

USAID GENDER EQUALITY AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT POLICY & SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

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In March 2012, USAID launched the [Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy](#). The policy's stated aim is to improve the lives of citizens around the world by advancing equality and empowering women and girls to participate fully in, and benefit from, the development of their societies. Accordingly, USAID commits to mainstream and integrate gender equality throughout the program cycle in strategic planning, project design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The policy focuses on three overarching outcomes (p. 10):

1. "Reduce gender disparities in access to, control over and benefit from resources, wealth, opportunities and services – economic, social, political, and cultural;"
2. "Reduce gender-based violence and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities;"
3. "Increase capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies."

The policy directs USAID to build partnerships across a range of stakeholders, including local women's groups, to better reflect country priorities and capitalize on local experiences. The policy also complements the implementation of the [U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security](#) by addressing the unique challenges women face in crisis and conflict-affected environments, facilitating women's participation in peace processes, and enabling women's safe and equitable access to assistance and services.

WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS?

Declaring that sustainable development cannot succeed without "transforming the distribution of opportunities, resources, and choice" so that individuals have "equal power to shape their own lives," (p. 3) the policy emphasizes that a woman's ability to make decisions over her reproductive health significantly impacts other areas of her life and the life of future generations and has broad implications on economic development, education, health, governance, and conflict resolution.

- Across developing countries, 215 million women across have an "unmet need for modern contraceptives" (p. 7).
- Maternal mortality rates remain high due to a "failure to provide adequate family planning and maternity care" (p. 7).
- Gender-related power imbalances continue to cause higher rates of "female mortality across the life cycle: at birth, during infancy, early childhood, and throughout the reproductive years" (p. 7).

In response to the health challenges faced by women and girls, the policy focuses on increased access to modern contraceptives, improved outreach to adolescents, and expansion of family planning and maternity care (p. 7). The policy also recognizes the necessity of addressing gender equality throughout an individual's life cycle through more inclusive and collaborative programming.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH AND GENDER EQUITY (CHANGE)

[The Center for Health and Gender Equity \(CHANGE\)](#) is a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization that promotes the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of women and girls worldwide through education and advocacy efforts that affect the development and implementation of U.S. policies.