

Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition

First 100 Days for Global Gender Equality

Introduction

This note is to urge the next U.S. Administration to take steps immediately following the inauguration to elevate development and humanitarian response within U.S. global leadership and particularly to establish critically important groundwork for rapid progress on women's and girls' empowerment and global gender equality.

Gender equality is first and foremost a matter of human rights. It is also a necessary precondition for achieving key U.S. international objectives, as gender inequality is an evidenced root cause and driver of global poverty, hunger, and conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated gender inequality, increasing the urgency of this agenda as the world begins to turn its attention to recovery. **The actions that the next Administration takes in the first 100 days will establish the pace and direction of rejuvenating global peace and prosperity, and progress towards global gender equality, for years to come.**

Over the past year, we have seen a protracted pandemic, and renewed calls for stronger civil rights and the abolishment of systemic inequalities, including structural racism. This has occurred as this country faces a recession that disproportionately affects the most marginalized, and alongside renewed attacks against women's and girls' rights and gender equality globally. The incoming Administration has an opportunity to learn from these epochal moments and set a strong, feminist course to ensure that women's and girls' rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled at home and abroad, that global gender equality is a priority, and that the most marginalized are centered in policymaking going forward to create a better future for everyone.

Overall, the U.S. government must recognize that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and contributing to the end of gender inequality and discrimination requires systemic and structural change, and improved opportunities for individual women and girls. Feminist action requires "seeking to challenge systems of oppression, marginalization and exclusion, and moving beyond binary approaches to the 'consultation' or 'inclusion' of women and girls to ensure their meaningful engagement and decision-making power."¹ To that end, we propose that the next Administration pursue the following executive actions within the first 100 days.

Overall Recommendations and "Action-forcing" Events

There are two major global moments during the first 100 days of the new Administration:

- The 65th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (March 15-26, 2021)

¹ See "Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States", page 4: https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFP-USA_v11-spreads.pdf

- The “Generation Equality Forum” – the postponed events marking the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

In order to re-establish U.S. global leadership on gender equality, the U.S. government should make significant policy announcements in both of these fora and send a delegation represented by leadership at the highest levels appropriate, including the President and Vice-President elect. The new Administration should commit to including in its delegation civil society representatives who are experts in their field and champion rights- and evidence-based approaches to comprehensively addressing women’s and girls’ priorities and experiences. Women’s civil society organizations and gender equality experts should also be meaningfully consulted in advance of these two moments to feed into the plans and priorities for the U.S. delegation and its engagement.

Immediate priority actions in the first 100 days:

- Include a strong commitment to gender equality domestically and internationally in the President’s inaugural address and the President’s Budget Request;
- Rejoin the evidence-based global consensus on gender equality, as expressed in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, in its leadership and negotiations in global fora such as the UN and WHO;
- Appoint a Senior Gender Coordinator at the National Security Council with the mandate to strengthen gender equality structures, capacity, and coordination across U.S. Foreign Policy and Assistance;
- Establish by Executive Order a National Gender Equality Council, comprised of Secretaries of all Executive Branch agencies, and tasked with developing a new Interagency Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy. The new Policy must be integrated into the President’s Budget Request to ensure adequate resourcing and political attention. The Policy must establish the human rights imperative and evidence-based rationale, as well as clear standards for each agency on how it will integrate the promotion of gender equality across all its efforts. This includes articulating:
 - Budgetary requirements, technical resources, and capacities needed to ensure internal gender structures are best suited to maximize efficiency and impact;
 - Interagency standards and guidelines on the development, collection, analysis, and use of gender data;
 - Commitment to an inclusive, holistic, and evidenced-based approach to the promotion of gender equality;
 - As a first step, each relevant agency should:
 - Assess its gender architecture, resources, and staffing;
 - Review its gender data collection, maintenance, and analysis system; and
 - Consult with civil society organizations, including locally based women’s rights organizations, community-based organizations, and youth- and girl-led groups and networks, in aid recipient countries.
- Reinstate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) trainings for all agencies and federal partners, and halt and reverse the implementation of Executive Order 13950 on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping. The new Executive Order has already created a chilling effect on the implementation of evidence-based efforts to foster diversity and inclusion in the workplace, including efforts to eradicate race and sex stereotyping and other manifestations of entrenched discrimination and bias.
- Nominate early on at the State Department a qualified Ambassador-at-Large to head up the office of Global Women’s Issues; and

- Nominate feminist heads, namely individuals that have shown demonstrated strong commitments to gender equality throughout their careers, to all U.S. agencies, especially the State Department, USAID, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Peace Corps, and U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

65th Commission on the Status of Women (March 15-26):

- Commit to a delegation with high-level leadership, led by the Vice President, and with civil society representatives who are experts in their field and champion rights-based, and evidence-based approaches to comprehensively addressing women's and girls' priorities and experiences;
- Ensure meaningful consultation with women's civil society organizations and gender equality experts to feed into the plans and priorities for the U.S. CSW delegation;
- Ensure participants from around the world are granted visas to engage in CSW to ensure that negotiators can hear from women, girls, and people with diverse backgrounds;
- Announce the development of a new whole of government gender policy in time for the Generation Equality Forum in France in June 2020;
- Announce U.S. intention to submit its candidacy for election to the UN Human Rights Council at the next opportunity, with a specific emphasis on women's and girls' human rights at the core of U.S. engagement;
- Announce U.S. commitment to a global gender data initiative that would accelerate progress in the comprehensive tracking, collection, and use of gender-sensitive and disaggregated data across U.S. foreign policy agencies. This would include a commitment to meeting international transparency standards in reporting development cooperation spending – including gender data – via International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and
- Announce an intent to report systematically on U.S. contributions and progress on Sustainable Development Goal Five (Gender equality and women's empowerment) through a Voluntary National Review (VNR).

Priority actions for USAID:

The next Administrator of USAID should:

- Work with Congress to create and appoint an Assistant Administrator for Gender Equality;
- Halt finalization and implementation of the 2020 USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (reverting to the 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, pending development of the new interagency policy) and launch a consultative, transparent process to update the policy;
- Halt implementation of Executive Order 13950 on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping;
- Put local women's organizations and girl-led groups and networks at the center of efforts to drive country-led development and solutions by increasing investment in local women-led civil society organizations and local organizations willing and equipped to meet the comprehensive or unmet needs of women and girls in their communities and significantly shifting procurement from "contracts" to grants and cooperative agreements;
- Establish a gender advisory council in every Mission made up of grassroots women's civil society organizations and networks, including youth-led and girl-led groups and networks;
- Ensure full-time Gender Focal Points in each Mission;
- Consistently apply an intersectional gender analysis across the program cycle and update the ADS 205 where needed;

- Embed learning on gender equality in USAID’s Learning Agenda;
- Include gender equality in a revised USAID Mission Statement.

Finally, we strongly endorse – and will not repeat here – the commitments already made by the President-elect to advance gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment globally, including regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and support for multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Similarly, many of our member organizations have endorsed the U.S. Feminist Foreign Policy White Paper.

For more information, please contact the **Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition Co-Chairs:**

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The Big Ideas for Women and Girls Coalition advocates for placing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the center of U.S. foreign policy and assistance, as both the right thing to do, and the smart thing to do. The Coalition brings together over 25 non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and unaffiliated experts who are committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls globally.

The Coalition convenes key actors on cross cutting issues related to gender equality and works with policy makers to ensure that U.S. government agencies, including their gender structures, policies, funding, and data, serve to advance global gender equality and are informed by civil society experience and evidence.

