R/CDCSs),[7] Project Development Documents (PDDs, or their successors), Senior Obligation Alignment Review (SOARs), Action Memoranda, BAAs, and solicitations. They are also strongly encouraged to reflect relevant findings from gender analyses for R/CDCSs and PDDs (as applicable) in PIO agreements, DCAs, MOUs, and G2G.

    - Procurement 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 the solicitation 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 procurement action would implement. If neither of these is in the procurement request, the cognizant Contracting Officer (CO)/Agreement Officer (AO) must notify the activity design team that they are unable to take further action until the required documentation is received.

    - In addition, procurement teams are strongly encouraged to require implementing partners to conduct a supplementary context-specific gender analysis, if the initial analysis was too broad to inform the activity, submit a Gender Plan of Action as part of award implementation, and integrate gender into the work plan and performance monitoring plan.

- *Gender Equality Marker*
    - Missions and OUs must apply the Agency's gender equality marker on an annual basis for all activities being implemented, and report gender marker scores into an Agency-wide Gender Equality Dashboard.[8]

- *Planning and Reporting of Results*
    - In Annual Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs), OUs must report on results realized during the reporting fiscal year, including by using the foreign assistance standard indicators maintained by the U.S. Department of State Office of Foreign Assistance (F), 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 WPS. All USAID OUs must work with implementing

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6 ADS 205 includes detailed instructions for carrying out a gender analysis.
7 As per ADS MANREF 201maz (Process for Developing and Approving a Regional Development Cooperation Strategy), a gender analysis is also required for RDCSs.
8 The gender equality marker provides a simple scoring rubric that supports program teams in any sector to engage in dialogue and learning, identify gender technical assistance needs, and improve integration of gender equality issues and objectives in the design, implementation, and evaluation of USAID activities. Use of the gender equality marker may also improve the rigor and reliability of gender key issue attributions and external reporting on gender integration to the OECD. Many bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations, and implementers have adopted gender markers and demonstrated their value as learning and accountability tools to improve gender integration.

partners to collect data and report on one or more of the gender foreign assistance standard indicators if the OU's programming produces data that contribute to the measurement of these indicators. In cases where gender-related results cannot be captured by using the standard foreign assistance indicators, OUs are encouraged to develop custom gender indicators with implementing partners, as warranted and feasible. In addition, all USAID people-level standard and custom performance indicators must be sex-disaggregated. Recognizing that sex disaggregation is necessary but not sufficient to adequately capture the range of gender identities, USAID will assess options for disaggregation to more accurately track who is being reached and benefits from USAID programming.

○ To track planning and progress against U.S. Government priorities and Congressional directives, all OUs must attribute funding in each fiscal year to all applicable Gender Key Issues including the four Gender Linked Key Issues (GE/WE-Primary, GE/WE-Secondary, GBV, and GBV-Child, Early, or Forced Marriage), 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. All OUs are also strongly encouraged to report against other Key Issues that may capture additional aspects of gender work, including the LGBTQI+ Key Issue.

Assessment of Policy Implementation:

USAID will assess the implementation of this policy by using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

- On an annual basis, Missions and OUs will be required to upload to an Agency-wide Gender Equality Dashboard:

    ○ Mission Orders on Gender, if there are any changes from the previous submission
    ○ The name, position/office/team, and LOE of all Gender Advisors and POCs in that Mission or OU
    ○ Update to the gender training completed by Gender Advisors and POCs of the Mission or OU
    ○ All completed gender analyses
    ○ Gender marker scores, once the gender marker tool has been fully phased in

- Data collected through the OPs, PPRs, and dashboard can be used by Missions and OUs for self-analysis and will inform GenDev's analysis of trends and opportunities and to prioritize support to OUs to deliver optimal development and Gender Equality outcomes. Data and information collected will also inform USAID's external engagement and communications and contribute to the Agency's Learning Agenda. 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.

- These sources of data can also be aggregated and analyzed in a participatory Gender Audit process.[9] The gender audit assesses the degree to which a particular OU's processes and

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9 As defined by the ILO, a gender audit is essentially a "social audit" and belongs to the category of "quality audits," which distinguishes it from traditional "financial audits." It considers whether internal practices and related support systems for gender integration are effective and reinforce each other and whether they are being followed. It establishes a baseline; identifies critical gaps and challenges; and recommends ways of addressing them,

practices are aligned with this policy and effectively enable gender integration and the advancement of gender equality objectives. It is strongly encouraged that Missions and OUs carry out a gender audit every five years to establish a baseline for each audited OU and recommendations and a plan of action for improvement.

BOX 6. GENDER ANALYSIS, GENDER EQUALITY MARKER, AND GENDER AUDITS

Gender analysis, the gender equality marker, and gender audits deliver complementary information at different junctures in the Program Cycle to support the Agency's accountability and learning around advancing gender equality outcomes.

Gender analysis provides a foundation to inform strategy and program design; the gender equality marker provides an annual self-assessment during activity implementation; and a gender audit provides a retrospective view of an OU's institutional support for gender equality objectives that, in turn, can inform future strategy and planning. Whereas gender analysis is a tool to provide an understanding of the root causes and manifestations of gender inequality in a given context and recommendations to address such disparities through USAID's programming, a gender audit assesses a given OU's track record and capabilities to effectively undertake this work. Together, gender analyses and gender audits provide complementary external and internal assessments of what is required for USAID to effectively deliver gender equality outcomes in a particular setting. Applied annually during program implementation, the gender equality marker is a simple learning and accountability tool that enables program teams to rate activities according to their level of gender integration. Individual marker scores support internal dialogue within a Mission or OU and identification of opportunities to improve gender integration within an existing activity. Aggregate marker scores provide useful insights into the Agency's performance on gender integration as a whole, by region and sector, and over time.

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suggesting possible improvements and innovations. It also documents good practices toward the achievement of gender equality.

5. GLOBAL SNAPSHOTS

The following global snapshots briefly examine gender equality gaps and opportunities across 15 sectors that are priorities for USAID:

- Agriculture and Food Security
- Biodiversity, Conservation, and Natural Resources Management
- Climate
- Conflict and Insecurity
- Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
- Digital Access and Technology
- Economic Growth
- Education
- Energy, Mining, and Infrastructure
- Gender-Based Violence
- Global Health
- Humanitarian Assistance
- Land and Property Rights
- Science and Research
- Water Security, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Each snapshot presents illustrative data on how gender inequalities manifest in that sector, addressing key drivers of these disparities, their impacts on sector outcomes, and opportunities to mutually reinforce sector-specific and gender equality objectives and impacts.

In aggregate, the snapshots highlight the many interdependencies and recurring gender-based issues across sectors. For instance, patriarchal gender norms that inhibit women from participation in the economy may also limit their prospects to own land, represent their communities in peace negotiations, or exercise reproductive autonomy. Similarly, women's time poverty (i.e., the disproportionate burden of unpaid care-giving and domestic tasks that falls on women and girls and shrinks their discretionary time)[21] is a cross-cutting barrier that not only inhibits the well-being of women and girls themselves but also impedes equitable economic growth, agricultural productivity, and access to water and sanitation. While men and boys are more likely to benefit from prevailing gender norms, as highlighted in the sector snapshots, there are associated costs. For example, harmful gender norms affect men and boys in all their diversity in a number of ways, e.g., by encouraging risk-taking and limiting health-seeking behaviors which can result in health inequities, such as higher rates of some diseases, increased risk of suicide and lower utilization of health services.[22,23] Also highlighted in the sector snapshots are sector-specific examples of how people who do not fit within binary notions of gender are targets of gender-based discrimination, exclusion, and violence such as increased SRGBV which in turn impacts other reading skills and other short and long-term outcomes.[24]

The GBV snapshot shines a light on the devastating and widespread negative impacts of GBV on individuals, families, communities, and countries. Nearly every snapshot notes the chilling effect of GBV on key goals for that sector, from effective natural resource management to equitable digital access to improved health.

The benefits of diverse and substantive leadership from women, girls, and individuals of diverse gender identities are raised in the context of climate adaptation, humanitarian assistance, science and research, and several other domains. It is also apparent that such representation is sorely lacking. Gender-related trends that are not yet visible or are only starting to be apparent across sector snapshots are

also instructive; more intersectional gender data are needed across the board, and their absence is more acute in some sectors than others.

Taken as a whole, these snapshots make a powerful case for the value of gender integration across all of USAID's work. When gender disparities are taken into account across all of USAID's work and sectoral programming is actively leveraged for the promotion of gender equality, the Agency is able to drive an agenda for justice while multiplying the returns on development investments.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

The multiple roles women play across agriculture and food systems place them at a critical nexus in food security, resilience, and nutrition. As women increasingly engage in food systems as entrepreneurs, women mostly remain concentrated in small-scale food processing and tend to serve local, often informal markets.[25] Despite their important roles in food systems, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions.

Youth and older adults, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples also face structural inequalities within food systems,[26] and there is a need for more research to understand and address the ways that gender intersects with age, ethnicity, and other social and contextual factors to compound food insecurity for certain groups.

Food Security. Gender norms and gendered access to resources and markets affect how women and men, in all their diversity, participate in and benefit from agriculture and food systems.[27] The difference between men and women farmers' agricultural productivity (measured by the value of crop production per unit of cultivated land) ranges from 4 to 25 percent.[28] Drivers of the gap include women's lower access to land, labor, productive assets, finance and risk management tools, and extension services, and lower use of key agricultural inputs. Partnership status, household composition, and social norms also drive the gender productivity gap in some contexts.[29,30,31,32,33]

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index has shown that poor access to credit, limited group membership, and high workloads are among the most pressing constraints for both women and men in agriculture, though women are more negatively affected.[34] In addition, women spend three to seven times more time than men on unpaid domestic and care tasks.[35] They are also more likely to have unmet demand for and limited control over financial tools and services.[36] The gender gap in registered users of digital agriculture solutions ranges from 62 to 70 percent.[37]

Women could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent if they had the same access to productive resources as men, reducing the number of hungry people by 12–17 percent globally.[38] Addressing the restrictions faced by women entrepreneurs and tackling the gender norms and power imbalances in household-level decision-making can improve the growth potential and profitability of their businesses.[39] Likewise, evidence suggests that applying gender-transformative interventions in agriculture can yield gender equality outcomes alongside increased food security and economic well-being for both women and men.[40]

Nutrition. Empowering women and engaging men in childcare can improve diets, hygiene, and use of nutrition services, contributing to a well-nourished population. As women's incomes rise and they have greater control over expenditures, child nutrition improves through improved diets and health care.[41] Women's empowerment is positively correlated with exclusive breastfeeding of children younger than six months (one of the most effective ways to ensure a minimum adequate diet), positively impacting child health and survival.[42,43] Engaging men in childcare and health may enhance bonds between fathers and their children, improve women's and children's well-being and nutrition, and increase couples' joint

decision-making and men's well-being.[44,45,46]

Resilience. Gendered roles and access to resources mean that women and girls have different capacities to reduce, mitigate, and manage risks and stressors such as natural disasters and outbreaks.[47] Women may be more exposed to risk in agriculture and food systems than men for many of the same reasons that their farm productivity is lower, i.e., fewer assets, less mobility and more limited access to information and services.[48]

BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Changes to ecosystems affect women and men in different ways. Gender inequalities rooted in social and legal norms shape roles and responsibilities related to natural resources, which in turn affect how women and men, respectively, can access and benefit economically from them.[49] Control over and access to natural resources can also be a source of conflict and lead to forms of exploitation such as GBV, which can be a key mechanism for maintaining power.[50] Supporting women's leadership and meaningful inclusion of women in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management can lead to more sustainable resource use, reduce conflict, and generate more equitable benefits for all users.[51]

Natural Resources Management. Natural resources management spans multiple, cross-cutting sectors, including fisheries, forestry, and wildlife.

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. Women can improve enforcement of regulations when they are engaged as stewards of fishery resources. Women's access to processing technology has reduced losses, increased value of products, and improved livelihoods without resulting in over-fishing.[52]

In forestry and natural resource supply chains, women smallholders typically focus more on the quality of their crops than their male counterparts. However, exclusionary practices in natural resource value chains can lower productivity and have a negative impact on the health and well-being of communities.[53] Women are not as well represented as men in forestry governance bodies and often lack access to higher-value timber, which men control.

Biodiversity and Conservation. Women around the world, particularly Indigenous women, are often the first to experience the impact of biodiversity loss. However, they are underrepresented in conservation efforts and leadership. An International Union for Conservation of Nature analysis in 2021 revealed that women held only 15 percent of top jobs as ministers of environmental sectors.[54] Many data gaps remain, as do mechanisms that could help us better understand and systematically map women's and girls' roles in biodiversity conservation, especially through an intersectional lens. When resources are destroyed or depleted, women are forced to travel greater distances to collect water, wood for fuel, and animals and plants for food and medicine.

Women are powerful agents of biodiversity protection because of their unique roles and possession of knowledge on natural resources, particularly within rural and indigenous communities.[55,56] Women's engagement and leadership can play a significant role in delivering sustainable results across biodiversity, conservation, and natural resource sectors, including increased food and economic security and improved health.

CLIMATE

Climate change is not gender neutral. Women and girls bear the brunt of climate change impacts because of inequitable laws and regulations, and discriminatory gender norms. The dire effects of climate change

disproportionately affect groups that already experience marginalization because of their gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age, and ability, among other things.[57] Women and girls, on average, are significantly more likely than men to die from natural and climate disasters and at earlier ages.[58] Moreover, negative coping mechanisms for climate stressors often come at the expense of women and girls, such as increased rates of GBV and the liquidation of their economic assets.[59,60] Women's unique knowledge, skills, and networks make their contributions as decision-makers, stakeholders, educators, and experts key to producing more equitable and sustainable solutions to climate change.

Mitigation. It is essential that mitigation activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions consider women's vulnerability to climate change and unique contributions as leaders of mitigation efforts. This includes ensuring that financing mechanisms and technological developments are flexible and reflect women's priorities and needs.[61]

Adaptation. Climate change adaptation is key to reducing exposure and vulnerability to its effects.[62] Robust and meaningful gender integration into adaptation interventions will prevent activities from exacerbating inequalities and ensure that the needs of those most vulnerable to climate change are incorporated.[63]

Food Security. Women farmers rely more heavily on traditional food sources and subsistence agriculture, which are severely affected by climate change. Yet, women are underrepresented recipients of climate-smart agricultural support. To improve food security for all, it is essential that women farmers gain equal access to resources, information and risk management tools, and agency to lead on food security solutions.[64]

The success of climate action requires diverse and substantive women's leadership, including through adequate direct funding for women-led and gender equality organizations. Climate interventions must also mitigate the risk of contributing to women's time poverty. In compliance with the Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan,[65] it is critical that governments integrate gender into their national policies, action plans, and other measures to combat climate change.

BOX 7. GENDER EQUALITY AND EMERGENCIES

Decades of experience and evidence have shown that there is a bidirectional relationship between gender inequality and crises, disasters, and pandemics. Underlying gender inequalities and the effects of emergencies exacerbate one another. Natural disasters, war, violent political transitions, forced displacement, and disease outbreaks result in negative impacts on health, education, access to food and water, and economic and personal security. Women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals are affected differently during and following emergencies, even within the same household. Women's mortality from disasters tends to be higher than that of men; girls are more likely to drop out of school during prolonged drought; and forced displacement and natural disasters place women and girls in all their diversity at increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.[66]

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increases in women's vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition, widened gender poverty gaps, increased incidence of GBV, exacerbated burdens of unpaid work, increased risk of COVID-19 for frontline workers, hindered access to sexual and reproductive health services, and intensified gendered forms of violence and discrimination.[67,68,69,70,71,72] Greater awareness of the interaction between gender inequality and the multiple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic can inform and strengthen immediate responses. It can also inform medium and long-term recovery and development strategies and serve to improve our preparedness and response to other and future crises.

CONFLICT AND INSECURITY

Conflict, instability, and insecurity reinforce and exacerbate gender inequality.[73] Though women and girls are disproportionately affected, they remain underrepresented in efforts to mitigate conflict and support post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery.

State Insecurity. Equality and the security of women and girls is closely linked to state stability.[74] Higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower risk of conflict between and within states.[75] Insecurity exacerbates structural inequalities, further reinforcing economic, political, and social disparities. Moreover, GBV is used as a weapon against women and girls and marginalized groups by state actors, security forces, paramilitaries, criminal entities, and peacekeeping forces. States that fail to address gender inequalities and GBV during peacebuilding and recovery risk a return to violence.[76]

Peacebuilders. Despite evidence of women's critical contributions to stability, women remain significantly underrepresented in peace and security decision-making and peace processes. Elevating the integration of women with diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences in these processes enables innovative approaches to peacebuilding. Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, only 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of signatories, and 6 percent of mediators in major peace processes.[77] However, research shows that when women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreements are 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years because women's participation broadens the range of conflict drivers and potential solutions under discussion.[78]

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. Women and girls are frequently overlooked in efforts to counter violent extremism, despite their roles as survivors, preventers, peacebuilders, policy makers, and security actors, as well as supporters and perpetrators.[79] Efforts to address violent extremism are more effective and sustainable when a diversity of women and girls are leaders in the response, and when they have the opportunities and resources to mitigate it.[80]

BOX 8. WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Recognizing that countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women have full and equal rights and opportunity, the U.S. enacted the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, and the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS Strategy), supported by USAID's Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan. Investing in women's empowerment and leadership helps break cycles of conflict and instability that threaten global security and undermine countries' ability to thrive.

To work toward this, the WPS Strategy identifies three separate, yet interrelated, strategic objectives that aim to make demonstrable progress by 2023:

1. Women are more prepared and increasingly able to participate in efforts that promote stable and lasting peace.
2. 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.
3. U.S. and partner governments have improved institutionalization and capacity to ensure WPS efforts are sustainable and long-lasting.

USAID's Implementation Plan supports 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.
- **Line of Effort 4 – Partner Capacity and Commitment:** Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE

There is a direct link between the health of any democracy and the ability of all members of a society to freely participate in politics and public life without suffering discrimination or reprisal, regardless of their gender identity. This includes the participation of women and girls, in all their diversity, in formal political and peace processes and informal avenues (e.g., participation in labor associations, civic activism, the media, and defending human rights.) Research demonstrates that women's political empowerment is essential to building and sustaining strong and inclusive democracies. Formal political institutions are more democratic and responsive to citizens' needs when they include meaningful women's representation.[81] New data also reveal that increased women's mobilization in civil society tends to align with positive trends in democratization; the reverse is also true.[82] Furthermore, although research on linkages between LGBTQI+ inclusion and democracy is nascent, there is a clear link between higher levels of human rights protection for all citizens and democracy.[83] This shows that increasing gender equality is not only a crucial human rights issue, but an imperative for global democratic resilience.[84]

Women and Girls in Politics and Public Life. The rights of women and girls have advanced in the quarter century since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, but progress has been slow and increases in women's leadership have been met with backlash. The rate of representation of women in national parliaments around the world gradually increased from 15 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2021.[85] Of the 45,913 parliamentarians in office in the world as of September 1, 2020, only 245 (0.5 percent) identify as LGBTQI+. While surveys consistently show that women clearly constitute the largest proportion of the LGBTQI+ population, women only make up 26 percent of the LGBTQI+ national parliamentary cohort.[86,87] However, increased women's representation within these institutions does not automatically translate into increased political power, as women's leadership is often hampered by the patriarchal norms and rules of the institutions within which they sit.[88] Furthermore, women are still over represented in "social" ministries and parliamentary committees, and inadequately represented in security, economic, defense, bodies within governments, which tend to be seen as men's purviews[89].

Women's leadership in social movements has expanded significantly, which has proven to be an important catalyst for democratic change.[90,91] Unfortunately, a high degree of gender equality within movements does not always lead to the same level of representation in negotiated settlements or ensuing governing structures.[92] As a result, women remain grossly underrepresented in decision-making worldwide at the local,[93] national, and international levels and across all branches of government and the security sector.[94] They continue to be marginalized in peace negotiations and face significant obstacles as media professionals and civic activists. Their mobilization is often met with harsh resistance, including violence in both its online and offline manifestations.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing economic and social barriers to women's political participation, emboldening anti-democratic leaders to close political space and roll back hard-won gains in gender equality.[95,96] It is increasingly clear that this backlash is often part of a concerted effort to

control political outcomes and maintain patriarchal power hierarchies that benefit autocratic leaders and illiberal governance.[97,98]

Ecosystem Approaches. Efforts must incorporate an understanding of how gender norms affect the promotion of democracy, human rights, and governance to increase women's full and meaningful participation in politics and public life. The disempowerment of women and girls in politics and public life is rooted in entrenched societal norms that are codified in political, legal, and financial institutions resulting in systemic gender inequality.[99] Research also emphasizes the negative impact of harmful social norms related to intersectional identities on women's political participation. Outright prejudice against minority LGBTQI+ candidates can be especially severe. Indeed, such candidates suffer from several layers of stigma derived from their gender, sexual, ethnic, and racial identities.[100] Based on this evidence, it is clear that efforts solely focused on capacity-building, behavior change, and legal reforms for women and girls in all their diversity cannot alone transform imbalances in power. To seed real change, interventions must focus on addressing barriers across the entire political ecosystem, including those at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. These include addressing various forms of resistance to inclusion, including lack of access to necessary skills, patriarchal norms, and discriminatory legal frameworks, while supporting the increased confidence and capacity of women and girls to participate.

BOX 9. BARRIERS TO THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Individual-level barriers can include a lack of access to necessary skills, such as a basic education or political experience. They can also take the form of freedom of movement and time poverty.

Institution-level obstacles include discriminatory legal frameworks that make it more difficult for women to run for office and discriminatory laws, such as early marriage, that directly impact the ability of girls to participate in public life. Legal requirements surrounding proof of identity to vote can pose insurmountable challenges for women, including trans women, who often do not have a form of identification that matches their gender identity.

At the societal level, gender norms and attitudes regarding women's and men's roles in public life and decision-making benefit pre-existing power structures in which men are the majority decision-makers. They are intentionally upheld, including through violence directly targeting those who deviate, and are manipulated to drive illiberal political agendas.

DIGITAL ACCESS AND TECHNOLOGY

The rapid development and adoption of digital technology is transforming how people gain access to information, goods, and services. Digital technology has the power to spur economic growth, improve development outcomes, and lift millions out of poverty. However, women and girls in all their diversity do not have equal access to the transformative benefits of digital technology. This creates a gender digital divide that, if not addressed, promises to further exacerbate gender inequality as fewer goods, services, and information become available from non-digital sources.[101,102,103]

The Gender Digital Divide. Women and girls are further marginalized when they are excluded from the benefits of safe digital technology access and use. This is especially true for women and girls with intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., Indigenous, disabled, living in poverty, living in rural communities, refugees and migrants). Although efforts have been made to close the gender digital divide, progress has been slow. According to a 2021 Alliance for Affordable Internet report, the gender digital

divide has only decreased by half a percentage point since 2011, dropping from 30.9 percent to 30.4 percent.[104] Moreover, men are adopting digital technologies at a faster rate than women, and this trend has accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.[105]

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence. Women, girls, and gender diverse persons disproportionately face online threats and harassment. These acts, including technology-facilitated GBV are carried out using the internet or information and communication technologies by one or more people to harm others based on their actual or perceived sex or gender identity. This can include, but is not limited to, online harassment, cyberstalking, online gendered disinformation and misinformation, and non-consensual image-based abuse.[106] In addition to causing harm, technology-facilitated GBV can discourage women, girls, and gender diverse persons from engaging in the digital ecosystem.

Addressing Gender-Based Barriers. Persistent and growing gaps in equitable access to and meaningful use of digital technology significantly hampers the ability of women and girls to take advantage of digital technology to improve their own lives and increase the stability and resilience of their families and communities.[107] It is therefore critical to address the key barriers women face in accessing and adopting digital solutions: affordability, availability, ability, and appetite.[108] Proven strategies to address gender-based barriers within the digital ecosystem include: 1) Changing social norms and cultural perceptions of women's engagement with digital technology; 2) Creating economic opportunities for women, including through digital channels; 3) Cultivating women's confidence in use of digital technology; 4) Designing creative, women-centric technology; 5) Establishing laws and private sector approaches that create accountability for TFGBV; and 6) Developing community support mechanisms for women technology users.[109]

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Gender inequalities run across economic systems, acting as barriers to the realization of individual rights and aspirations and to poverty reduction and economic growth. The World Bank's 2022 Women, Business and the Law research found that in only 12 countries do women have legal equal economic standing with men. The research further revealed that nearly 2.4 billion women of working age worldwide still lack equal economic opportunities.[110] At the current rate of change, estimates suggest it will take 267.6 years to close the gender economic opportunity gap,[111] which is ten years longer than previous estimates. This is in part because the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities affecting women and girls in all their diversity related to informal, part-time, and tenuous employment, unpaid care, and GBV.[112,113] This includes a 4.2 percent drop in women's employment between 2019 and 2020 versus a 3 percent drop in employment for men.[114] In a recent policy briefing, the International Labour Organization estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic forced more than two million women around the world to leave the workforce to meet unpaid caregiving needs, such as school and childcare center closures.[115] The disparate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic also highlight the increased economic vulnerability of women facing multiple and compounding forms of discrimination.[116]

Gender-Based Barriers to Growth. Evidence shows that gender inequality drives poverty and impedes economic growth.[117] Restrictive gender norms limit women's mobility, financial and bodily autonomy, labor participation, sense of self-efficacy, bargaining power, and access to education and credit.[118,119] A key barrier to women's higher and consistent labor force participation is the lack of safe and affordable childcare options; the ILO estimates that 300 million jobs could be created in the care industry to address this need.[120,121,122]

Women are less likely to be promoted into leadership and management positions; they are often not seen as successful entrepreneurs or productive employees, and are overlooked in hiring because of absenteeism that might occur during maternity or because of childcare needs. Women and girls are also

overlooked as key consumer or client market segments,[123] and advertising can reinforce gender stereotypes.[124] Access to finance is a key obstacle to women's economic security; the credit gap for formal women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises across all regions is roughly $287 billion.[125] GBV is both a rights violation and a detriment to individual, community, and country economic well-being. The cost of intimate partner violence is an estimated 5.18 percent of global GDP.[126] An International Monetary Fund study found that in Sub-Saharan Africa, a one percent increase in the share of women subjected to violence can reduce economic activity by up to 8 percent.[127] External shocks such as conflict and migration, pandemics, and climate change exacerbate inequality. As a result of these events, women are at greater risk of losing jobs, livelihoods, businesses, and productive assets. For those dependent on agriculture and related industries, the climate crisis is having disproportionate effects.

Prosperity through Gender Equality. The rights and well-being of women improve with women's economic empowerment and greater gender equality in the economy, as does the well-being of their family as well as GDP and company performance.[128,129,130] Countries that are more open to trade (as measured by the ratio of trade to GDP) have higher levels of gender equality.[131] In addition, closing the labor participation gender gap by 25 percent by 2025 could increase global GDP by $5.3 trillion.[132,133,134,135] Research also demonstrates the economic benefit of gender equality within companies, funds, and e-commerce trade activities.[136,137] For instance, data from more than 700 funds and 500 portfolio companies showed that private equity and venture capital funds with gender-balanced senior investment teams generated 10 to 20 percent higher returns compared with funds that had a majority of male or female leaders.[138,139] In addition, if women's engagement in e-commerce trade equaled men's engagement, in Africa alone, the e-commerce market could increase by nearly $15 billion from 2025 to 2030.[140]

EDUCATION

Gender-transformative education advances governance, health, economic, and other development outcomes. UNICEF defines gender-transformative education as the education system that seeks to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms, and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.[141] This approach helps children and youth gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and mindsets to advocate for themselves and others, challenge harmful gender norms, and create more just societies. Gender-transformative education ensures that all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, can succeed in safe, equitable, and inclusive education systems.

Gender-Based Barriers and Solutions. Despite progress, students and educators continue to face gender-based discrimination and oppression, especially adolescent girls,[142] women, and LGBTQI+ people. Multiple aspects of a person's identity, including gender identity and sexual orientation, disability, race, and age, intersect with barriers to education, such as child marriage, harmful gender norms, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and discriminatory policies, to decrease that person's likelihood of benefiting from education systems. Promising interventions include but are not limited to:[143] 1) Addressing the cost of schooling; 2) Promoting diverse women's leadership in education systems; 3) Collaborating with local educators and communities of all gender identities to create and promote safe and inclusive in-person and distance-learning environments; 4) Supplying gender-equitable books and other educational materials that are accessible to all individuals including persons with disabilities; 6) Strengthening school and community-based infrastructure to prevent and address SRGBV.

Variation across Contexts. Gender inequality in education is multidimensional and varies across and within countries. Education programs are most effective when they account for gender-related challenges to meet the unique needs of learners and educators in each context.

Globally, boys are more likely to be enrolled in primary school than girls,[144] but learning poverty rates

(defined as the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text at ten years of age) are higher for boys than for girls in all regions and almost all countries of the world.[145] In secondary schools, the gender gap disadvantages girls in some regions, and boys in others.[146] Growing rates of secondary completion for girls have not necessarily led to an equivalent increase in workforce participation.[147] In higher education, women are still only 35 percent of all students enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and medical fields.[148] Women are overrepresented in the global teaching staff at lower education levels, while their presence is markedly lower in higher education, school management, and education policymaking.[149]

Most data about educational outcomes do not reflect the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in USAID's partner countries. However, 42 percent of LGBTQI+ learners globally report being ridiculed, teased, insulted, or threatened at school because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, primarily by their peers; and 37 percent report feeling rarely or never safe at school.[150]

ENERGY, MINING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A lack of access to energy can lock women and girls in all their diversity into poverty and affect all areas of their lives. A shortage of women's leadership in the clean energy sector may undermine low-emission development goals.[151] Women's empowerment in artisanal and small-scale mining can contribute to poverty alleviation, national revenue generation, and foreign exchange earnings. Workforces tend to be male dominated in these sectors, with limited access to opportunities for women in formal employment, especially in technical and leadership roles.

Women play critical roles in transforming these sectors in their roles as entrepreneurs, innovators, and decision makers. Numerous studies show the business benefits of diverse leadership and workforces. Increasingly, institutions 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 workforce: 32 percent of the renewable energy sector's workforce and 22 percent of jobholders in the energy sector overall.[152] This is often because of restrictive, harmful gender norms and discriminatory policies and practices within energy, mining, and infrastructure organizations.

The following themes demonstrate how energy, mining, and infrastructure are closely intertwined with gender equality and women's empowerment:

Energy Access and Electrification. Improved access to energy, including electricity, leads to improved income, health, and education outcomes and can reduce poverty. It also improves safety for women and girls in all their diversity when their homes and public spaces are well lit and they have access to clean cooking and heating solutions. Women and girls can spend hours per day collecting firewood for cooking and lighting needs and to earn extra income for the family; during these trips, they are vulnerable to GBV. Household air pollution from inefficient cooking and lighting causes premature death in more than four million people per year. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, as they are primarily responsible for cooking in the home in many countries.[153]

Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining. Artisanal and small-scale mining techniques are used to extract a variety of minerals, including those for the clean-energy transition. Women are estimated to represent 30–50 percent of the global artisanal and small-scale mining workforce, but their needs have been largely overlooked by governments and donors.[154] A shortage of women's representation as leaders in the clean energy sector may undermine low-emission development goals,[155] and women's empowerment in this sector can contribute to poverty alleviation, national revenue generation, and foreign exchange earnings.

Infrastructure. Access to safe and gender-sensitive infrastructure for all people is key to a population's health and overall socio-economic well-being. Marginalized populations often face limited access to

infrastructure (including roads, waste management, public transportation, etc.) because of poor design or social norms and laws that restrict their ability to equitably use infrastructure.

Including gender diverse persons, and youth voices in the design and planning phase of programs is essential to ensure that projects meet the needs of all people.[156] Programs can support gender economic equality by actively recruiting and training women and girls in all their diversity to take advantage of economic opportunities in traditionally male-dominated fields related to infrastructure projects. Finally, safeguards must be in place to prevent GBV and trafficking in persons that can emerge around infrastructure projects or from the poor design of public infrastructure.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The perpetration of GBV is another tool to uphold harmful gender norms. Across its many manifestations, GBV is a human rights abuse and a barrier to civic, social, political, legal, and economic participation. GBV includes physical, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. Importantly, it is an umbrella category that encompasses different types of violence, including, but not limited to, intimate partner violence; sexual violence; sexual exploitation, harassment, and abuse; "honor" killings and female infanticide; and e) practices such as child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) and female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C). It negatively impacts the well-being of individuals, families, and communities; impedes public health; thwarts girls' access to education; contributes to economic instability, including lost household productivity and reduced income; and threatens national security and democratic gains.

Prevalence and Risk Factors. Despite decades of work by governments, civil society organizations, multilateral organizations, and tenacious advocates, GBV remains a pervasive global problem. Gender-based violence is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. Although individuals of all gender identities may experience gender-based violence, women, girls, and gender diverse individuals face a disproportionate risk of gender-based violence across every context due to their unequal status in society. The World Health Organization estimates that one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime,[157] in some communities the percentage can be much higher. Members of some populations face overlapping forms of discrimination that put them at even higher risk of gender-based violence, including but not limited to Indigenous peoples; marginalized racial, ethnic and religious populations; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; and persons in fragile and conflict-affected states.

GBV cuts across identity categories and social statuses, including but not limited to ethnicity, race, socio-economic class, religion, education level, and citizenship status. Perpetrators of GBV operate in a variety of social locations, including the family, the public sphere, workplaces, schools, religious institutions, and via digital technologies. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women worldwide; women killed by intimate partners or family members account for 58 percent of all female homicide victims reported globally.[158]

Children are particularly vulnerable to violence, especially sexual abuse. More than one in ten girls under age 20, or approximately 120 million worldwide, have experienced forced sex , or other forced sexual acts, at some point in their lives.[159] A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) study found that girls and young women with a disability face up to ten times more GBV than their non-disabled peers.[160] Global data show that boys are also at risk for sexual violence and are at higher risk for physical violence, including fights and peer bullying.[161]

GBV against older adults is widespread, but it receives comparatively less research and public advocacy focus compared to GBV perpetrated against youth and younger adults. Perpetrators include 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 limits their ability to leave an abusive partner or household.[162]

In the context of humanitarian crises and emergencies, civilian women and children are often the most vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and abuse because of their gender, age, and status in society. LGBTQI+ people also face heightened risk.

Evidence-Based Interventions. Although statistics on the prevalence of GBV vary, the scale is tremendous, the scope is vast, and the consequences for individuals, families, communities, and countries are devastating. There are proven strategies to effectively prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV. These include: 1) Provision of quality GBV response and survivor-centered support services in humanitarian and development settings; 2) Structural interventions to improve the implementation and enforcement of laws and shift harmful gender norms; and 3) Socio-ecological approaches to reduce acceptance of GBV across individual, family, community, and institutional levels; [163,164,165] and 4) Engaging local, women-led, and women's rights organizations as well as men and boys to achieve transformational change.[166,167]

BOX 10. A GLOBAL ISSUE: CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS

Child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) are forms of GBV that are enabled by gender norms, the devalued status of girls, poverty, and lack of access to free and equitable education. CEFMU is a human rights violation that undermines efforts to address maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality and women and girls' empowerment.

- From 2008 to 2018, CEFMU among women and girls decreased by 15 percent.[168] Although the rate of CEFMU is declining, the absolute number of girls married before the age of 18 remains alarmingly high and continues to grow. Every year, one in five girls is married before the age of 18, equaling nearly 12 million girls worldwide.[169] Eighteen of the 20 highest prevalence countries globally are in sub-Saharan Africa, whereas the countries with the absolute largest numbers are in South Asia. 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 and humanitarian disasters, family, social, and legal networks tend to break down. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened earlier gains achieved to decrease CEFMU.[170] During such times of precarity, families may feel added financial pressures to marry off their children.

- Married girls are at a higher risk of domestic violence and social marginalization. They are less likely to complete their education, have access to health care or information, or opportunities for skills building. These negative outcomes not only impact the girls themselves, but also their children and households.

- A large percentage of adolescent pregnancies occur in the context of CEFMU, and these girls are at increased risk for adverse maternal and newborn outcomes (e.g., obstructed labor, obstetric fistula, preterm birth, hypertension in pregnancy, infection, sepsis.)[171] Children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to die during or after childbirth, or to be small for gestational age.

- Globally, 115 million boys and men were married before age 18.[172] Although child grooms face different challenges, early marriage can lead to reduced education or economic opportunities. It can also force the child groom to face fatherhood at an earlier age.

GLOBAL HEALTH

Over recent decades, significant strides have been made in improving health and well-being, particularly in life expectancy, fertility, and mortality. However, gender inequality continues to constrain positive health outcomes for all individuals. Gender-related power imbalances limit women's and girls' health decision-making and their access to and use of health services, contributing to excess female morbidity and mortality. Men and boys in all their diversity also experience health inequities, such as higher rates of tuberculosis and lower utilization of health services. Harmful gender norms affect men and boys by encouraging risk-taking and limiting health-seeking behaviors. These and other challenges persist and worsen the health and well-being of women and girls, men and boys, gender diverse individuals, LGBTQI+ people, and families across the life course. Norms that sanction gender inequalities and GBV increase risks for early pregnancy, childbirth complications, maternal mortality, transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and poor mental health outcomes.[173] The examples below demonstrate the strong links between gender equality, women's empowerment, and health outcomes.

Family Planning.[10] Internationally agreed principles established at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development have centered sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programming, including family planning, on the rights of individuals and couples to decide their family size and avoid unintended pregnancies.[11] There is also increasing recognition that access to voluntary family planning improves women's opportunities for education, employment, and full participation in society and contributes to climate resilience and economic growth through its impact on population dynamics. Despite significant improvements, gendered barriers continue to reduce individuals' capacity to exercise their reproductive rights and attain SRH. Some 218 million women worldwide would like to avoid pregnancy but are not using a modern contraceptive method, which may lead to unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, delayed antenatal care, and poor pregnancy outcomes.[174] Inequitable gender and power dynamics limit women and girls' agency to decide whether and when to have sex, with whom, and/or whether and when to have children and how many.[175] Harmful gender norms and GBV can also limit couples' communication, cooperative decision-making, and contraceptive use. Furthermore, approximately 12 million girls aged 15–19 give birth each year in developing regions and many lack decision-making agency around the conditions of marriage, contraceptive use, or the timing of pregnancy.[176]

Gendered barriers also prevent men from using and/or supporting women's use of contraception. Myths, misconceptions, and negative attitudes about the role of men and boys in family planning and reproductive health are often rooted in inequitable forms of masculinity. These act as barriers to men and boys sharing responsibility for using contraception or family planning services and supporting their partners' reproductive

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[10] USAID supports and funds all the key components of effective, voluntary, informed family planning and reproductive health programming: the delivery of care; performance improvement; supply chains and logistics for contraceptive methods; health communications; biomedical and social science research; policy analysis; planning; monitoring; and evaluation. USAID's reproductive health portfolio includes integration with programming in maternal and child health, HIV, GBV, and cervical cancer.

[11] The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) established core, internationally-agreed principles and acknowledged that full attention should be given to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations. Under ICPD, "reproductive rights" are defined as follows: reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents, and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence, as expressed in human rights documents. (Source: ICPD Programme of Action, Para 7.3, 1994)

goals.[177] Addressing gendered barriers helps to promote safe, healthy, and equitable relationships and ensures all people are able to make and act on informed choices about their reproductive lives.

Maternal and Child Health. Inequality between women and men contributes to increased levels of female morbidity and mortality across the lifespan. Adolescent pregnancy is associated with significant risks for both mother and child (see Box 9).[178] Women who experience intimate partner violence in pregnancy are 16 percent more likely to suffer a miscarriage, 41 percent more likely to have a preterm birth,[179] and are more likely to experience depression and anxiety disorders. Injuries from sexual violence, including labor and delivery complications, can contribute to reproductive tract fistulas, which profoundly undermine a woman's health, well-being, employment, education, and social status.

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. Women are more likely than men to be affected by hunger. In societies that favor sons, girl children receive less or lower-quality food.[180] Some countries hold traditions in which women eat last, after all the male members and children have been fed. Women are more likely to suffer from nutritional deficiencies than men, due in part to low social status and inequalities in income and education. Burden of household work and other sociocultural disparities can also increase women's chances of being malnourished.[181] Worldwide, 50 percent of pregnant women are anemic, and at least 120 million women are underweight, which is associated with increased risk of illness or death.[182]

HIV/AIDS. Structural barriers to HIV epidemic control are rooted in gender inequality, unequal power relations, and unrelenting stigma and discrimination. Research has shown that exposure to, or perpetration of, violence is a proximate determinant of HIV acquisition and transmission,[183] and exposure to GBV, particularly intimate partner violence, is associated with lower use of antiretroviral therapy; 50 percent lower odds of self-reported adherence to treatment; and significantly worsened viral suppression among women.[184] Holding gender inequitable beliefs—particularly norms sanctioning violence against and control of women—decreases the odds of antiretroviral therapy use among people living with HIV.[185] Advancing gender equality and ending GBV, including violence against children, is essential to achieving sustained HIV epidemic control.

Infectious Diseases and Pandemics. Biological differences across genders affect vulnerabilities to infectious diseases; for example, pregnancy increases the risk for morbidity and mortality associated with malaria and Zika.[186] Cultural and societal gender norms surrounding workplace and caregiving roles have a differential impact on the transmission of Ebola and Neglected Tropical Diseases.[187] The impact of stigma-related barriers associated with tuberculosis diagnosis also differs across genders because of their effects on health-seeking and treatment-retention outcomes.[188] During pandemics, as seen with COVID-19, women can experience exacerbated inequalities, job losses, economic stress, GBV, and unmet health care needs.[189,190]

Health Systems and the Health Workforce. For health systems to remain responsive and effective,[191] they must evolve to ensure equitable access to respectful, client-centered health care for all people. This includes addressing restrictive gender norms and inequalities within the health system and tackling systemic barriers blocking full participation of women and gender minorities in the health workforce.

Globally, women comprise up to 70 percent of frontline workers in formal and informal health care delivery. Therefore, women are disproportionately at risk of exposure and the deleterious effects of shortages of sanitary medical supplies, personal protective equipment, hygiene supplies and facilities, and livelihood support for health care workers.

Female health workers carry a high burden of unpaid work and face safety concerns including

harassment, GBV, and other gender-related barriers that negatively affect the workforce and service quality. Addressing GBV and discrimination through worker protections paves the way for leadership opportunities and career advancement among women and gender minorities.

Health programs that address socio-demographic factors, including gendered barriers to the access and utilization of care, can help improve health outcomes. Applying evidence and technical experience to ensure gender-integrated and gender-transformative health programming at multiple societal levels will contribute to these outcomes and enhance the effectiveness of policies and programming.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In 2022, 274 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection, a significant increase from 235 million in 2021, already the highest figure in decades.[192] Disasters and crises amplify existing gender inequalities and exacerbate other vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls in all their diversity, the LGBTQI+ community, children, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and older people. To fulfill the humanitarian mandate of targeting and providing services to those most at risk, humanitarian actors employ intersectional analysis to address these multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities in program design and implementation.

Gender Inequality in Emergencies. On average, natural disasters result in the deaths of more women than men and kill women at an earlier age than men.[193] For women and marginalized populations, crises can result in exclusion from life-saving care and lead to under-representation in decision-making processes related to relief and recovery. Girls, especially adolescent girls, experience increased risks of various forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse; their needs are often unmet by interventions designed for children and adults.

Harmful gender norms also adversely affect boys. During humanitarian crises, boys are vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and to trafficking for the purposes of sex or labor exploitation. If labor needs increase, boys are more likely to be taken out of school.

In emergency settings, women and girls—particularly adolescents—are more likely to experience acute food insecurity. Women and girls represent more than 60 percent of people facing chronic hunger.[194] When food is scarce, women and girls bear the brunt of negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage, sex-selective feeding, child labor, and transactional or survival sex, as well as increased risks of trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers.

Women and girls in crisis situations face inequitable or unsafe access to maternal health services and water, sanitation, and hygiene support, including menstrual hygiene materials. Sixty percent of preventable maternal mortality deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement, and natural disasters.[195]

Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. GBV is a daily reality in all contexts, but the risk of GBV increases exponentially in times of crisis. Women and girls are at risk of multiple forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence; sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; and CEFMU. Rates of intimate partner violence perpetrated against women and girls in conflict-affected settings are consistently higher than rates of non-partner sexual violence, and one in five women in humanitarian settings is likely to experience sexual violence.[196,197] These forms of GBV consistently and undeniably occur during all emergencies, from the earliest days of a crisis through decades of protracted displacement. However, they remain underreported because of exposure to secondary risks, stigma or fear of retaliation, limited access to trusted service providers, impunity for perpetrators, and lack of awareness of the benefits of seeking care.

Women's and Girls' Leadership in Crisis. 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.

Research indicates that women's engagement in disaster risk reduction strategies often helps focus attention on the needs of vulnerable groups, such as young children and persons with disabilities, in sudden onset emergencies.[198] When women and girls are at the center of humanitarian aid and crisis responses, they can contribute to the assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring of assistance. When they are prioritized in strategies and approaches, their specific needs and potential vulnerabilities are understood and supported.

LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

Globally, women are often the primary laborers and users of land, yet their rights to land and land-based resources such as forests and trees are rarely recognized. This is despite the fact that rural women's equal rights to own, manage, and dispose of land are recognized by international human rights law.[199] When these rights are secure, the results include higher economic gains, increased empowerment to make household decisions, more efficient and sustainable land use, increased agricultural investment and production, and improved food security.[200] Secure ownership of land is also linked to the ability to access credit.[201]

Women's secure ownership of land and property is particularly important in cases of divorce and widowhood to support children and prevent loss of housing and land. When inheritance or family laws and gender norms create barriers to women and girls securely owning marital or family property, they are vulnerable to forcible displacement, GBV, and land-grabbing from in-laws and others.[202] Research also shows that the next generation of women experience larger benefits from gender-equitable inheritance rules.[203]

Women, Land Rights, and Food Production. Women's secure rights to land are essential for food production and sustainable, more stable livelihoods. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization reports that "[f]ewer than 15 percent of agricultural landholders around the world are women and 85 percent are men. The largest gender inequalities in access to land are found in North Africa and the Near East, where only around 5 percent of all landholders are women."[204] More recent research on the topic of women's land ownership finds significant differences in levels of ownership. These range from a reported low of 2 percent in the Middle East and North Africa to a high of 54 percent in three countries: Burundi, Cambodia, and Rwanda.[205]

Globally, land rights are often dependent on natal and marital affiliations. At least 60 percent of countries still discriminate against daughters' rights to inherit land and non-land assets in either law or practice.[206] The resulting insecurity undermines economic and social benefits, as land rights provide economic access to key markets and social access to non-market institutions, such as household and community-level governance. Land rights can support women's economic independence and bargaining power and reduce vulnerabilities to harmful behaviors, such as transactional sex.[207]

Strengthening Women's Land and Property Rights. Coordinated policies and programs can strengthen women's land and property rights by:

1. Working with the private sector to bring more women landholders into supply chains
2. Engaging male leaders to promote positive behavior change and shift discriminatory norms
3. Promoting legal literacy programs to enable women to exercise their rights
4. Increasing women's ability to meaningfully participate in governance structures and institutions
5. Raising awareness of the linkages between GBV and land disputes in communities
6. Improving the capacity of law enforcement and community leaders to enforce such rights

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

Women are significantly underrepresented in science and research fields, comprising only 33 percent of all researchers globally and 12 percent of membership in national science academies.[208] In up-and-coming

fields such as artificial intelligence, only one in five professionals (22 percent) is a woman, although women with artificial intelligence skills are more likely than men to be employed as data analysts and in research, information management, and teaching positions.[209] Despite a shortage of skills in most technological fields, women still account for only 28 percent of engineering graduates and 40 percent of graduates in computer science and informatics.[210]

Girls receive less encouragement to apply to engineering and science programs, which leads to a gap in career expectations. A 2018 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study found more boys than girls planning careers in science and engineering in 34 of 63 countries surveyed.[211] Female researchers tend to have shorter, less well-paid careers. Their work is underrepresented in high-profile journals, and they are often passed over for promotion. Furthermore, women are typically given smaller research grants than their male colleagues.[212]

Existing research suggests that programs aimed at increasing women's representation fail to consider the complex, cumulative ways in which intersectionality influences outcomes, and greater consideration for race, disability, gender, and other identity facets is necessary to empower women researchers.[213]

Barriers to Diverse Women's Leadership in Science and Research. Women scientists and researchers in low and middle-income countries face many barriers to their full potential in academia and industry.[214] Women account for 45 percent of researchers in Latin America and the Caribbean, 41 percent in Arab States, 31.8 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 23.8 percent in East Asia and the Pacific.[215] Obstacles in the workplace include part-time and precarious work, sexual harassment, lower pay, higher teaching and/or administrative workload, cultural restrictions with respect to mobility and family responsibilities, and work-life balance. In addition, women are often pressured to take on additional responsibilities that have significant career costs without contributing to the likelihood of advancement.[161] As a result of these challenges, female researchers are often blocked from contributing to scientific advances in international development.

Impacts of Gender Bias in Science and Research. Gender bias often results in research that does not provide evidence about how policies, programs, and/or interventions impact the well-being of women and gender diverse individuals. This is in part because of the lower rates of women and gender diverse people in influential research, policymaking, and funding-related positions. Greater inclusion of women and gender diverse individuals as participants in research is needed. Data and analytic practices should elucidate their unique needs and preferences and examine the outcomes of programs on these groups. Failure to do so can result in ineffective or even harmful programs and policies.[216]

WATER SECURITY, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

As of 2020, an estimated one in four people lacks safe drinking water in their homes, nearly half the world's population lacks safely managed sanitation, and three in ten people cannot wash their hands with soap and water at home.[217] These conditions compromise dignity, menstrual health and hygiene, and nutrition and create vulnerability to GBV.[218] Lack of access to water security, sanitation, and hygiene (WSSH) also affects women's and girls' educational and employment opportunities, physical and psychosocial health, and agency.

Globally, women and girls in all their diversity are largely responsible for water collection in households.[219] Poor sanitation contributes to time poverty that affects their health, safety, education and livelihoods.[220,221]

Improved water, sanitation, and hygiene in health facilities is a leading demand of women worldwide,[222,223] but nearly two billion people use a health facility that has no access to water or sanitation.[224] Sex-segregated latrines are the global norm but may exclude LGBTQI+ persons or put their safety at risk without their

involvement in program design and implementation. Women and girls with disabilities may also find increased difficulty accessing or using WASH facilities that are not designed with their needs in mind.

Women make up only 18 percent of employees in water utilities on average, both because of gender norms and legal barriers.[225,226] This highlights an opportunity to improve both women's economic empowerment and the capacity of service providers by creating job opportunities in the sector.[227]

WSSH services have a proven positive impact on gender equality and female empowerment. Households with piped water spend 80 percent less time collecting water, instead spending this time tending to kitchen gardens, caring for children, or working outside the home. These households also report improved psychosocial well-being.[228] Engaging both men and women in shaping water policies and institutions leads to communities that use water services more and sustain them for longer. Women leaders in local government are more likely to invest in drinking water and sanitation than their male counterparts.[229,230]

BOX 11. MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Approximately 500 million people worldwide face barriers to managing their menstruation in a safe, healthy, and dignified manner. These barriers include insufficient or inaccessible knowledge, information, menstrual hygiene products, latrines, water for washing, and social support. Insufficient access to menstrual hygiene products increases the risk of transactional sex for menstrual hygiene supplies.[231] Poor menstrual health and hygiene has significant psychosocial impacts, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-efficacy, loneliness, disengagement from class or training, difficulty sleeping, and withdrawal from public life.[232,233,234,235]

Up to 80 percent of adolescent girls in lower- and middle-income countries report limited knowledge and understanding about menstruation prior to reaching menarche.[236] Women report that insufficient or inaccessible latrines and lack of an enabling environment for menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) in workplaces leads to lower productivity and absenteeism.[237] Holistic menstrual health and hygiene interventions in workplaces and a supportive environment from male colleagues and supervisors have been shown to increase job satisfaction.[238]

It is important to note that while the studies cited above classified participants as girls and women, menstruators represent a gender diverse population. These populations have often been excluded in gender-normative social and behavior change initiatives for menstrual health.

Menstruator and disability-friendly latrines, which include lights and locks for safety and privacy, unobstructed access, waste bins for disposable pads, water, soap, and space for washing or changing clothes, are essential to enabling menstrual health and hygiene. Evidence indicates that latrine upgrades may account for a significant portion of the benefits to businesses of workplace MHH initiatives, in addition to protecting health and dignity.[239]

Holistic approaches to menstrual health and hygiene contribute to self-efficacy, education, psychosocial well-being,[240] economic empowerment of menstruators, positive youth development, and environmental protection objectives. Other key elements of menstrual health and hygiene initiatives include:

- Puberty and menstruation education and training
- National and institutional policy development
- Social and behavior change to confront menstruation stigma and cultures of silence on menstruation
- Inclusive social and behavior change initiatives featuring gender diverse menstruators

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- Environmentally friendly management of disposable menstrual hygiene products
- Support of small and medium enterprises that increase menstrual hygiene product choice and availability and diversify the market

ANNEX 1: DEFINITIONS

To achieve USAID's vision and objectives, the Gender Policy uses the following definitions, with the understanding that language is dynamic and evolving.

GENDER

A socially constructed set of rules, responsibilities, entitlements, and behaviors associated with being a man, a woman, or a gender diverse individual, and the relationships between and among people according to these constructs. These social definitions and their consequences differ among and within cultures, change over time, and intersect with other factors (e.g., age, class, disability, ethnicity, race, religion, citizenship, and sexual orientation.) Though these concepts are linked, the term *gender* is not interchangeable with the terms *women*, *sex*, *gender identity*, or *gender expression*.

GENDER ANALYSIS

1. A socio-economic analysis of quantitative and qualitative information to identify, understand, and explain gender gaps between individuals, which typically involves examining the:

   a. Differences in the status of women and men, girls and boys, and gender diverse individuals and their differential access to and control over assets, resources, education, opportunities, and services
   b. Influence of gender roles, structural and systems barriers, and norms on the division of time between paid employment, unpaid work (including subsistence production, domestic work, and care for family members), and volunteer activities
   c. Influence of gender roles, structural and systems barriers, and norms on leadership roles and decision-making; constraints, and opportunities
   d. Potential differential impacts of development policies and programs on women and men, girls and boys, and gender diverse individuals, including unintended or negative consequences

2. Includes conclusions and recommendations to enable development policies and programs to narrow gender gaps and improve the lives of women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals.

Data for a gender analysis should reflect the intersection of sex and gender identity with other characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, income, ethnicity, race, disability status, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender expression, or other socially relevant category) in education, health, political participation, economic activity and earnings, time use, GBV, and other relevant domains. It is important to understand a person's *intersecting* identities to capture the extent to which they may or may not experience heightened marginalization or exclusion in society.

GENDER BINARY

A system in which gender is socially constructed into two categories of man or woman.

GENDER DIVERSE

Refers to a person with a gender identity beyond the binary categories of man or woman. This can include identifying along the vast diversity of gender identity (e.g., transgender, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, agender, etc.).

GENDER EQUITY

The process of ensuring women and men, boys and girls, and gender diverse individuals receive consistent, systematic, fair, and just treatment and distribution of benefits and resources. To ensure fairness, measures must be taken to compensate for historic and systemic disadvantages (i.e., economic, social, and political). Equitable approaches are different from approaches in which resources are distributed equally to all persons or groups regardless of specific circumstances or needs. Gender equity is the process that needs to be followed to reach the outcome of *gender equality*.

GENDER EQUALITY

Equal ability to attain and benefit from human rights, freedoms, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources by all individuals independent of a person's sex, gender expression, and gender identity. Gender equality is more than parity in numbers and laws on the books. Achieving gender equality means that all individuals - women and girls, men and boys, and gender-diverse individuals - can meaningfully contribute and belong to their societies.

GENDER EXPRESSION

How a person presents their gender identity outwardly, through acts, dress, behavior, voice, or other perceived characteristics. Gender expression can be described variously as feminine, masculine, both, or neither. Pronouns are also part of how people express and articulate gender identity.

GENDER IDENTITY

A person's deeply held sense of self. It is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. This can include identifying as woman or man, or as a gender diverse individual along the spectrum of gender identity and gender expression. While gender is a social construct ascribed to individuals, gender identity is self-determined. A person's gender identity may or may not align with their biological sex assigned at birth. When someone's sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity, the person is cisgender. When someone's sex assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity, the person may identify as a transgender man, transgender woman, nonbinary, or another identity (e.g., gender nonconforming, agender, etc.).

GENDER INTEGRATION

Incorporating gender equality principles and practices, issues and needs, and objectives throughout all phases of programming including, but not limited to, strategic planning, project and activity design, procurement, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

GENDER NORMS

The often unspoken social rules that govern the attributes, roles, and behaviors that are valued and considered acceptable for women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals within a given culture or social group. Norms are learned and reinforced from childhood to adulthood through observation, instruction, positive and negative sanctioning, media, religion, and other social institutions. Restrictive gender norms permit only a narrow range of gender expressions and/or behaviors. Individuals who do not conform to prevailing gender norms may experience sanctions.

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

An approach that seeks to fundamentally transform relations, structures, and systems that sustain and perpetuate gender inequality. This approach requires:

1. Critically examining gender roles, norms, power dynamics, and inequalities

2. Recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support gender equity and equality and an enabling environment

3. Transforming underlying power dynamics, social structures, policies, and broadly held social norms that impact women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals and perpetuate gender inequalities

This approach recognizes that gender equality cannot be achieved or sustained without an approach that includes all three of these components.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

An umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. GBV is typically characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social, and other forms of control, coercion, and/or violence and can occur across the life course.

IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY

This statement is used to underscore that, where women and girls, men and boys, and gender diverse individuals are mentioned, this includes the full range of gender identity and/or gender expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and other *intersectional* characteristics such as age, caste, disability, race or ethnic origin, religion, or belief. Use of this term affirms the commitment to leave no one behind and achieve gender equality for everyone.

INTERSEX

An umbrella term for people whose sex characteristics at birth do not all correspond to a single sex. Many variations of sex characteristics are possible, and there are about 40 variations that cannot be categorized as male or female. Being intersex is not the same as being nonbinary or transgender, which are terms typically related to gender identity.

INTERSECTIONALITY

All individuals have multiple social identities shaping their lived experiences, including but not limited to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, class, race, age, disability, nationality, etc. These identities determine one's place in their society, privileges and protections from human rights violations, and the impact of complex forms of discrimination. Intersectionality acknowledges that singular oppressions exist, while affirming that intersecting identities interact with overlapping systems of oppression and/or discrimination. Intersectionality serves as an analytical lens that considers and addresses how a person's overlapping identities contribute to unique experiences of oppression, privilege, and access (including access to development programming).

SEX

The designation of a person as male, female, or intersex based on a cluster of anatomical and physiological traits known as sex characteristics. Sex characteristics include external genitalia, secondary sex characteristics (e.g., facial hair, distribution of fat tissue, voice pitch), gonads and internal organs, hormones, and chromosomes. At birth, infants are typically assigned a sex based on visual inspection of external genitalia.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to other people by sex or gender identity. Common sexual orientations include straight or heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, and questioning. Sexual orientation is separate from gender identity or gender expression.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

When women and girls in all their diversity act freely, claim and exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. All individuals have power within themselves; however, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment.

ANNEX 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF USAID'S WORK ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

USAID has a 50-year history of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. The passage of the 1973 Percy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act was an early milestone, recognizing the key role that women play in ensuring the success of development efforts. A year later, USAID established the Women in Development (WID) Office. Early guidance came from a 1982 Women in Development Policy Paper, followed by a 1996 Gender Plan of Action that included requirements for gender integration in policy, personnel, procurement, performance monitoring, and evaluation. USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS), which describes mandatory Agency procedures, mentioned gender by the early 2000s and established a more comprehensive approach to gender integration in its 2009 revision (ADS 201). Other changes to Agency systems and activities included: gender analysis was included as one of two analysis requirements; introduction of gender key issues as new budget attributions along with a set of standard gender indicators; expansion of the gender architecture and leadership in the Agency; and renaming of the WID Office to the Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GenDev).

In 2012, USAID leadership recognized that the Agency needed a coherent, relevant, and up to date policy on gender equality and female empowerment; the first version of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy was launched that year and a second iteration of the policy was released in 2020.[241] Building on the existing evidence base and best practices of USAID and other donors, it provided an overarching framework for gender integration throughout all aspects of the Agency's work, including a series of new mandatory requirements that remain in force today. USAID issued the first-ever standalone ADS chapter dedicated to gender equality in 2013 (ADS 205) detailing the Agency's understanding of gender analysis and step-by-step instructions on its application in country strategies, project and activity designs, solicitations, and monitoring and evaluation.

From 2012 onwards, USAID and the U.S. Government have issued a series of policy and strategy documents that address specific aspects of women's empowerment and gender equality (see Box 2). The passing of the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act (WEEE Act) in 2018 was a watershed moment for gender equality work at USAID because it transformed good practice into law by requiring that gender analysis inform USAID strategies, projects, and activities and that gender equality be integrated across the USAID Program Cycle. Since then, Congress and USAID have moved to further enable impactful gender equality work including through the expansion of Agency gender training opportunities, the first-ever USAID global conference on gender equality in 2019, the establishment of dedicated women's economic security funding, and the forthcoming launch in 2022 of a new website—GenderLinks—bringing together USAID's diverse assets and guidance on gender equality across sectors.

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