

June 28, 2023

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Power,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to congratulate you on the release of the 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy and to express our hopes for the robust implementation, public transparency, and accountability within the organization on the policy in order to meet the U.S.' commitment to address gender inequality globally.

We are encouraged to see that this policy has been updated and addresses the many concerns previously expressed by civil society about the 2020 policy, including stronger language around gender equality and equity, sexual health and reproductive rights, and the emphasis on inclusive human rights and evidence-based approaches. The update to this policy includes a much-needed emphasis on the inclusion of diverse populations, including women and girls with disabilities, adolescent girls, older women, and LGBTQI+ individuals.

However, our organizations remain concerned that this policy does not do enough to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment will be prioritized and mainstreamed by the agency, and we were disappointed to see that the public launch of this policy was postponed. Earlier drafts shared publicly included strong definitions and accountability mechanisms that would have allowed the Agency and others to track progress against its goals and ensured that the policy could create sustainable and enduring change within the institution. We were disappointed to find that the final policy removed many of these welcome structural changes, including the internal dashboard to track and monitor sex- and age-disaggregated data and the integration of gender analyses. Language was also removed that would have required increases in gender-focused staff, including staff dedicated to gender-based violence prevention and response and to training and capacity building.

As civil society organizations committed to advancing human rights and gender equality globally, we ask that you work to elevate and prioritize this policy throughout the Agency's programs and commitments by mainstreaming and building capacity for the policy across the agency. The centrality of the gender strategy and gender staffing for achieving USAID's strategic goals merits a prominent event led by yourself as Administrator to highlight its importance. We urge you to commit to public and transparent annual reporting on progress and consultation processes with U.S.-based and local partners, especially women- and girl-led organizations, including organizations representing marginalized groups. This will help ensure that the Agencies' actions are grounded in the work and experiences of those working directly with communities.

This reporting should include the number of gender advisors, their level of effort on gender, spending on gender, and results across sectoral issues to address gender. There should be increased requests for new resources to support the implementation of the policy through the PBR, and that all programs and activities reflect quality inclusion of gender and intersectionality to address the root causes of poverty and inequity.

Gender is a cross-cutting issue that impacts the Agencies' abilities to achieve on myriad outcomes. The compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing humanitarian concerns, the global food crisis, and rising cost of living has exacerbated an already enormous gap in global gender equality. Globally, women still only have three-quarters of the economic rights as men. Women still own and control fewer assets, including property and land; impacting their ability to produce food for their families and supporting their community during food shortages. There are increasing attacks and limits on the rights of LGBTQI+ populations globally. Opponents of sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world are emboldened by the backsliding in the U.S. Women, girls, and people of all genders also face unique barriers such as gender-based violence, disproportionate unpaid care burden, and unmet health needs that stand in the way of their progress. If left unmitigated, research shows that these inequalities hurt peace processes, undermine food security, and stunt economic growth. At a time when gender equality is further at risk due to oppressive governments curtailing rights and ongoing conflicts, crises, and climate-related uncertainty further threatening the advancement of women's and girls' rights especially, USAID must stand as a bold partner to protect against the diminishment of human rights and global progress.

We hope that USAID, under your leadership, will work with civil society as you implement this policy to ensure that the structural changes needed to meaningfully and transparently address gender equality are re-prioritized.

Signed,

- ACIDI/VOCA
- Alliance for Peacebuilding
- Amnesty International USA
- Basic Education Coalition
- CARE USA
- ChildFund International
- Council for Global Equality
- Education Development Center (EDC)
- Equality California
- Equality Now
- FEMNET- African Women's Development and Communication Network
- FHI 360
- First Focus on Children
- Futures Without Violence
- Gender Equality Initiative in International Affairs
- Global Communities
- Global Fund for Women
- Global Justice Center
- Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation
- GreeneWorks
- Guttmacher Institute
- Heartland Alliance International
- HelpAge USA
- HIAS
- Inclusive Development Partners (IDP)
- International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)

- International Center for Research on Women
- International Rescue Committee
- Interruptr
- Ipas
- Islamic Relief USA
- IYF
- JSI/World Education
- Just Like My Child Foundation
- Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
- Last Mile4D
- Men Stopping Violence, Inc.
- Mercy Corps
- Movement for Community-led Development
- MPact Global
- Mujeres Aliadas
- Nonviolent Peaceforce
- Oxfam America
- Pathfinder International
- Plan International USA
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America
- Sarvodaya USA
- Save the Children
- Savie Asbl NGO LGBT PGEL Congo
- Search for Common Ground
- The Hunger Project
- Together for Girls
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
- Unbounded Associates
- Vital Voices Global Partnership
- Winrock International
- Women Deliver
- Worldreader
- Zonta International