

September 15, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the below 44 organizations, which focus on women's and girls' rights and empowerment, we welcome this opportunity to provide input to the State Department and USAID redesign process.

We believe that any redesign should be done with the primary aim of improving diplomatic engagement and international development assistance, two elements of the U.S. Government's work that must be maintained as distinct but complementary efforts. To this end, the redesign must not be used as a pretext to cut back our engagement or aid; neither should increased effectiveness and efficiency be used as an excuse for slashing resource levels. Rather, the guiding question for redesign efforts should be "How do we do more good work, more efficiently, and more sustainably?" As such, the redesign should focus on improving the quality of interventions to ensure that U.S. dollars are maximized, with the ultimate, long-term goal of supporting countries to become self-sufficient.

To achieve this, the U.S. must work with and support civil society and marginalized groups, which necessarily includes women and girls, to help create stable, inclusive, and free societies where the human rights of all are respected, protected and fulfilled. Investing in women and girls is vital to prosperous, stable, and peaceful communities and countries. For example, research has shown that the global GDP would increase 26% (or \$28 trillion) by 2025 if women were able to participate in the economy equally,<sup>1</sup> and that when women are included in peace processes there is a 20% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 2 years, and a 35% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years.<sup>2</sup> Those leading redesign must therefore recognize and prioritize women and girls in structural and programmatic efforts.

**Recommendations:**

The redesign must be predicated on the fact that more efficient provision of foreign assistance and use of the U.S. Government's diplomatic efforts is essential to help meet global development goals and is also in the best interest of the U.S. It must focus on using best practices and evidence to support efficiency and effectiveness, centering the needs and rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities, and promoting transparent processes. The U.S. has been a global leader in foreign assistance for decades, and that leadership has yielded significant progress toward alleviating poverty, disease and injustice, and improving the health and lives of individuals and communities.

In order to improve both diplomatic engagement and international development assistance, we hope you will consider the following recommendations:

**Efficiency and effectiveness:** Increased efficiencies must not come at the expense of commitment to meeting long-term development goals. The redesign process cannot be undertaken with the assumption

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<sup>1</sup> McKinsey & Company. "The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth: Executive Summary." September 2015. Page ii.

<sup>2</sup> Laurel Stone (2015). Study of 156 peace agreements, controlling for other variables, *Quantitative Analysis of Women's participation in Peace Processes* in Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes, Annex II

that foreign aid should be cut, that the U.S. Government will have to simply “do less,” or that there are geographies or programs that can be easily cut without negative impacts to the local communities or U.S. national interests. For example, “graduation” from USAID programming is not a straightforward process which can be undertaken through the creation of one-size-fits-all system. In fact, graduation that is not thoughtful and strategic may cause more long-term problems than it purportedly solves.

Where aid can be delivered more efficiently and effectively, this should be done through the use of:

- Existing best and promising practices
- High quality data (from governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society), including the consistent and transparent use of sex and age disaggregated data, to target programs to those it will most benefit
- Innovative approaches to international development
- New technologies for program design, implementation and evaluation
- Removal of barriers which undermine the U.S.’s ability to work with the most effective partners

Furthermore, investing in research is critical to improving foreign aid effectiveness and efficiency in the long-term. This includes increased investment in:

- Research to understand and develop new practices and proof-of-concept programming
- Data collection methods and efforts to further improve targeting of assistance and an understanding of impact
- Technology and innovation that can improve current and future programs

In addition, shifting focus away from empowering women and girls under the guise of finding “efficiencies” would undermine rather than streamline the U.S. Government’s ability to be effective. The U.S. Government’s work with women and girls has proven to have catalytic and multiplier impacts that go beyond the initial investment of resources. Research by the International Monetary Fund has found that gender inequality is, quite simply, bad for economic growth<sup>3</sup> and that the stability and economic growth of other nations helps the U.S. In fact, 11 of America’s top 15 trading partners were once recipients of U.S. foreign aid.<sup>4</sup>

**Serving vulnerable and marginalized communities:** Efforts to redesign U.S. foreign assistance must not ignore marginalized groups, including but not limited to women and girls, sexual and gender minorities, people living with HIV, ethnic and religious minorities, people living in poverty, those living in hard to reach regions, people living with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. Dedicated standalone policies and programs designed to address the unique needs of these populations are critical and necessary but are not sufficient in and of themselves. Investing in women and girls by mainstreaming gender equality

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<sup>3</sup> Hakura, Dalia, Mumtaz Hussain, Monique Newiak, Vimal Thakoor, and Fan Yang. “Inequality, Gender Gaps and Economic Growth: Comparative Evidence for Sub-Saharan Africa.” IMF Working Paper. June 2016.  
<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16111.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. “Here’s Why Foreign Assistance is Important.” January 4, 2017.  
<http://www.usglc.org/2016/01/04/heres-why-foreign-assistance-is-important/>

efforts across USAID and State Department policies and programs must be continued and should not be seen as duplicative but rather as critical to the success of the U.S. Government's efforts.

This work must be complemented by the use of specific Special Envoys or offices committed to breaking down silos and working across USAID and State Department offices and bureaus, and with other U.S. Agencies. Not all development and diplomatic professionals understand the importance of working with vulnerable or marginalized populations and eliminating or demoting senior positions focused on these populations would harm U.S. efforts to address the needs and rights of these populations, as well as U.S. national interests.

People living in countries that do not have immediate strategic influence and/or importance to U.S. national interests must not be ignored. The development of societies that truly achieve gender equality requires long-term investment given that gender discrimination is at the heart of poverty and that dismantling discrimination requires sustained, holistic investment. Stable societies, in terms of security, health, and economics, require the full and free participation of all people, including women, and stable societies are necessary for US national security. This has long been a central value of the United States; backing away from this tenet would upend decades of U.S. commitment to democratic, inclusive principles.

**Transparency and accountability:** Foreign assistance must be delivered with the highest levels of transparency and accountability. Civil society provides a critical accountability measure to government efforts. It is vital that a broad range of civil society organizations and experts in foreign assistance are meaningfully consulted during redesign efforts and on an ongoing basis as part of development programming and diplomatic efforts. The redesign should encourage State Department and USAID staff posted domestically and overseas to seek out feedback and input from diverse civil society stakeholders. Furthermore, the redesign should outline space for civil society engagement and cooperation in the future efforts of the State Department and USAID. We also encourage the Administration to work with Congress throughout the process given the role of oversight and budget appropriation of Congress.

Please reach out with any questions; we are happy to consult further.

Sincerely,

1. Advancing Girls' Education in Africa
2. Advocates for Youth
3. Amnesty International USA
4. CARE USA
5. Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
6. Catholics for Choice
7. Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
8. ChildFund International
9. Educate Girls
10. Free the Slaves
11. Futures Without Violence

12. Gender Equality Initiative in International Affairs | The Elliott School at the George Washington University
13. Global Fund for Women
14. Global Rights for Women
15. GreeneWorks
16. Heartland Alliance International
17. IMA World Health
18. Institute for International Law and Human Rights
19. International Action Network for Gender Equity and Law
20. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
21. International Medical Corps
22. International Women's Health Coalition
23. International Youth Foundation
24. John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
25. Milaan Girl Icons
26. National Association of Social Workers
27. National Network to End Domestic Violence
28. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
29. PAI
30. Population Council
31. Population Institute
32. Population Media Center
33. Promundo-US
34. Save the Children
35. Shadhika Project, Inc.
36. The Hunger Project
37. Unitarian Universalist Association United Nations Office
38. Vital Voices Global Partnership
39. What Works Association
40. Women Graduates-USA
41. Women Thrive Alliance
42. Women's Refugee Commission
43. World Education, Inc.
44. Zonta International