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- **Infectious Diseases.** There are important differences between men’s and women’s vulnerability to infectious diseases. Biological factors such as pregnancy present a greater risk for morbidity and mortality for malaria and Zika virus infections. Twenty-five million pregnant women are currently at risk for malaria, and malaria accounts for over 10,000 maternal and 200,000 neonatal deaths per year. Cultural practices, norms and roles, including burial preparation and associated <sup>41</sup> practices, may increase women’s risk for Ebola infection. Cultural and societal roles <sup>42</sup> surrounding workplace exposure and caregiving roles have a differential impact on the transmission of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) to humans. The impact of stigma-related <sup>43</sup> barriers associated with tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis also differs between men and women, insofar as such barriers relate to health seeking and treatment retention behavior and outcomes. Men are more likely to experience stigma in the workplace and community after a TB diagnosis, while women experience more social isolation and stigma from family. <sup>44</sup>

- **Maternal and Child Health, and Family Planning.** Gender inequality contributes to increased levels of female morbidity and mortality across much of the lifespan: before birth (including prenatal sex selection); at the time of birth, during infancy, early childhood, and adolescence; throughout the reproductive years and beyond. In some countries, the risk of dying before age five for girls is significantly higher than what might be expected based on epidemiology. Adolescent pregnancy is associated with significant risks for both mother and child. Women who experience intimate partner violence in pregnancy are 16 percent more likely to suffer a miscarriage, and 41 percent more likely to have a pre-term birth ; and they are more likely to experience depression,<sup>45</sup> anxiety disorders, and suicide attempts compared to women who have not experienced this type of violence.

**WEI Commented [4]:** Additionally, different subgroups of women and girls experience higher rates of maternal mortality and reduced access to maternal health care, e.g., disabled women and girls often are denied such medical services or medical personnel have negative stereotypes of disabled women's ability to parent, which negatively impacts the maternal health care provided to them.

Communication between spouses regarding fertility, finances, and household issues has been positively associated with the use of family planning. Conversely, negative gender norms, violence, and abuse, can limit couples’ communication related to, and their voluntary use of, family planning. Fertility awareness can help reduce adverse health outcomes, in part due to improving healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies so that women and their babies have opportunities to thrive. Addressing the root causes for early marriage and early sexual debut should be considered to achieve equality and empowerment for women and girls, and to help promote safe, nurturing, and stable marriages, families, and communities.

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

Half a century of experience has shown that health programs which address sociodemographic and other factors as well as barriers to access and utilization of care, and which engage men, can help improve health development outcomes. For example, when women are educated, household income rises, maternal and infant mortality declines, child health and nutrition improve, economies expand, and poverty rates decline. Increasing women's participation and decision-making, while ensuring that men are not left out, are critical to improving maternal, newborn and child health, nutrition, infectious disease and HIV-related outcomes and will enhance the effectiveness of policies and programming.

### Humanitarian Assistance

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

- **Crises and Conflict.** More than 130 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance for their survival, security, and protection. Global forced displacement has nearly<sup>46</sup> doubled in the last two decades, topping 70 million as of June 2019, and roughly half of those displaced are women and girls. Societal and cultural norms, and other factors — such as age<sup>47</sup> and disability status — have a significant impact on what women and men experience during a crisis, because they shape the roles they play in their communities, their access to resources, and the coping strategies they have available. When crises occur, pre-existing inequalities are often exacerbated and can result in increased levels of gender-based violence, especially against women and girls; exclusion from life-saving care; and underrepresentation in decision-making processes related to relief and recovery. Negative gender norms adversely affect men and boys as well; for example, in crises, men and boys are frequently vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and to trafficking for the purposes of labor exploitation.
- **Women and Emergencies.** Natural disasters, on average, kill more women than men, or kill women at an earlier age than men. In some countries, women and girls are disproportionately<sup>48</sup> affected by flooding, as many cannot swim or are unable to leave their homes due to cultural barriers. Meanwhile, a majority of preventable maternal mortality deaths occur in situations of conflict, displacement, or natural disasters. And in emergency settings, women and girls are more likely to suffer from food insecurity. USAID recognizes the critical role that women play in responding to humanitarian crises. Despite their heightened vulnerability in crisis, women often serve as first responders and play a central role in the survival and resilience of their communities. It is therefore critical that, in addition to addressing their needs, humanitarian actors should meaningfully engage women and girls. Community-engagement mechanisms must meet the needs and concerns of women and girls in keeping with girls current and developing capacities and their parents/family engagement. USAID invests in tools that capture women's and girls' voices and improve their access to humanitarian services. This support amplifies women's strategies to protect themselves from violence and

fosters their communication with response leadership, enabling the aid system to support what they identify as necessary and effective. Only through this meaningful dialogue will responders be able to proactively mitigate and respond to the unique protection risks that women and girls face during emergencies.

### Land and Property Rights

Globally, women are often the primary laborers and users of land, yet their rights to land and resources are rarely formally recognized. Women's land rights translate into higher economic gains, increased empowerment to make household decisions, more efficient land use, increased agricultural investment and production, and improved food security. The W-GDP Pillar 3 (Women Enabled in the Economy) <sup>49</sup> recognizes the lack of women's ability to own and manage property as a key barrier to women's economic empowerment. The following two themes explore the importance of land and property rights:

- **Women in Agriculture.** Despite the positive effects, women are significantly less likely than men to own or control land. In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise nearly 50 percent of agricultural labor but account for 15 percent of landholders; in Asia, women comprise 42 percent of agricultural labor and 11 percent of land holders; and across the Middle East and North Africa, women comprise 40 percent of agricultural labor, but five percent of landowners. <sup>50</sup>
- **Women and Land Rights.** Women's secure rights to land is essential for food production and sustainable, more stable livelihoods. However, globally, land rights are often dependent on natal and marital affiliations. 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. Secure land and housing rights can also help address gender-based violence, including as it relates to contracting HIV/AIDS. Land rights can support women's economic independence and bargaining power, reducing vulnerabilities to harmful behaviors, such as transactional sex. <sup>51</sup>

USAID is playing an active role in empowering women by helping them to secure their land rights, a key necessity to fully integrate women into a nation's economy. The Agency also supports coordinated policies and programs that clarify and strengthen women's land rights.

### [CALL OUT BOX: USAID's Mobile Applications to Secure Tenure (MAST) Approach

USAID's MAST trains women and men to understand their rights and formal titling, and engages women and men as community surveyors and land committee leaders. Using locally adapted technology tools, users are able to efficiently and affordably map and document land and resource rights. This approach has been effective in empowering women by strengthening their ability to secure land tenure, leading to greater economic stability and decision-making power among women. Prior to MAST, data from Tanzania indicated that only 27 percent of landowners were women. Using MAST has achieved 45 percent in target villages.

## Management of Natural Resources

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

- Fisheries. The fisheries sector plays a key role in food security, as an estimated one billion people depend on seafood as their primary source of protein. The sector employs 40 million people,<sup>52</sup> and women are 90 percent of the fisheries-processing workforce and 15 percent of those employed in fisheries harvesting. When women are engaged as stewards of key fish resources,<sup>53</sup> projects have seen improved enforcement of regulations, and women’s access to processing technology has resulted in reduced loss and increased value of products, and stronger women’s livelihoods without over-fishing.<sup>54</sup>
- Forestry. In forestry and natural-resource supply-chains, women smallholders typically focus more on the quality of their crops than their male counterparts. Exclusionary practices in natural-resource value-chains can lower productivity and have a negative impact on the health and well-being of all community members.<sup>55</sup>

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

## Technology

Digital technology is transforming how people worldwide gain access to information, goods, services, and opportunity and has the power to accelerate the Journey to Self-Reliance in developing countries rapidly. However, those transformative opportunities are not equally available to men and women. The International Telecommunication Union’s 2019 report concludes that the digital divide has continued to widen from 2013 to 2019 in developing, and, particularly, in least-developed, countries. Men are adopting digital technologies at a faster rate than women, and the problem is only worsening. When women and girls are excluded from the benefits of digital technology access and use, they are further marginalized, and equitable development is impossible to achieve. As the world becomes increasingly more digital, USAID’s interventions should align with the [USAID Digital Strategy](#) in closing the persistent gender digital divide.

WEI Commented [15]: Furthermore, innovations in technology are even less available to certain subgroups of women and girls, e.g., technology is often inaccessible to disabled women and girls as it is not designed to meet their specific needs.

## [CALL OUT BOX]: THE NEXUS OF WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Launched in 2018 by Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump and USAID Administrator Mark Green, the [W-GDP WomenConnect Challenge](#) (WCC) is a global call for solutions to improve women’s participation in everyday life by meaningfully changing the ways women and girls gain access to and use technology.

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

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

### Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

Inadequate water supply and sanitation continue to be a problem for a significant number of people, and disproportionately burden women and girls. At least 844 million people still lack access to a basic drinking water source, and 2.3 billion people still lack basic access to sanitation. In many countries,<sup>56</sup> women and girls spend up to an hour each day fetching water. Improved delivery of clean water and sanitation is a key factor in reducing the mortality of girls and women in infancy, early childhood, and reproductive years. The following two themes take a closer look at the significant role WASH plays in achieving women's empowerment:

- **Women's Leadership.** Including women in decision-making roles has the potential to help address governments' underinvestment in WASH. Emerging evidence shows that women leaders in local government are more likely to invest in drinking water and sanitation than their male counterparts, and the presence of women leaders increases the willingness of women and men to contribute money towards public goods. Involving women in all stages of the community<sup>57</sup> planning process enhances the sustainability of interventions in both water supply and sanitation.

### [CALL OUT BOX]: MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

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

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

- **Economic Opportunities.** Expanding access to water supports the improvement of economic outcomes for women as they rely on water for productive activities such as



agricultural cultivation, livestock raising, and small-scale enterprises. Access to, and the control of, water resources, are equally important in relation to non-WASH activities. For example, while women play an important role in agricultural productivity, the design and implementation of small-scale irrigation systems does not reflect this reality. Women are equally important in the <sup>58</sup> management of natural resources, such as watersheds. As the primary collectors of water and firewood, environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and girls, who are nonetheless often not involved in the community response.

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

## 5 AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

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

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

### Basic Requirements:

- **Mission Order on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:** Missions, Regional Missions, and Country Offices must adopt or revise, and periodically update, a Mission Order (MO) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. This MO should describe how a Mission will implement this Policy, including by: ensuring gender integration/mainstreaming is applied throughout the USAID program cycle; outlining the intended contributions to the Policy objectives; affirming the budget attributions in Operating Plans (OPs) reflect the suite of Gender Key Issues; reporting the appropriate indicators for gender equality and women's empowerment in Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs); assigning specific and detailed roles and responsibilities related to gender equality and women's empowerment to Mission staff; and ensuring all staff who are required to do so receive training on gender equality and women's empowerment. A <sup>59</sup> template for this required Mission Order is available on ProgramNet.
- **Gender Advisors - Missions, Regional Missions, and Country Offices:** Will appoint or hire a Mission Gender Advisor, who has (or will have the opportunity) to develop fully the technical skills, competencies and experience necessary to provide appropriate, in-depth guidance 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 project/activity design. In all cases, Gender Advisors will have

responsibilities explicitly included in their job descriptions, including an allocation of time sufficient to carry out the work. Missions will determine the appropriate personnel category (e.g., Foreign Service Officer, Foreign Service National, Personal Service Contractor) for the Gender Advisor position and to whom the incumbent will report. Small Missions and those in the process of closing are exempt from the requirement to have a Gender Advisor, but nonetheless must appoint a staff member to serve as a Point of Contact (PoC) on issues related to this Policy.

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

**Requirements Related to USAID's Program Cycle:** Chapter 205 of USAID's Automated Directives System, 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 our OUs and gender integration across the Program Cycle. The Agency will revise this Chapter periodically to ensure harmonization with related ADS Chapters (such as ADS Chapter 201) as well as other changes in USAID operations or applicable U.S. Government laws. Among the key requirements relating to gender integration in the Program Cycle are the following:

- As part of the design of strategies, projects, and standalone activities, USAID's Bureaus, Missions, and Independent Offices must conduct a gender analysis. Technical teams and program offices must reflect the findings of these analyses in Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs), Project Appraisal Documents (PADs, or their successors), Action Memoranda, and solicitations.<sup>60</sup>
- Design teams must reflect the findings of the gender analysis in the different components of a solicitation and must include a statement that clearly indicates how it incorporates the results of the gender analysis or gives a rationale for why gender inequality is not an issue for the particular activity the requested procurement action would implement. If neither of these is in the procurement request, the cognizant Contracting Officer (CO)/Agreement Officer (AO) must notify the project team that she or he is unable to take further action until she or he receives the required documentation.

#### **Reporting:**

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

- Internal reporting of results: In Annual Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs), OUs must report on results realized during the reporting Fiscal Year, including by using the Standard Indicators maintained by the Office of Foreign Assistance (F) at the U.S. Department of State, which are required as applicable. The Master Indicator List (MIL) includes cross-cutting indicators that cover gender equality, women's empowerment, GBV, and WPS. All USAID OUs should work with implementing partners to collect data and report on one or more of the gender standard indicators if the OU's programming produces data that contributes to the measurement of these indicators. In addition, USAID's implementers must disaggregate by sex any people-level standard and custom performance indicators reported on in the PPR.
- External reporting of results: USAID will report on the results of the Agency's efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through a range of required and ad hoc reporting processes, including, but not limited to, Congressional, interagency, and donor reporting requirements and requests. Data and information collected through the OPs and PPR will also inform USAID's external engagement, communications, and learning efforts.

#### Training:

- Introductory training on gender equality and women's empowerment is required for (a) all Agency staff who design, evaluate, or manage strategies and projects; (b) Agency staff (including Mission and OU Directors and Deputy Directors) who directly or indirectly supervise staff who design, evaluate, or manage strategies and projects; (c) all COs and AOs; and, (d) Program Officers. The Agency's goal is for all new staff to receive basic training within two years of their start date and for all other staff captured in categories (a)-(d) who have not had gender training, to receive it within two years.
- Similar to training for other competencies, USAID should continue to develop and offer advanced training that meets the needs of Gender Advisors and PoC's. Bureaus, Missions, or IOs also might wish to establish advanced gender training for other relevant positions or technical backstops. OUs should also incorporate specific content on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment into broader technical or sectoral training they manage.

#### Assessment of Policy Implementation:

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

## 6 Conclusion

Equality between men and women and women's empowerment are vital to achieving USAID's development goals and successfully providing humanitarian assistance. This Policy underscores USAID's dedication to improving the status of women and girls worldwide, and to upholding our commitment to protect the dignity of all people. Wherever USAID works, we are committed to empowering women and girls to realize

their full potential and become capable leaders for future generations. Societies that prioritize, elevate, and empower women and girls create strong communities and long-lasting, positive change. And we know investing in women and girls is essential to strengthening self-reliance in our partner countries. This Policy provides the foundation and guidance for USAID's investments in gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors.

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[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

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