



UNITED STATES
**GLOBAL
STRATEGY
TO EMPOWER
ADOLESCENT GIRLS**





President Barack Obama greets Linet Momposhi Nenkoitol, 16, at the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Regional Leadership Center at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, July 26, 2015. WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA



First Lady Michelle Obama, talks with students while visiting the Room to Read program at Hun Sen Bakong High School in Cambodia on March 21, 2015. WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY AMANDA LUCIDON

UNITED STATES GLOBAL STRATEGY TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS



COVER PHOTO: Yemen's Nujood Ali was just ten when she divorced her abusive, much older husband. The girl's courageous act turned her into an international heroine for girl's rights. However, for many girls, courtroom victories and global accolades can mean little when the doors of opportunity remain closed to them. Stephanie Sinclair/Too Young to Wed

Every country and every culture has traditions that are unique and help make that country what it is. But just because something is a part of your past doesn't make it right... There's no excuse for sexual assault or domestic violence. There's no reason that young girls should suffer genital mutilation. There's no place in civilized society for the early or forced marriage of children. These traditions may date back centuries; they have no place in the 21st century. These are issues of right and wrong—in any culture. But they're also issues of success and failure. Any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women and allow them to maximize their potential is doomed to fall behind in a global economy.

—President Barack Obama, Remarks at Safaricom Indoor Arena, Nairobi, Kenya, July 26, 2015

I don't think it's an accident that we've reached gender parity in primary but not secondary education. Because when girls are young, they're often seen simply as children. But when they hit adolescence and start to develop into women, and are suddenly subject to all of their societies' biases around gender, that is precisely when they start to fall behind in their education... If we truly want to get girls into our classrooms, then we need to have an honest conversation about how we view and treat women in our societies—and this conversation needs to happen in every country on this planet, including my own.

—First Lady Michelle Obama, Remarks at World Innovation Summit for Education, Doha, Qatar, November 4, 2015

PHOTO: PEACE CORPS



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The United States understands that when a girl is kept from achieving her potential it is a loss not only for that individual girl, but also for her family, community, and country. We know that empowering girls, keeping them free from violence, and providing them with an education is one of the best ways to ensure that societies thrive...By working together as a community of nations, we can build a world in which girls are not treated as property, chattel, or spoils of war, but rather as individuals with their own voice, talents, and freedom to realize their potential and contribute to our collective humanity.

—Secretary of State John Kerry,
Statement, International Day of the
Girl, October 11, 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adolescence is a critical period in a girl's life, when significant physical, emotional, and social changes shape her future. In too many parts of the world, adolescence is the most precarious time for girls. A quarter of a billion girls live in poverty. One in three girls in the developing world is married by the time she is 18, and one in nine is married by the age of 15. Every year, millions of girls undergo female genital mutilation/cutting. Millions more live in conflict settings that increase the risks of gender-based violence. Many girls continue to be infected with HIV/AIDS, and too few girls have the education or skills they need to participate fully in the economies of their countries.

While adolescence is a time of great vulnerability for girls, it is also an ideal point to leverage development and diplomacy efforts. It is an opportunity to disrupt poverty from becoming a permanent condition that is passed from one generation to the next. A pivotal question for an adolescent girl is whether she stays in school. If she drops out prematurely, she faces an increased risk of early marriage, early pregnancy, HIV infection, and maternal morbidities. She is also likely to be unskilled, have less earning power, and be less able to participate meaningfully in society. However, if she remains in school, she is more likely to marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and earn an income that she will invest into her family and community. To break the cycle of poverty, our efforts must reach girls before they arrive at this intersection of adolescence and follow them until they complete their education. This investment is not just an investment in girls, but in their families and communities.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) improved outcomes for girls in primary education, they also highlighted the need for a targeted focus on adolescents and young adults, particularly regarding the transition to and completion of secondary school and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. A concerted effort to address the challenges faced by adolescent girls, to safeguard their rights, and to promote their participation in their societies and economies is critical to advancing U.S. foreign policy and security objectives and development priorities. The progress of this population will be an essential determinant of our success in achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Today's epidemic of undereducated and impoverished girls is tomorrow's crisis of instability and conflict, health, hunger, and avoidable child deaths.

The goal of U.S. government efforts under this strategy is to ensure adolescent girls are educated, healthy, economically and socially empowered, and free from violence and discrimination, thereby promoting global development, security, and prosperity. Our efforts aim to enhance their access to quality education, to reduce their risks of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM), to reduce their vulnerability to gender-based violence including harmful norms and practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and to provide them with the tools necessary to fully participate in their societies, claim their rights, and to control their own lives.

This strategy sets forth the following objectives:

- ◆ Enhance girls' access to quality education in safe environments
- ◆ Provide economic opportunities and incentives for girls and their families
- ◆ Empower girls with information, skills, services, and support
- ◆ Mobilize and educate communities to change harmful norms and practices
- ◆ Strengthen policy and legal frameworks and accountability

President Obama has stated that addressing the challenges faced by adolescent girls and supporting them to fully participate in their communities and economies are critical to U.S. foreign policy. The Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Peace Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are the primary implementers of United States government programs to empower adolescent girls globally.¹ The United States has several programs currently underway aimed at empowering adolescent girls, including the Let Girls Learn initiative and the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, Safe) initiative.

Pursuant to the objectives of this strategy, efforts will be coordinated across the U.S. government and integrated into agencies’ ongoing work. Agencies will implement the strategy through a range of approaches appropriate to their respective mandates and capacities, including diplomacy, programmatic interventions, public engagement and outreach, coordination with international and private sector partners, and evidence building. Each agency acknowledges the value and importance of empowering adolescent girls and, in keeping with its mission and authorities, intends to integrate advancing the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls into its operations, including in policy development, strategic and budget planning, staff training and capacity building, implementation of policies and programs, and monitoring and evaluation of results. Agency implementation plans outline the specific modalities that each agency will adopt to achieve the goals and objectives of the strategy.

CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS

The United States Congress has long emphasized the importance of focusing on issues affecting adolescent girls, particularly CEFM, and has played a critical role in strengthening U.S. efforts to address harmful norms and practices affecting women and girls. This strategy provides a framework to address CEFM and the factors contributing to the continuation of this practice including the lower value put on girls’ education and the host of related challenges facing adolescent girls that hinder them from reaching their potential and participating fully in their societies. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress to implement this strategy to promote the rights and empowerment of girls and women globally.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TOWED



THE CASE FOR A FOCUS ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS

THE STATE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Despite progress toward gender equality around the world, accelerated by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and other international agreements, in far too many places girls and women lack access to health services, education, full legal and social rights, and economic assets. Women and girls face discrimination and violence throughout their lives, but the challenges are particularly acute for adolescent girls. Globally, 62 million girls are not in school, half of whom are adolescents, and 250 million adolescent girls live in poverty. These girls face diminished economic opportunities; high rates of illiteracy; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; child, early, and forced marriage; early and unintended pregnancies; trafficking; and other forms of discrimination, violence, and abuse. These disadvantages both perpetuate and ensure cycles of poverty, which multiply as generations of girls have families of their own.

Education

In many countries, puberty triggers a marked divergence in the lives of boys and girls, usually resulting in greater opportunities for boys and greater limitations for girls. Adolescence marks a perilous transition in a girl's educational trajectory, as it coincides with this shift from girlhood to adulthood. As a result, adolescent girls confront particularly daunting challenges in pursuing an education. Girls living in rural or remote communities may travel long distances to reach schools—especially secondary schools, which are more widely dispersed—and face a range of threats along the way, including abduction, physical and sexual violence, and harassment. In many cases adolescent girls are forced to leave school to attend to household responsibilities, or are put to work on the farm or at the market. When households lack access to water, girls disproportionately shoulder the burden of collecting it, which may require significant travel time or long waits at water sources, putting them at greater risk of absenteeism and assault. Due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure and sanitary facilities at schools and fear of stigmatization, adolescent girls may also stay home during menstruation, which can result in them missing several days of classes per month and falling behind.

Once girls arrive at school, they are too often subject to sexual harassment and violence from both teachers and fellow students, undermining their ability to learn and threatening their physical and psychological well-being. Many schools often have too few female teachers and instruction or curricula that discriminates against girls and perpetuates negative gender stereotypes. Poor quality of education is pervasive and can be a particular challenge for girls, in part because their families often already see little value in girls' education. Where the costs of school fees, uniforms, or school supplies are prohibitive, families with limited resources may choose to educate their sons rather than their daughters, based on the perception that this investment offers a greater return for the family. Given the limited roles and economic opportunities available to women in many settings, parents sometimes decide that a few years of schooling are sufficient for a girl. In some contexts, discriminatory school policies preclude girls who are pregnant or married from attending school.

Primary education for girls is a relative bright spot. Through concerted efforts by the United States and the international community, girls in primary school have moved closer to parity in many countries. As girls reach puberty, the disparities appear and widen with successive levels of education: in primary education, 66 percent of countries have achieved gender parity, compared to 50 percent in lower secondary, 29 percent in upper secondary, and only 4 percent in tertiary.² In both developing and developed countries, fields of study tend to be segregated by sex, with more males choosing or being encouraged to pursue higher



PROFILE: MEMORY BANDA

As a young girl, Memory Banda watched as her young family members and friends got married at the age of 10 or 11 in her rural Malawi community. She decided she wanted to do everything she could to support these girls, and others just like them. So she became a girl advocate. Today, as a Rise Up Girl Leader, she offers free writing lessons to adolescent moms in her neighborhood. She visits the families of girls who are in danger of being married, and she encourages them to change their minds. And she's part of a grassroots campaign to build networks for girls and end child, early, and forced marriage once and for all.

status and better-paid careers in science, technology, and engineering, while females predominate in the lower paying education, healthcare, and social service professions. With the gains made in improving girls' attendance and performance at the primary level, there are also efforts to extend educational inclusion to all girls, including married girls, migrant and refugee youth, street children, rural youth, and young people with disabilities. Despite these efforts, too many girls remain out of school and do not complete primary school or continue on to secondary grades. The UN Secretary General's report on the implementation of the MDGs notes that significant gaps still remain with respect to girls' secondary education, which "has been shown to contribute more strongly than primary school attendance to the achievement of gender equality and women's rights and several positive social and economic outcomes."³

Investing in girls' education is a critical component of U.S. government efforts to reduce poverty and empower women economically, including by increasing women's labor force participation. Women's economic empowerment fuels economic growth, provides women with income to invest in their family's health and education, increases household food stability and resilience, and strengthens women's decision-making power in their homes, communities, and societies. Adolescent girls who lack an education are less able to participate meaningfully in stable economic ventures or hold well-paying jobs. The social and gender norms that limit adolescent girls continue into adulthood: women hold fewer assets than men, earn less income, and own a fraction of the world's enterprises, even when they have the same or higher level of education as compared to their male peers. Laws and policies often limit women's political participation, restrict their access to land and other assets, and present barriers to women's entrepreneurship—including by limiting their access to financial services, markets, and skills training—all of which translate to greater rates of poverty. These factors push adolescent girls and young women into the informal economy, which presents greater instability than the formal economic sector and offers no health or retirement benefits, leaving women more vulnerable to economic shocks and resulting in intergenerational poverty.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

Girls' transition into puberty and adolescence increases their vulnerability to GBV—including physical, emotional, and psychological violence, rape, and other forms of sexual abuse—with grave and enduring impacts on their health and well-being. More than 1 in 10 girls worldwide has experienced some form of forced sexual activity, and many girls' first experience of sexual intercourse is unwanted or coerced.⁴ Worldwide, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys have experienced sexual violence; nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.⁵ GBV disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable members of society. Girls in conflict or emergency settings, in minority or indigenous communities, with disabilities, and lesbian, bisexual, and trans-identified girls are at increased risk of GBV. Married girls may also be at a higher risk of marital rape and domestic violence, either from their husbands or their husbands' families. Harmful practices such as CEFM and FGM/C are widespread.

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

FGM/C, which refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, is typically carried out on young girls between infancy and adolescence, and occasionally on adult women. According to UNICEF, at least 200 million girls around the world in 30 countries have undergone FGM/C.⁶ Current progress in eliminating this practice is insufficient to keep up with increasing population growth. If trends continue, the number of girls and women undergoing FGM/C will rise significantly over the next 15 years. FGM/C is a human rights abuse that has no health benefits and is not rooted in any religious or theological tradition. It is typically practiced as an initiation rite that reflects locally held beliefs around the need to control women's sexuality and preserve and prove their virginity for marriage. Depending on the degree of the cutting, the practice can lead to intense life-long pain and a range of physical and mental health problems, including psychological trauma, chronic infection, infertility, fistula, hemorrhaging, and life-threatening complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM)

CEFM is defined as a formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties is under the age of 18. As of 2010, there were legal prohibitions against this practice in 158 countries, and 146 granted exemptions in the case of parental consent.⁷ In many countries, existing laws are weakly enforced, especially when they conflict with local customs. There are currently nearly 700 million women alive today who were married as children, and 15 million more are married each year.⁸ CEFM often occurs in contexts of poverty, displacement, or societal pressures, and prevalence rates are highest in the most impoverished and most rural regions of the world. Of the 25 countries with the lowest gross domestic product, 12 have rates of child marriage above 40 percent.⁹ Within these regions, CEFM is concentrated within the poorest households; girls living in poor households are almost twice as likely to be married before the age of 18 as compared to girls in higher income households, as are rural girls compared with girls from urban areas.¹⁰

Families marry girls before the age of 18 for a number of reasons, including social beliefs about the appropriate age of marriage for girls; fears that older girls will not find spouses; poor quality of schooling; concerns about the risks of sexual violence girls face in school and on their way to school; the socioeconomic needs of a girl's household; and concerns about premarital sexual behavior that could result in pregnancy outside of marriage, HIV/AIDS, and perceived dishonor to the family. This practice is often rooted in patriarchal beliefs that value girls less and confine them to traditional roles of motherhood and domestic labor.

Ultimately CEFM arises from, and often perpetuates, gender inequality. It is a human rights abuse that contributes to economic hardship and leads to under-investment in girls' educational and health care needs. CEFM undermines economic productivity, threatens sustainable growth and development, and fosters conditions that enable or exacerbate violence and insecurity, including domestic violence. It produces devastating repercussions for a girl's life, effectively ending her childhood. Early marriage forces a girl into adulthood and motherhood before she is physically and mentally mature and before she completes her education, limiting her future options, depriving her of the chance to reach her full potential, and preventing her from contributing fully to her family and community.

Early pregnancy

In many contexts, young brides face great pressure to bear children as quickly as possible to prove their fertility. Approximately 16 million adolescent girls aged 15-19 years old give birth each year, comprising about 11 percent of all births globally.²¹ Early pregnancy and childbirth have severe consequences for adolescent girls as compared to young women, including an increased risk of miscarriage and complications at birth, obstetric fistula, and death. Despite progress in overall rates around the world, maternal mortality remains a leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19.²² In general, the vast majority of maternal deaths are preventable when women have access to quality antenatal and postnatal care and safe delivery attended by skilled personnel, backed by emergency obstetric care. However, adolescent girls do not always have access to these forms of care or information about the importance of these services, especially when they are married at an early age and have become socially isolated within their husbands' households. In addition to the harm placed on adolescent mothers, their children also face numerous hardships. The children of young mothers have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition and are less likely to be educated than children born to mothers older than 18. Lack of access to contraception is a challenge to approximately 225 million women worldwide, who would like to avoid pregnancy but are not using a modern method of contraception.²³ This is a particular challenge for girls who would like to stay in school.

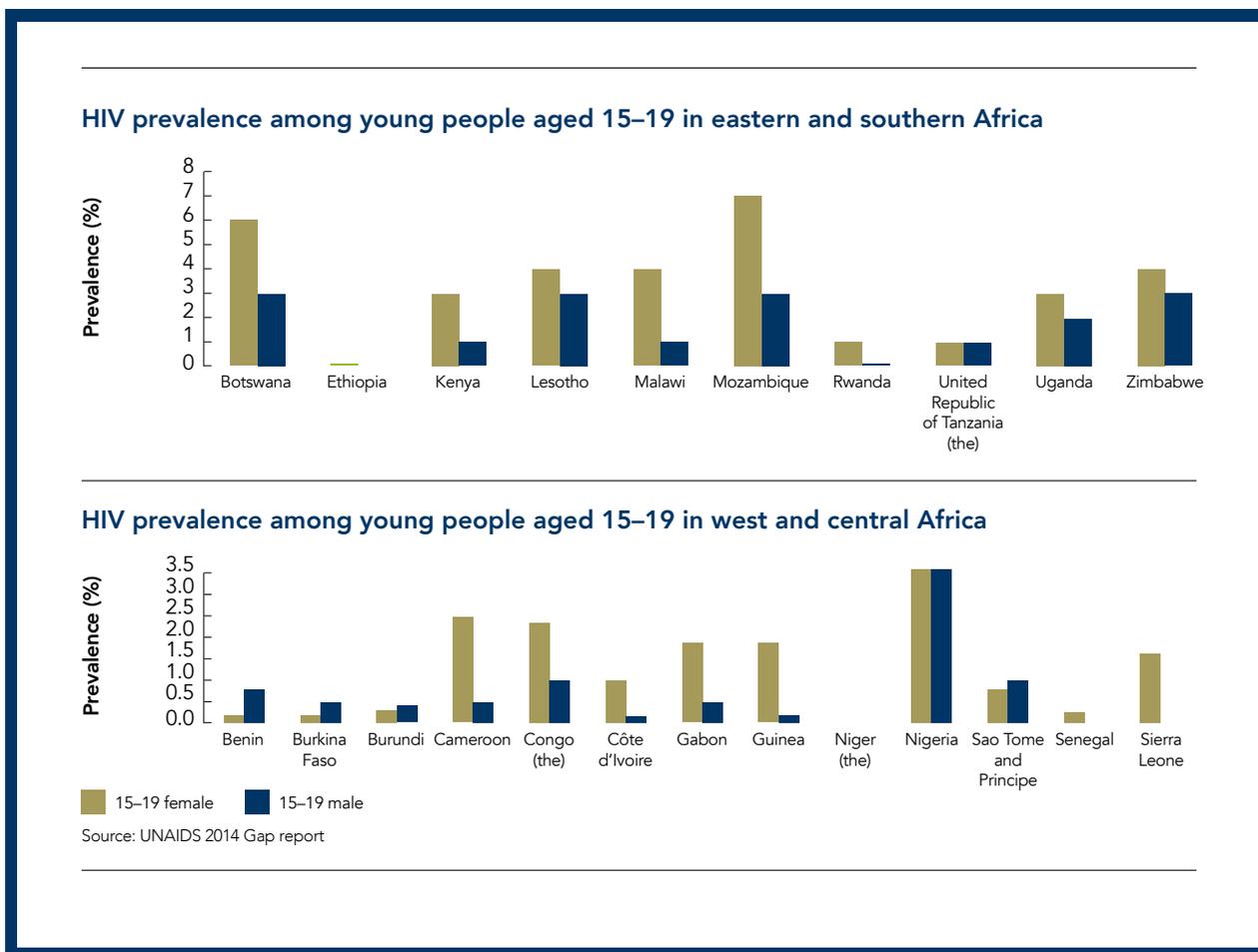
PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TOWED



A 14-year-old mother with her two children in Yemen.

HIV/AIDS

HIV disproportionately affects adolescent girls and young women beginning in adolescence and continuing into early adulthood. Despite significant progress in the global HIV response over the past twenty years, there are approximately 380,000 new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women (10–24) globally every year, and girls and young women account for 71 percent of new HIV infections among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁴ HIV-positive pregnant women are at increased risk of life-threatening infections such as sepsis and opportunistic infections, including tuberculosis, pneumonia, and meningitis. For adolescents, these risks are exacerbated by early and repeated pregnancies. In cases in which HIV results in the death of the mother, the impact on her surviving children is devastating.



Conflict, crises, and humanitarian emergencies

Threats to girls' safety, health, and education are exacerbated by insecurity and heightened during armed conflict and natural disasters. In modern conflicts, where civilians suffer heavy consequences, women and children are typically the most vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and abuse due to their gender, age, and status in society. According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) schoolgirls routinely become victims of sexual violence in conflict settings, often from military officials and police.¹⁵ Conflict and humanitarian settings can increase the prevalence of CEFM due to economic insecurity, the breakdown of protective social safety networks and legal structures, reduced access to educational and economic opportunities, and restrictions on freedom of movement. In such contexts, families may perceive marriage as a means to increase a daughter's safety, particularly from extremist groups and other

combatants who often force girls into marriage; however, girls married under these circumstances are more vulnerable to violence from husbands and families and are unlikely to remain in school.

In some countries, violent extremist organizations like ISIL, Boko Haram, and the Taliban view educated girls as threats to their ideologies and seek to intimidate or harm girls who pursue an education. GCPEA reports that between 2009 and 2012, schools in 30 countries were used for military purposes in armed conflict or directly attacked, including specific attacks aimed at girls. Conflict also increases the incidence of disability, and women and girls with disabilities face particular risks, including social stigma and isolation, difficulty accessing humanitarian assistance, unmet healthcare needs, and higher rates of GBV and other forms of violence during and after conflict.

WHY INVEST IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

Investing in adolescent girls, particularly through education, benefits not only girls and their families, but entire communities and economies. Girls' attendance in formal school during adolescence is correlated with later marriage, later childbearing, decreased fertility rates, lower rates of HIV/AIDS and other reproductive morbidities, fewer hours of domestic work, and greater gender equality. Importantly, these benefits accrue to the next generation. Each extra year of girls' education is correlated with a 5–10 percent reduction in infant mortality, and a child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to live past age five.¹⁶

Addressing maternal mortality is one area where progress toward achieving the MDGs was slow. In 2014 the UN Secretary General stated that, "to truly triumph over maternal mortality, we must focus our initiatives on the adolescent girl. Adolescent girls need to be able to go to school and pursue education to the highest levels possible. When an adolescent girl is safe from harm and able to choose when to bear children, she can be saved from HIV infection, hemorrhage, obstetric complications such as obstructed labor and fistula, and death." Recent evidence indicates that a one percent increase in the percentage of mothers receiving even one year of education reduces maternal mortality by 174 deaths per 100,000 births.¹⁷

PHOTO: USAID



Empowered, educated, healthy, and safe adolescent girls possess a better complement of tools to make the transition into adulthood and engage productively in the economy as adults. Educated women are more likely to join the formal labor force, broadening a country's tax base and increasing its productivity.¹⁸ In an analysis of 100 countries, the World Bank found that a one percent increase in the share of women completing secondary education boosts economic growth by 0.3 percent per capita, a significant amount. The study concludes that "societies that have a preference for not investing in girls pay a price for it in terms of slower growth and reduced income."¹⁹ Based on data from this study and UNESCO education statistics, Plan International has estimated that the economic cost to 65 low and middle income and transitional countries that failed to offer girls the same secondary school opportunities as boys reached a staggering US\$92 billion each year.²⁰ GBV, including CEFM, also takes a toll on societies in terms of lost economic opportunity, including financial costs, medical costs, lost education and earnings, lower growth potential, and continuing poverty.²¹

UNITED STATES APPROACH TO EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS GLOBALLY

BUILDING ON AN EXISTING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Under the leadership of President Obama, the United States has put gender equality and the advancement of women and girls at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. This is embodied in the President's [National Security Strategy](#), the [Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development](#), the [U.S. Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review](#), and the [Presidential Memorandum on the Coordination of Policies and Programs to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls Globally](#). It is also demonstrated by the issuance of [Executive Order 13595](#) and the [U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security](#) to support women's voices and perspectives in decision-making in countries threatened and affected by war, violence, and insecurity, as well as [Executive Order 13623](#) directing departments and agencies to implement the first-ever [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#).

These achievements have contributed to significant improvements for many women and girls globally, as outlined in the annual reports for these respective strategies and in the [U.S. Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#). However, the enormous potential of adolescent girls, as well as the distinct challenges they face, are too often subsumed under discussions around either children or women. Yet, evidence demonstrates that today's epidemic of undereducated and impoverished girls is tomorrow's crisis of instability and conflict, health, hunger, and avoidable child deaths. A concerted effort to address the challenges faced by adolescent girls, safeguard their rights, and encourage their participation is critical to achieving U.S. foreign policy and security objectives and development priorities. The welfare and active participation of this population will be an essential determinant of our success in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To further advance its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, the Obama Administration has developed the United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls ("U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy) and agency-specific implementation plans to advance the human rights and welfare of adolescent girls worldwide. The purpose of this strategy is to establish a whole-of-government approach that identifies, coordinates, integrates, and leverages current efforts and resources. It outlines several guiding principles and a set of shared objectives that agencies will pursue according to their own priorities and mandates through concrete actions outlined in their respective implementation plans.

The goal of U.S. government efforts under this strategy is to ensure adolescent girls are educated, healthy, socially and economically empowered, and free from violence and discrimination, thereby promoting global development, security, and prosperity. In particular this work will aim to promote the girls' rights and address the harmful social norms that devalue girls, discourage their education and economic participation, and perpetuate practices such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The United States' approach to empowering adolescent girls will be guided by the following principles:

Focus on adolescent girls as direct beneficiaries and active participants

The success of our efforts will ultimately be determined by whether they generate positive changes in girls' lives. Successful efforts to ensure adolescent girls are included as active participants in development, humanitarian, and diplomatic work require us to address the specific barriers and challenges that they face. Girls should be consulted about these challenges and problems and involved in the creation and evaluation of programs and policy. They must be able to safely and actively participate in interventions designed in their interest.

We must make a deliberate and intentional effort to reach those with the greatest unmet need, including girls who are part of impoverished, rural, or indigenous populations, as well as girls who are marginalized or isolated as a result of a mental or physical disability, early marriage, or early motherhood. We must ensure that our approaches are calibrated to be appropriate for the different ages of adolescence, in particular the youngest adolescents (10–14), whose needs are distinct from those of older adolescents and young women. Particular emphasis should be placed on reaching girls in this younger adolescent age range, because they are at a critical developmental tipping point. Wherever possible, our work will take account of whether our target population falls into the 10–14 or 15–19 age range—or both—and design and implement policies, programs, and associated monitoring and evaluation efforts accordingly, including through the collection, analysis, and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data.

Develop locally informed strategies adapted to unique contexts

Since girls' inequality is rooted in culture-specific gender norms and poverty, it has a unique face in different contexts. Economic and social drivers vary among communities, regions, and countries, and thus no single approach can solve this problem. Changing the particular mix of attitudes, harmful practices, and beliefs that devalue adolescent girls and restrict their opportunities will require a range of locally developed strategies that are carefully adapted to the specific contexts. The U.S. government will continue to engage diplomatically and design programs and policies with an in-depth, data-driven understanding of the local contexts, including assessments of the primary challenges that girls are confronting, to maximize the effectiveness of its investments and avoid generating negative or unforeseen consequences. Program design will be based on evidence of best practices and engage local men, women, boys, and girls to improve program success and encourage support from local communities. Partnerships with local communities that are informed by on-the-ground insights foster local accountability for sustainable programmatic success and accelerate changes in social behaviors that perpetuate harmful practices and beliefs.

Adopt a holistic, multi-sectoral, comprehensive approach

Given the close relationship between decisions about schooling, marriage, health care, including family

planning, and household economics, the United States recognizes that policies and programs targeting adolescent girls must be comprehensive, combining interventions across a range of development sectors. This approach should include grassroots “bottom up” activities as well as coordinated national reforms. Through this strategy, the U.S. government aims to integrate a specific focus on adolescent girls throughout the ongoing work of agencies implementing activities to address global health, education, economic growth, democracy and governance, food security, climate change, natural disasters, and conflict and security. Efforts to prevent CEFM and protect and support married girls are critical in advancing U.S. goals and priorities across all of these sectors.

Rely on evidence-based interventions

Data and evidence of best practices will ensure that our interventions yield the greatest impact and achieve our policy goals. The U.S. government will support evidence-based programming and invest in monitoring and evaluation to learn from and continually improve our efforts. Through this strategy, we are committed to learning, sharing, and contributing to the body of evidence regarding what works to empower young women and adolescent girls.

OBJECTIVES

This strategy sets forth the following objectives²²:

1. ENHANCE GIRLS’ ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Over the last thirty years, the international community has increasingly recognized that girls’ education is one of the most powerful forces for international development, economic prosperity, security, and stability. The linchpin to any successful effort to support adolescent girls is increasing the number of girls who transition to secondary education, which can be transformative for adolescent girls and their communities. However, attendance at school is only the first step. Schools should be safe, secure, and have adequate sanitation facilities; instruction should be of high quality; and curricula should be inclusive, gender-sensitive, and relevant to girls’ lives. The United States will promote policies and programs that address the availability, quality, and relevance of education for adolescent girls. These efforts will include recruitment and training of female teachers; gender-sensitive teacher training; creation of non-formal or “second chance” schools and flexible learning options; mentoring and tutoring; health, nutrition, and comprehensive sexuality education; life skills education; and vocational training to ensure that young women gain the necessary skills to find employment.

2. PROVIDE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND INCENTIVES FOR GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Economic factors often prevent girls from attending and completing school and achieving their full potential. The cost of a secondary education is often three to five times higher than a primary education, and supporting a girl’s education beyond the primary level is often seen as a poor investment, particularly in societies where early marriage presents a more financially appealing alternative and is viewed as a means to protect young girls from gender-based violence. The United States will promote policies and programs that help families keep their daughters in school and delay marriage, including through measures such as scholarships, stipends, or conditional cash transfers directed at alleviating economic pressures within poorer households. The United States will also promote policies and programs that increase financial security by providing adolescent



PROFILE: JIMENA

Jimena was born to parents who were only teenagers. Today, as a 12-year-old girl living in Guatemala, she is an advocate for other girls and a Rise Up Girl Leader. For the past four years, she's taught other girls about human rights, girls' health, and education in Guatemala. Jimena is also an educator of adults. She is a reminder that girls aren't just an investment we're making in the future. They're also important partners who can advocate and educate and empower in their own right. "Invest in us," says Jimena. "We are not just the future but we are the present."

girls or other family members with financial knowledge, income generating opportunities, vocational training, access to capital or savings, including microfinance, and access to technology. Such measures can provide a positive alternative to school dropout or early marriage and offer relief to girls and families facing economic hardship. At the same time, these measures can help shift the perception of a daughter from a burden to an asset, increasing girls' status within their households and giving them greater influence over their lives. Economic incentives are especially critical in regions affected by crisis or conflict and in regions where the prevalence of CEFM is high and/or the median age of marriage is low.

Economic empowerment programs or interventions specifically targeting adolescent girls can increase their financial literacy, help them build assets and access safe and legal employment and sustainable livelihoods, and increase their overall confidence and well-being. For married girls in particular such interventions can provide a means for them to build assets, reduce financial insecurity, and mitigate the negative consequences of early marriage. Economic empowerment strategies that target adolescent girls should be age appropriate and data driven; for example, entrepreneurship, capacity-building, and employment programs should be grounded in real market needs and opportunities.

3. EMPOWER GIRLS WITH INFORMATION, SKILLS, SERVICES, AND SUPPORT

Girls benefit from a range of skills, services, information, and support networks beyond formal education to reach their full potential. In order to stay in school and reap the benefits of education, they must be healthy and empowered to make informed and responsible decisions about their bodies and their lives. In particular, adolescent girls and young women need information about health, nutrition, sexuality, and reproduction to build the foundation for a lifetime of healthy behaviors, both for themselves and their children. The United States will promote policies and programs that target adolescent girls both in and out of school—as well as those adolescent girls and young women who are married and unmarried—to increase their awareness of, and access to, sexual and reproductive health information and services; family planning methods; HIV prevention, testing, and treatment; and mental health services. Such information and services could be provided to girls through outreach, one-stop centers, dedicated transportation services, and mobile devices such as cell phones.

The United States will also promote policies and programs that increase girls' awareness of their rights and their ability to advocate for themselves. Programs with proven success in increasing girls' agency and opportunities bring girls together in safe spaces to share information. In such settings, girls receive literacy and life skills training, develop their critical thinking, improve their communication and negotiation skills, and learn about their human rights. Such training makes girls aware of the options and services that are available to them, raises their expectations for their own lives, and empowers them to advocate for themselves and make informed life choices. Safe spaces also provide girls with the opportunity to interact with peers, be mentored by older girls and young women, and overcome isolation, which is a problem particularly for married girls. Through dialogue, they can build self-confidence and social skills that will make it easier for them to pursue additional education and employment. As girls' sense of possibility and self-worth grow, others in the community may start to view them differently, reshaping broader assumptions about girls. It is also important to educate adolescent boys about sexual and reproductive health and rights and the consequences of violence and engage them in thinking critically about gender norms.

Natural disasters and humanitarian crises increase the vulnerability of girls. Instability, conflict, and stress present acute challenges for girls that must be considered in the design and provision of humanitarian response. Consistent with the principles of the U.S.-led initiative "Safe from the Start," staff with training in the prevention of and response to gender-based violence should be deployed at the onset of each humanitarian response effort, and all staff should be trained on gender-sensitive response and the specific needs of adolescent girls. Adolescent girls must be identified during the initial phases of conflict and linked with girl-specific services and support, including access to health, education, and livelihoods opportunities adapted to their needs; targeted sexual and reproductive health



PHOTO: PEACE CORPS

Examples of Key U.S. Coordinated Efforts

The United States' efforts to empower adolescent girls and expand their opportunities build on the foundation laid by agencies across the U.S. government and by Congress. This strategy will complement and reinforce these ongoing efforts, as detailed below.

LET GIRLS LEARN

In 2015 the Obama Administration launched the Let Girls Learn initiative, which brings together the Department of State, USAID, Peace Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and other agencies and programs like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to address the range of challenges preventing adolescent girls from attending and completing school and from realizing their potential as adults. This initiative recognizes that too often a girl who could change her world for the better is locked out of that future by the circumstances of her birth or the customs of her community. This effort aims to address persistent gaps in adolescent girls' educational attainment through girl-sensitive programming and by leveraging public and private sector partners. It also aims to build partnerships and challenge other organizations and governments to commit resources to lift up adolescent girls across the globe. A key part of Let Girls Learn is to encourage and support community-led solutions to reduce barriers that prevent adolescent girls from completing their education.

DREAMS

The United States response to global HIV/AIDS is saving lives and changing the very course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. PEPFAR and private sector partners are investing almost \$500 million in ten African countries to reduce HIV infections in adolescent girls and young women. The DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, Safe) portion of this funding will allow participating countries to implement a core package of evidence-based approaches that go beyond the health sector, addressing the structural drivers that directly and indirectly increase girls' HIV risk, including poverty, gender inequality, sexual violence, and lack of education. The balance of the investment will support complementary activities such as targeting medical male circumcision and HIV treatment to males that are likely to pose the greatest risk of transmission to adolescent girls and young women.

U.S. STRATEGY TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE GLOBALLY

In August 2012, President Obama issued Executive Order 13623, "Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls Globally," directing agencies to implement the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally ("GBV Strategy"). This strategy, developed by the Department of State and USAID in coordination with other relevant U.S. government departments and agencies, identifies early and forced marriage as a form of gender-based violence and emphasizes the need for increased programming to address the practice in countries where it is most prevalent. It also calls on U.S. agencies to address root causes of violence as a means of raising the value of girls while developing best practices, programs, and policies. In August 2015, the State Department and USAID submitted an evaluation of implementation report to the National Security Council, which found that the Department achieved significant progress toward the objectives of the GBV Strategy. In December 2015, the Department and USAID released the "Evaluation of the Implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally." In it, the Department has also identified internal and external challenges to full implementation. In adherence with E.O. 13623, the GBV Strategy will be updated to ensure continued work to achieve the objectives beyond 2015.

U.S. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

In December 2011, President Obama released the first-ever U.S. National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security and signed Executive Order 13595 directing the NAP's implementation. The goal of the NAP is to promote U.S. national security by empowering women abroad as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, conflict, violence, and insecurity. The NAP commits the United States government to strengthening efforts to prevent and protect women and children from harm, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse, including gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. Of central importance to adolescent girls in crisis and conflict settings, the NAP outlines actions that increase women and girls' access to health, education, and economic opportunities.

U.S. ACTION PLAN ON CHILDREN IN ADVERSITY

The U.S. Action Plan on Children in Adversity is the first-ever whole-of-government strategic guidance for U.S. government international assistance for children. The goal of the U.S. government Action Plan on Children in Adversity is to achieve a world in which all children grow up within protective family care and free from deprivation, exploitation, and danger. Led by the Special Advisor on Children in Adversity, USAID's Center of Excellence on Children in Adversity works collaboratively with seven U.S. government agencies and departments as well as U.S. Missions, civil society, the United Nations and the scientific community to systematically implement the Action Plan.

MULTILATERAL EFFORTS

The United States contributes to the Global Partnership for Education, and recently increased its annual contribution for FY 2016 to \$70 million. At the United Nations, the United States has cosponsored resolutions on eliminating harmful practices affecting adolescent girls, including CEFM and FGM/C, at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council (HRC) and made statements at the HRC condemning CEFM and calling on nations and the scientific community to systematically implement the Action Plan.

services, including family planning and HIV prevention education and services, menstruation management, and personal hygiene supplies; safe and confidential methods for reporting abuse; and protective peer networks and psychosocial support.

4. MOBILIZE AND EDUCATE COMMUNITIES TO CHANGE HARMFUL NORMS AND PRACTICES

The environment around adolescent girls plays a key role in girls' ability to thrive. Girls who live in disempowering environments may not have access to programs and resources, and even when they are available they may be beyond girls' reach due to structural or cultural barriers or household dynamics that restrict their access to such services and support. The United States will promote policies and programs that partner with communities to eliminate the pervasive inequitable norms and practices that perpetuate GBV, inhibit girls from completing their education, and contribute to broader instability and economic stagnation. Such interventions raise broad awareness about the benefits for girls, their children, and the community at large of keeping girls in school, preventing HIV/AIDS, delaying marriage, and ending harmful practices such as FGM/C. They also engage participants in discussions about shifting gender norms and practices.

Interventions are most effective when they engage whole communities, including adolescent girls and girl-led groups, parents, grandparents, siblings, in-laws, and especially adolescent boys, as evidence shows that early adolescence is a key moment in the formation of norms and beliefs. These interventions must also draw in traditional and religious leaders, and other members of the community with influence, such as political leaders, civil society organizations, mother's groups, and parent-teacher associations. Teachers and school management staff in particular have an important role in providing positive role models for both boys and girls, identifying girls at risk of CEFM, and encouraging married girls to stay in, or return to, schools.

5. STRENGTHEN POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Many legal frameworks around the world do not protect girls from violence and discrimination, either because they discriminate against girls or because anti-discrimination provisions are inadequately enforced. Girls face a myriad of obstacles to accessing justice, including a lack of self-esteem and assertiveness; lack of awareness about the law, their rights under it, and of appropriate reporting mechanisms and services; and a fear of stigma, blame, or victimization through the justice system. Laws protecting girls' rights and citizenship are critical first steps toward gender equality. Without a proper legal framework, girls have no recourse to protect their rights, and without equal access to citizenship (i.e., through mechanisms such as inheritance, birth, and marriage registration) girls cannot fully participate in their communities and economies.

However, laws alone are not sufficient. Governments are accountable for ensuring that laws protecting adolescent girls are implemented and enforced, and that all citizens, especially girls, are aware of their rights under the law. The United States will work with governments and civil society organizations to (i) advocate for policy and legal reform to protect adolescent girls; (ii) improve implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies, and (iii) raise awareness of the laws and legal protections adolescent girls are granted under the law. Interventions will provide girls with rights-based education and support networks; equip legal systems to address the needs of adolescent girls by protecting them from violence and all forms of discrimination; examine potentially exclusionary policies around women's political participation; and challenge gender norms and stereotypes.

PROFILE: SANGITA PAL

Sangita Pal grew up in Mumbai, where she shared a one-room home with six members of her family. All her life, her community encouraged her to stay home and marry early. Instead, with the guidance and coaching of a local NGO called Magic Bus, Sangita persuaded her parents to allow her to pursue her education. Today, she's in the top 5 percent of her class at one of Mumbai's best universities. She's now also an advocate for Magic Bus, helping lead the next generation of girls in her community to a more empowered life.

METRICS TO MEASURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

A working group will measure the progress of the implementation of the strategy. The progress of this strategy will also be assessed in line with various existing policies and strategic frameworks, including the Department of State's Policy Guidance on Promoting Gender Equality, USAID's Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy; MCC's Gender Policy, the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally, and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, as well as the Agencies' implementation plans.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

President Obama has stated that addressing the challenges faced by adolescent girls and supporting them to fully participate in their communities and economies are critical to U.S. foreign policy and development efforts. The Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps, MCC, and PEPFAR are the United States government's primary implementers of programs to empower adolescent girls globally, including the Let Girls Learn initiative launched by the President and the First Lady in 2015, which is aimed at addressing the range of challenges preventing adolescent girls from attending and completing school, and from realizing their potential as adults.

Pursuant to the strategy's objectives, efforts will be coordinated across the U.S. government and integrated into agencies' ongoing work, including the Let Girls Learn initiative and PEPFAR's DREAMS initiative. Agencies will implement the strategy through a range of approaches appropriate to their respective mandates and capacities, including diplomacy; programmatic interventions; public engagement and outreach; coordination with international and private sector partners; and evidence building. Each agency acknowledges the value and importance of empowering adolescent girls and, in keeping with its mission and authorities, intends to integrate advancing the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls into its operations, including in policy development, strategic and budget planning, staff training and capacity building, implementation of policies and programs, and monitoring and evaluation of results.

The following implementation plans outline the specific modalities that each agency will employ to achieve the goals and objectives of the strategy.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED



Two 8-year-old brides with their husbands in Yemen.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S COMMITMENT TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS

This implementation plan outlines how the Department will implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy. The Department recognizes that a concerted effort to empower adolescent girls globally and address the harmful norms and practices that impede their full socioeconomic participation is essential to safeguarding girls' human rights and is of central importance in maximizing the effectiveness of efforts to advance U.S. security interests and development priorities. When a girl drops out of school, is forced into marriage, or becomes pregnant before she is physically and mentally ready, her rights are compromised and she is constrained from achieving her full potential. In addition, her welfare and that of any future children is threatened, which can perpetuate cycles of under-education, poverty, and poor health. At the national level, these outcomes undermine economic productivity, threaten sustainable growth and development, and drive conditions that enable violence or insecurity.

Our commitment to promoting the rights and welfare of adolescent girls is grounded in the Department's broader efforts to empower women and girls globally, as outlined in the [Policy Guidance on Promoting Gender Equality to Achieve our National Security and Foreign Policy Objectives](#), issued in March of 2012. This guidance directs the integration of gender equality and the advancement of the status of women and girls in all policy development, strategic and budget planning, implementation of policies and programs, management and training, and monitoring and evaluation of results. It sets forth priority areas where efforts to address the status of women and girls should be integrated into the Department's work, including political and civic participation, economic participation, and peace and security.

In June 2014, Secretary Kerry issued additional policy guidance on [Promoting Gender Equality and Advancing the Status of Women and Girls](#), which directs all U.S. embassies and Department bureaus to prioritize efforts to empower adolescent girls, including by eliminating impediments to their education and addressing the specific challenges they face such as GBV and harmful practices. This guidance places particular emphasis on including girls from disadvantaged populations and girls who are pregnant or have been married. Together, these policies offer a structure to guide the Department's internal and external efforts.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

The implementation of this strategy will be led by the Secretary's Office of Global Women's issues (S/GWI), in coordination with other bureaus, offices, and embassies. As part of this implementation plan, the Department is already building partnerships, investing in programs, and coordinating strategic efforts to address challenges facing adolescent girls. In addition to the efforts of U.S. embassies around the world, including our multilateral engagement, the Department of State bureaus and offices implementing programs benefitting adolescent girls include the Secretary's Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (S/GAC), and the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

For example, S/GAC leads the implementation of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and works to prevent the transmission of HIV to key populations, particularly adolescent girls and young women. IO leads on U.S. engagement with the United Nations, which includes advancing a variety of

goals relating to the protection of the human rights of women and girls and advancement of the status of women and girls through a myriad of UN bodies, including the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, Commission on the Status of Women, and UN executive boards. PRM leads Department efforts on the protection of girls in humanitarian response and on sexual and reproductive health and rights policy issues more broadly.

DRL seeks to end discrimination, violence and exploitation, and harmful practices against women and girls; promotes the full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; and works to strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment. ECA creates programs in tandem with our overseas posts and regional and functional bureaus in order to open dialogues with important public audiences—particularly women, youth, and civil society groups. These programs inform, develop skills and motivation, and create people-to-people networks that empower participants to improve their lives and their communities.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Priority thematic objectives for the Department’s implementation of this strategy will include promoting legal and policy frameworks that protect girls’ universal human rights and addressing harmful practices, in particular CEFM and FGM/C. Among U.S. government agencies, the Department of State is uniquely positioned to address these issues given its focus on ensuring governments are effective and accountable. These priorities are aligned with the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a specific target on eliminating harmful practices as part of Goal 5 and emphasizes transparent and accountable governments as part of Goal 16.

Promote legal and policy frameworks that protect adolescent girls’ rights

Through diplomatic engagement, the United States will work with governments and civil society organizations to advocate for policy and legal reform to protect and empower adolescent girls. This should include advocating for national policies and strategies and the passage, amendment, and implementation of laws such as those that:

Protect girls’ rights, including those that provide for universal birth and marriage registration, protect girls from statelessness, and establish women’s and girls’ rights to access justice on an equal basis with men; their rights to own, transfer, and inherit assets on an equal basis with men; and their right to a divorce.

Prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including those aimed at prohibiting dowries or bride prices, criminalizing the practice of FGM/C including by medical providers, funding women’s shelters, updating judicial training programs, or creating units in police forces aimed at prohibiting CEFM or responding to gender-based violence.

Expand girls’ access to education, health, and services, including those that extend the period of free and compulsory education for girls through secondary school, preserve the rights of married and pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to attend school, institute comprehensive sexuality education in national curricula, and remove barriers to sexual and reproductive rights and comprehensive, accessible, quality health services.

In addition to advocating for the passage of laws, the Department will prioritize ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies. These efforts will include working with law enforcement to protect girls at risk of violence or girl survivors of violence. As awareness and education about these laws are key, the Department will also work with governments, civil society, and business organizations to inform audiences abroad, and particularly adolescent girls, of the rights and legal protections adolescent girls are granted under the law.

Address child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and mitigate its consequences for married girls

A human rights abuse that affects over 15 million girls each year, CEFM undermines a range of U.S. government policies and programs and stands as a major obstacle to global stability and development. Pursuant to this strategy, CEFM will be addressed as a cross-cutting issue throughout foreign assistance, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic efforts. Department policy and programs—particularly those benefiting adolescent girls or affecting high-prevalence countries—should, to the extent practicable, incorporate a specific focus on preventing CEFM and educating audiences abroad about its harmful consequences, including high rates of maternal death and injury among married adolescent girls who become pregnant before their bodies are fully mature. Efforts should also aim to mitigate the harmful consequences of CEFM for married girls, including by helping them reconnect to education; generate income; gain safety from violence; obtain divorce when they wish, along with their share of marital property; and access justice, social support, and sexual and reproductive health information and services. Wherever possible, efforts should be community-led and community-implemented, with support from the U.S. government, and should aim to incorporate men and boys, as well as traditional and religious leaders.

End female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and address its consequences

The practice of FGM/C is a grave human rights abuse that is also a social norm in far too many places, justified as a rite of passage into adulthood or to prepare a girl for marriage. It is carried out based on deeply embedded attitudes and views on religion, tradition, culture, women's and girls' sexuality, and their place in society. Its practice spans religions and socioeconomic status. In many communities, there is a social obligation to undergo the practice and a fear of stigma or even social exclusion if families refuse to conform. In addition to often causing intense, life-long pain and psychological trauma, the procedure carries both short and long-term health risks—including hemorrhaging, recurrent infections, infertility, the potential of increased risk for HIV infection, fistula, complications in child birth, and even death—and has no health benefits. Department policy and program initiatives will focus on raising awareness about the harmful impacts of all types of FGM/C, incorporating a focus on human rights as part of education and awareness-raising efforts, encouraging the enforcement of laws against FGM/C where they exist, encouraging passage in places where laws are weak or nonexistent, and raising the awareness and ability of medical providers of how to best identify and care for survivors of FGM/C. Wherever possible, initiatives should be community-led and community-implemented, with support from the U.S. government, and should look for opportunities to engage local and national religious leaders to counter perceptions that the practice is based in religion. Interventions that include livelihood alternatives for FGM/C practitioners should be considered. Efforts should also focus on providing services for at-risk girls as well as those suffering health consequences from the practice.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The Department of State will implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy through five strategic operational goals:

1. Increase diplomatic engagement on issues affecting adolescent girls
2. Engage adolescent girls and their communities through public diplomacy and outreach
3. Enhance and expand programming to empower adolescent girls
4. Strengthen coordination with U.S. government, international, and private sector partners
5. Integrate a focus on adolescent girls throughout the Department's operating structure

This holistic approach, using a range of tools and investments, will significantly improve the lives of girls around the world.

GOAL 1. INCREASE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT ON ISSUES AFFECTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

High-level, sustained diplomatic engagement on issues affecting adolescent girls is at the forefront of our efforts to implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy. Governments have a responsibility to invest in adolescent girls' education, health, and safety. U.S. diplomats will raise these issues—including discriminatory laws and judicial systems, lack of access to or availability of services, particularly education and sexual and reproductive health services, and the prevalence of harmful practices such as CEFM and FGM/C—in bilateral and multilateral meetings and fora with host countries. Efforts related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals present opportunities to reinforce government, private sector, foundation, academia, and civil society attention to ongoing, persistent challenges to development and achieving full gender equality, including "second generation" education issues, and issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, political and economic participation, and GBV.

Bilateral and Regional Diplomacy

The Department of State will continue to promote adolescent girls' empowerment through bilateral and regional engagement, both by communicating directly with foreign governments and by working with civil society groups, businesses, and with girls themselves to empower them to serve as effective advocates to influence families, communities, schools, policy makers, and host governments. Where appropriate, Department officials will raise issues affecting adolescent girls in bilateral strategic dialogues to share best practices for addressing these issues, promote accountability, and encourage countries to take specific and effective actions that will measurably improve the lives of girls and their communities. The Department will frame these issues within the context of shared strategic objectives, noting the security and developmental implications of poor educational, health, and economic outcomes for girls. In particular, the Department will encourage governments to develop and implement national strategies to prevent CEFM, including protecting girls who have already been married. For countries that have demonstrated the political will to address CEFM and other challenges facing adolescent girls, the United States will offer policy collaboration and/or technical support as appropriate.

Ambassadors and officers at U.S. embassies can play a strategic role by working with host government officials, including through engagement with relevant ministries, to learn more

about the specific issues facing adolescent girls in-country and advocating for greater and more impactful attention to these issues in government policies and programs. Embassies are encouraged to convene stakeholders to facilitate policy-oriented discussions and linkages among stakeholders. For example, embassies could host consultations between government representatives and civil society and/or traditional and religious leaders to discuss education, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, or other issues affecting adolescent girls, or they could bring together representatives from diverse government ministries to improve coordination around these topics. Embassies may also be able to facilitate public-private partnerships—for example, between the government and media outlets to organize national public awareness campaigns. The United States could also host regional dialogues where countries can exchange strategies and highlight best practices for addressing harmful norms and practices affecting girls, reforming discriminatory legal and policy frameworks, and improving implementation and awareness of law and policies protecting girls. Officials can also use strategic dialogues as an opportunity to partner with other donor countries on adolescent girl related investments.

Multilateral Diplomacy

The United States will leverage its engagement in the United Nations and in other multilateral institutions to advance the rights and well-being of adolescent girls and to ensure that the 2030 Agenda, especially Goal 4 on education and Goal 5 on gender are achieved. Multiple UN fora—including the Security Council, the General Assembly and its committees, the Human Rights Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women—provide opportunities to continue working with other governments to promote, protect, and realize girls’ rights and highlight the harmful effects of CEFM and FGM/C. The United States has provided strong leadership in the campaign against CEFM at the UN and in other international organizations and will continue to support resolutions on harmful practices and strengthen language related to girls at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

The UN Security Council, UN Human Rights Council, and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly regularly consider resolutions that deal with issues such as CEFM; child protection; violence against women; women, peace, and security; and access to basic education. U.S. negotiators support language in these resolutions that, in the strongest terms possible, notes ongoing prevalence of and harms caused by discriminatory practices affecting adolescent girls and calls upon states and the Secretariat to take all appropriate action to combat these practices and promote opportunities for girls globally. With respect to CEFM and conflict, the Department will seek through the Security Council to promote accountability by condemning the practice of CEFM in the context of conflict-related sexual violence.

We will continue to ensure that the human rights of adolescent girls, harmful practices, and adolescent girls’ equitable access to quality education and youth-friendly health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, are addressed at the UN Commission on the Status of Women and UN Commission on Population and Development, including through progressive rights-based language in agreed conclusions. The Department is committed to continuing to develop partnerships that can play an active role in preventing and responding to these practices, including through the FGM/C Donor Working Group.



Examples of Diplomatic Efforts to Empower Adolescent Girls

BILATERAL AND REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

STRATEGIC DIALOGUES AND OTHER BILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS

As appropriate, Department of State senior officials include girls' rights, health, education or harmful practices affecting girls on the agenda of strategic dialogues and other bilateral engagements, stressing that girls' inability to access rights—be they social, economic, cultural or political—drive associated challenges to U.S. foreign policy goals of peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

COALITION BUILDING

The Department of State is working with countries that have experienced the social and economic benefits of increasing girls' education, empowering girls, and curtailing CEFM and other harmful practices to encourage progress on these issues in other capitals. For example, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is working with 11 countries that have updated their citizenship and birth registration laws in ways that will safeguard child brides and their children from statelessness to spread the message around the benefits of reform. The Department will undertake similar initiatives in line with its implementation of the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy.

SUBNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Opportunities and barriers for adolescent girls vary widely within foreign countries. For instance, CEFM and FGM/C may be concentrated in particular regions within a country. Regional advisors within the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues work with the regional bureaus and the Bureau of Public Affairs' Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs to increase the capacity of state and local governments, as well as community and religious leaders, to promote policies that enhance girls' access to education and curb harmful practices.

EMERGING CRISES

Adolescent girls suffer disproportionately when populations are destabilized or displaced by insecurity, conflict, or natural disaster. For example, rates of CEFM among Syrian refugees in Jordan reached 25 percent, compared to 13 percent among Jordanian nationals and 18 percent among Palestinians living in Jordan. The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, in coordination with embassies and relevant regional and functional offices, monitors emerging and ongoing crises to ensure that foreign governments and humanitarian organizations work to protect adolescent girls and prevent CEFM and other detrimental practices for girls in such situations.

MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS

The Universal Periodic Review is a process conducted by the UN Human Rights Council through which the human rights records of the United Nations' 193 Member States are reviewed and assessed. U.S. interventions delivered to countries under review with poor records on girls' education or a high incidence of harmful practices affecting adolescent girls highlight those issues and recommend steps to address them.

2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the negotiation process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, the United States was a strong advocate for a stand-alone goal to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as a focus on gender throughout the Agenda and the related Addis Ababa Action Agenda. With the adoption of the global goals in September 2015, the United States and its partners must now work to finance, implement, and track progress toward the ambitious agenda, and we will remain committed to putting women and girls at the center of development efforts.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is the preeminent international vehicle for financing education programs, monitoring results, and sharing knowledge. GPE requires recipient countries to agree to substantive reforms of education sectors. One of GPE's focus areas is ensuring that more girls enroll in school and receive a good quality education. The United States recognizes the important role of GPE and has recently increased its commitment.

UN POLICY INITIATIVES

The United States engages in a number of global UN policy and advocacy initiatives that promote girls' education and gender equality in education. As one of 14 champion countries for the UN Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), the United States seeks to raise education to the top of the global policy agenda. The United States also is a strong advocate for equitable education as part of UNESCO's Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. Finally, the United States supports the Joint UNESCO-UN Women-UNFPA Program on Girls' Education, which was launched in 2015 and will increase enrollment rates for adolescent girls and young women by linking education and health services and using technology to promote gender-responsive education systems. The program will be implemented in 20 countries, starting with Mali, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, South Sudan, and Tanzania.

REPORTING

The Department will continue robust reporting on issues that affect adolescent girls globally. The Department of State's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (Human Rights Reports) and *Trafficking in Persons Reports* are useful tools to guide our engagements with foreign governments and encourage us to evaluate our own efforts around the world. As part of the Department's implementation of the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy, diplomats will raise sections of the Human Rights Reports focused on adolescent girls—especially the sections on education, CEFM, FGM/C, reproductive rights, and health—in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with donor countries and countries where adolescent girls are disadvantaged.

The Department will continue to strengthen its reporting from post on issues affecting adolescent girls, including through the Human Rights Reports and cables. We will consider the status of legislation protecting girls' rights as well as whether it is being effectively implemented and enforced. To better inform human rights reporting on the situation of adolescent girls, political officers will be encouraged to meet regularly with organizations that are working to empower adolescent girls or address barriers to their education, such as HIV/AIDS and GBV, including CEFM and FGM/C, as well as conflict and displacement. Further, internal reporting on the implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security will continue to incorporate efforts to advance the status of girls in countries affected by conflict, war, violence, and insecurity.

GOAL 2. ENGAGE ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES THROUGH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND OUTREACH

Public engagement to address and dispel harmful social norms that devalue girls and girls' education, constrain the range of acceptable roles for women, and discourage discussion of adolescent health and rights is critical. Even when legislation against CEFM, FGM/C, or other gender-based violence exists, local authorities may not enforce such laws. Efforts to raise awareness and to engage key local and national decision-makers are often a key driver in shifting public attitudes and encouraging collective action to end harmful practices that affect adolescent girls.

As part of the Department of State's implementation of the Adolescent Girls Strategy, staff in Washington and in U.S. embassies will use the full range of public diplomacy tools—including cultural programming, academic grants, international visitor programs, educational exchanges, alumni programming, media engagement, Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) speakers, Share America written content, and public outreach—to inform audiences abroad, including men and boys, about the importance of adolescent girls' education and health and the harmful impacts of gender-based violence, including CEFM and FGM/C. Embassies are also encouraged to engage with youth directly and to conduct outreach to local civil society organizations.

In addition, the goals of this strategy will be promoted through the following:

Public Engagement and International Days

Embassies can use public engagement opportunities, including media interviews, op-eds, and social media platforms, to raise awareness locally about the importance of girls' education, rights, health, and empowerment. In particular, embassies and officials in Washington may use thematic opportunities—including Women's History Month, International Day of the Girl Child, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, International Day of



Examples of Public Diplomacy and Outreach to Empower Adolescent Girls

ZIMBABWE

Although one in three Zimbabwean girls is married before age 18, many Zimbabweans were unaware of the prevalence of CEFM and its links to poor health, decreased educational attainment, poverty, and violence. In FY2014, Embassy Harare spearheaded a robust public affairs campaign that included roundtable discussions, social media campaigns, exchanges, public speaking events, and school visits aimed at raising public awareness of Zimbabwe's high rate of CEFM and influencing policymakers to ban the practice. The Mission's sustained engagement on this issue galvanized government officials, civil society organizations, academics, legal experts, and others to action, and in 2016, a Constitutional Court ruling raised the legal age of marriage to 18, effectively banning the practice.

SPORTS DIPLOMACY

ECA launched the U.S. Department of State's Empowering Women and Girls through Sports Initiative to increase the number of women and girls involved in sports around the world, using the global lessons of Title IX as a founding theme. Through sports visitor, envoy, and mentorship programs, these exchanges have accelerated sports opportunities for girls and have also been tailored to address GBV, HIV/AIDS, and CEFM.

EXCHANGES

ECA's TechGirls program provides three weeks of intensive training and hands-on skills development in technology-based fields to girls from the Middle East and North Africa, making them more competitive in their pursuit of STEM careers. ECA's high-school exchange programs bring youth from around the world to the U.S. for an academic year; upon return, alumni initiate projects to tutor young girls, improve health education, and facilitate access to clean water. Exchanges for international secondary school teachers, like the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program and the International Leaders in Education Program, train teachers to better serve adolescent girls in their classrooms and communities, including developing strategies to prevent early marriage and pregnancy and increase parental support for girls' education. Other exchanges, such as the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), introduce emerging leaders and influencers to U.S. approaches to addressing domestic and gender-based violence, trafficking, and economic and political empowerment. In FY 2015, ECA brought approximately 557 IVLP participants to the United States on 69 different programs related to women and girls.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

English language is a gateway to economic and educational opportunity in many countries. The Department's English language programs include direct in-country English teaching, exchange programs for U.S. teachers and experts, and online and print resources. ECA's English Access Microscholarship Program, which reaches 15,000 economically disadvantaged young people aged 13-20 in over 80 countries, requires that at least half the participants in each country be female.

Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, International Human Rights Day, International Women’s Day, and other appropriate occasions—to convene events focused on girls and illustrate the benefits to individuals and societies of educating and empowering girls. Whenever possible, embassies should look for opportunities to include adolescent girls in public diplomacy events and activities. To increase girls’ attendance at embassy-hosted events, country staff could reach out to schools or girls’ organizations.

Outreach to Youth and Civil Society

Embassies are encouraged to take an inclusive approach to youth and civil society engagement, including outreach to schools, girls groups, and civil society organizations focused on youth empowerment, gender inequality, poverty, social norm change, or adolescent girls’ rights, health, or education—especially those organizations that are woman- or girl-led. Such organizations can facilitate connections with families, community leaders, religious leaders, and other local influencers to overcome barriers faced by adolescent girls. Dialogues with U.S. government officials can raise the profile of organizations’ work and help them improve the efficacy of their efforts. Youth-centered convenings at embassies and missions as well as large global conferences and gatherings can facilitate a dialogue between diplomats and development experts with adolescent girls and organizations that serve them to discuss country-level priorities and pathways to action.

Exchanges

Department exchange programs provide girls with the information, skills, and support they need to reach their full potential and encourage adults to empower girls around the world. Department staff will seek opportunities to nominate appropriate candidates engaged in this sector to participate in U.S. government-sponsored exchanges, such as ECA’s [International Visitors Leadership Program \(IVLP\)](#), [Fulbright](#) and [Humphrey](#) Fellowships, and teacher and youth exchanges. Posts eligible for the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program may nominate secondary teachers for a specialized six-week program to examine girls’ education themes in depth. As part of ECA’s partnership with Let Girls Learn, posts eligible for the 2016 Fortune-Department of State [Global Women’s Mentoring Partnership](#) are encouraged to include among their nominations women who have a demonstrated passion for adolescent girls’ education and empowerment.

Engaging Networks in Mentoring and Advocacy

Embassies can leverage existing youth, professional and alumni networks—including the IVLP, Fulbright, [Young African Leaders Initiative \(YALI\)](#) and [Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative \(YSEALI\)](#)—to mentor and advocate for adolescent girls. All exchange participants become part of the alumni network and are eligible to join the International Exchange Alumni website, which has 150,000 active users. Members are eligible for small grants and other opportunities, and often choose to implement projects that address the challenges facing girls. Embassy Public Affairs Sections can offer additional opportunities to alumni.



PHOTO: PEACE CORPS

GOAL 3. ENHANCE AND EXPAND PROGRAMMING TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The Department of State implements a range of programs that benefit adolescent girls, including programs that educate communities about the harmful effects of GBV, prevent the transmission of HIV to adolescent girls, provide assistance to girls impacted by conflict and crisis, promote STEM education for girls, and use sports to build girls' confidence.

Pursuant to this strategy, the Department will prioritize programming that supports adolescent girls and addresses barriers to their full participation in societies. This could include initiating new programming as well as ensuring that programs already being implemented consider the needs and opportunities of adolescent girls. The Department of State will also continue to work with the Millennium Challenge Corporation through its compacts, as well as USAID and other agencies disbursing foreign aid, to advocate for programs addressing issues facing adolescent girls, including the passage, improvement, and implementation of laws that protect and promote adolescent girls' rights, health, education and safety.

Programs should draw on the existing evidence base to determine what approaches have been most successful and sustainable, and should incorporate a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation, using sex- and age-disaggregated data. Programs should draw on the expertise of local civil society experts, whenever possible.

Priority Countries

Evidence suggests that programs that combine a range of interventions targeting the myriad challenges faced by adolescent girls are among the most effective means of empowering girls and allowing them to achieve their potential. Wherever possible, potential programmatic activities implemented under the strategy should be delivered as a holistic, integrated package in order to maximize impact. However, such programs can be resource intensive and must be thoughtfully designed with careful attention to the local context. By implementing the programmatic aspects of this strategy in a specific set of pilot countries where adolescent girls face disadvantages relative to boys, we can ensure our investments are targeted and effective, and concurrently establish a model for success that could be scaled up for broader implementation.

In July of 2015, President Obama [announced](#) that Tanzania and Malawi are the first two countries to be eligible for funding under the [Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund](#), led by USAID and the Department of State. The Challenge Fund will encourage and support innovative and community-led solutions to ensure adolescent girls receive a quality education. The Challenge Fund—to be managed by USAID—will use a unique approach that allows external partners and the U.S. government to co-create comprehensive and integrated solutions. Ultimately, this will bring together external stakeholders from the private sector, academia, and civil society to help design and implement innovative programs to ensure that girls are able to remain in school. Challenge Fund interventions will be shaped to meet the specific needs of each priority country. To help determine country-specific approaches, consultations will be held with host country government officials, civil society representatives, mission and embassy staff, Peace Corps volunteers where applicable, and Washington-based officials, among others. Any potential programming will include robust planning for monitoring and evaluation.



PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED

Examples of Programs to Empower Adolescent Girls

ADDRESSING FGM/C IN GUINEA

In Guinea, the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues helped to protect vulnerable girls against the prejudicial practices of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) through a \$1.5 million project from the Secretary's Full Participation Fund. This project established a national multi-media awareness campaign to promote behavior change against FGM/C in Guinea with key partners, including the Government of Guinea, UNICEF, and male religious and tribal leaders, health, media and civil society networks. The project collected data on the practice via community surveys and provided capacity building and specialized training for those directly involved in cutting such as health workers, traditional excision practitioners, religious leaders, and community associations.

NO LOST GENERATION INITIATIVE

Education is a key component of PRM's protection work in humanitarian response. The U.S. government's humanitarian assistance has supported the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative, which since its launch in 2013 has mobilized the international community around the impact of the Syria crisis on children, youth and adolescents, including adolescent girls. The initiative establishes a 3-5 year framework that remains flexible to respond to changing dynamics in affected countries to expand the delivery and access while increasing focus on the quality of education, child protection, social protection and adolescent and youth engagement services inside Syria and in neighboring refugee host countries. In 2015, NLG partners supported 1.2 million children with community-based child protection interventions, including psychosocial care and support services and 535,000 adolescents and youth were trained to provide leadership at the local level including for social cohesion and community engagement. Inside Syria 3.2 million children were enrolled in education and in the refugee host countries 700,000 Syrian refugee children accessed formal and non-formal education opportunities.

Department of State Grants

Engaging with civil society organizations is vital to the work of empowering adolescent girls and addressing harmful social norms. Various bureaus and offices in the Department of State, including S/GWI, provide grants directly to local, grassroots civil society organizations that are uniquely attuned to the precise set of issues facing their communities, including those which hinder gender equality for girls and women. Supporting such organizations to address the context-specific variables that drive poor outcomes for girls is one of the most effective means to catalyze shifts in attitudes at the local level.

Some U.S. embassies have foreign assistance funding that could support the health, safety, education, and rights of adolescent girls globally. Embassies could provide grants to civil society organizations—particularly those that are women- or girl-led—that have demonstrated success in identifying and addressing the main challenges faced by girls in a given country or region, or in reaching the girls with the greatest need. For programs focused on youth such as the [English Access Microscholarship Program](#), [EducationUSA](#), high school and undergraduate exchanges, or Ambassador’s Youth Councils, embassies should work to ensure that these programs are gender-balanced and gender sensitive. Embassies can also encourage program participants, particularly those who are female, to mentor adolescent girls and conduct awareness campaigns on the importance of girls’ education, rights, health, and empowerment.

GOAL 4. STRENGTHEN COORDINATION WITH U.S. GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL, AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS

While the efforts of the global community have realized important gains in reducing inequality for girls and women, the barriers that remain are complex, multifaceted, and resistant to change. As also outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, overcoming these significant remaining barriers to development will demand deliberate and sustained coordination among all of the stakeholders whose work has an impact on the lives of adolescent girls’ globally to make the best use of our resources and maximize the impact of our investments. In implementing this strategy, the Department will prioritize collaboration with the legislative branch, given its leadership on, and long-term commitment to, these issues. The Department will also seek to strengthen its coordination with bilateral and multilateral partners, the private sector, and civil society to harmonize interventions, avoid duplication of efforts, and exchange best practices.

A key component of the Department’s implementation of this strategy is coordination with its interagency partners, especially USAID, Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Persistent poor educational and health outcomes for adolescent girls, as well as their subjection to harmful practices, impact the efforts of many U.S. government priorities, including Feed the Future, PEPFAR, Children in Adversity, the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the work of many offices across the Department of State, USAID, and other relevant agencies. Efforts to empower adolescent girls directly support the objectives of other United States strategies, including the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally, and the Action Plan on Children in Adversity.

Examples of Coordination to Empower Adolescent Girls

WISCI GIRLS STEAM CAMP

The Department of State's Women in Science (WiSci) Girls STEAM camp, held at Gashora Girls Academy in Rwanda in July to August 2015, brought nearly 120 secondary and high school female students from eight African countries and the U.S. together for three weeks of cultural exchange and hands-on learning in the fields of science, technology, engineering, art & design, and mathematics (STEAM). In-kind and financial contributions from all partners—including AOL Charitable Foundation, Intel Foundation, Microsoft, the United Nations Foundation's Girl Up Campaign, Rwanda Girls Initiative, Rwandan Ministry of Education, African Leadership Academy, and the Meridian International Center—brought nearly \$1.4 million in value to the girls' camp. Organizing partners crafted a curriculum that combined exercises in coding and robotics, mentoring sessions, project-based learning, and team exercises. The WiSci camp has inspired the participants to bring STEAM and Girl Up clubs to their home schools, continue working on group projects, and serve as mentors for younger girls in their communities.

CHARGE

At the Clinton Global Initiative in 2014, the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution and the No Ceilings Initiative at the Clinton Foundation convened a global collective to address and advance "second generation" issues in girls' education. This collective of more than 40 organizations—including USAID, the Department of State, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation—is known as CHARGE (Collaborative Harnessing Ambition and Resources for Girls' Education). Through CHARGE, each partner organization makes a commitment to address one of five CHARGE priorities: (1) Access, (2) Safety, (3) Quality Learning, (4) Transitions, and (5) Leadership. Currently, CHARGE brings together more than \$800 million in commitments.



PHOTO: USAID

GOAL 5. INTEGRATE A FOCUS ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGHOUT THE DEPARTMENT'S OPERATING STRUCTURE

Pursuant to the Secretary's Policy Guidance on Gender Equality, the Department of State will continue to strengthen management and oversight, build human capital, and emphasize training around gender equality, with a particular emphasis on the importance of addressing issues facing adolescent girls. To implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy, the Department will:

- ◆ Encourage diplomatic and development programs to address adolescent girls in strategic and budget planning and monitoring and evaluation of results.
- ◆ Seek to identify strategy leads at each embassy to facilitate communication and create a network of Department staff working across sectors to address the needs of adolescent girls and ensure the implementation of the strategy serves broader diplomatic and development priorities.
- ◆ Offer training to employees on issues faced by adolescent girls. Such training should elucidate how challenges such as CEFM, FGM/C, and poor educational attainment and health outcomes for girls' impacts their work, and should feature best practices for working with communities, families, and girls themselves to shift social norms and increase girls' access information, skills, services, and support. All staff whose work responsibilities are related to empowering adolescent girls will be encouraged to complete classroom or distance learning gender equality training available through the Foreign Service Institute.
- ◆ Assemble existing tools and resources online to help country staff and staff across the Department highlight and address the challenges facing adolescent girls. This may include toolkits to plan girl-focused events or campaigns, statistics and fact-sheets to inform op-eds and remarks, and resources to inform program design and data collection or facilitate youth participation in programs. Where tools or resources do not currently exist, the Secretary's Office of Global Women's issues will work with associated bureaus to develop these. An online portal could also serve as a platform to exchange lessons, share ideas, and build communities of practice.
- ◆ Make efforts to disseminate the strategy broadly, including by translating it into several languages, making it easily accessible online, and sharing through cables, as well as elevating it at global, regional, and country-level meetings with embassy and mission staff.

MEASURING RESULTS

The Department of State continues to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure the effectiveness of its foreign assistance investments and that bureaus and embassies are integrating sex-disaggregated data into reporting mechanisms. The United States was also a strong advocate for the incorporation of sex-disaggregated data throughout the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



PHOTO: PEACE CORPS

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED



As noted above, priority thematic areas of focus are promoting legal and policy frameworks that protect girls' rights and addressing harmful practices, in particular CEFM and FGM/C. While quantifying the impact of the Department's efforts in these areas is not always straightforward, illustrative indicators are suggested below for bureaus and embassies to demonstrate and track their efforts to implement this strategy.

1. Increase Diplomatic Engagement on Issues Affecting Adolescent Girls
 - ◊ Number of resolutions supported at the United Nations on issues affecting adolescent girls
 - ◊ Number of laws drafted, proposed, or adopted with USG assistance designed to protect girls' rights, prevent or respond to GBV, or expand girls access to education, health and services
2. Engage Adolescent Girls and their Communities through Public Diplomacy and Outreach
 - ◊ Number of events held at embassies focused on the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls
 - ◊ Number of events held at embassies that directly engage adolescent girls
 - ◊ Number of adolescent girls included in existing programs focused on education, health, and other areas that have a particular impact on adolescent girls
 - ◊ Number of girl activists/advocates engaged by embassies to inform country initiatives and promote their work.
3. Enhance and Expand Programming to Empower Adolescent Girls
 - ◊ Number of new programs created or supported focused on adolescent girls as a target population and/or have a commitment to advancing the priority thematic areas
4. Strengthen Coordination among USG, International and Private Sector Partners
 - ◊ Number of bilateral partnerships formed around adolescent girls rights and empowerment
 - ◊ Number of public-private partnerships formed around adolescent girls rights and empowerment
5. Integrate a Focus on Adolescent Girls throughout the Department's Operating Structure
 - ◊ Number of trainings held integrating content on the issues faced by adolescent girls

Department staff are also encouraged to consult with civil society experts and advocates to develop and establish indicators for programs and policies.

All efforts under this strategy will be guided by the Department of State's evaluation policy, which provides a framework to implement evaluations of programs, projects, and activities that are carried out and funded by the Department. The Department will make a deliberate effort to link policies and programs to the goals elaborated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular efforts will be linked to the achievement of targets under Goal 4 on education and Goal 5 on gender, especially target 5.3 to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation."



Adolescence should be a time of learning and growing, a time of endless possibility. But for the nearly 600 million girls growing up in the developing world today, adolescence is too often a time when doors close and opportunities are limited. USAID and our community of partners are committed to changing that. When we empower girls with education and opportunity, we help communities thrive and nations prosper. And that makes the world a better place for everyone.

—Gayle Smith, Administrator, USAID

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

USAID'S COMMITMENT TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS

USAID's commitment to empowering adolescent girls to reach their full potential is reflected in the Agency's larger efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. The Agency holds decades of experience leading advances for greater gender equality and empowerment that benefit adolescent girls; however, these activities have not been expressed in a comprehensive framework. This implementation plan reflects USAID's engagement with adolescent girls, aged 10-19, and the Agency's work to address the diversity of opportunities, possibilities, and challenges that adolescent girls encounter. USAID's contributions to the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy draw from the Agency's existing gender framework to amplify development efforts that advance gender equality for adolescent girls. In turn, these investments create opportunities for adolescent girls to increase their contributions and ability to benefit from the development of their societies. The sections below highlight the Agency's attention to developing best practices for strengthening efforts to integrate adolescent girls into programs and interventions, and to ensure their needs are met.

This implementation plan articulates and builds upon existing USAID and U.S. government policies and strategies that address the specific opportunities and challenges facing adolescent girls. The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy that guides the Agency's work on gender is an integral part of USAID's policy framework. USAID's policy framework also includes documents oriented to the particular challenges confronting youth, such as the Youth in Development Policy; the Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action; the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy; and the U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity. The policy framework also speaks to gender-specific vulnerabilities, including the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally; the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security; USAID's LGBT Vision for Action; the USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy; and the Agency's Gender and Extreme Poverty Discussion Paper. Through these documents the Agency addresses impediments, risks, and goals for women throughout their lives, including and especially during adolescence. USAID's commitment to empowerment, protection, and participation of females and males in their societies is reflected in the principles in the USAID Policy Framework 2011–2015. These principles are consistent with key points made in the 2015 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), and were developed in conjunction with other related USAID policies.

USAID's "whole-of-girl" approach encompasses the interconnected events that resonate across a girl's life from birth to adulthood. The Agency's programs address the differentiated needs of girls in specific stages of adolescence, recognizing that the challenges young adolescents encounter are distinct from those experienced by older adolescents approaching adulthood. Adolescent girls of all ages are an often overlooked, but fundamental, population for achieving development goals and unlocking the full human potential of societies. Their full participation in development efforts contributes to more sustainable investments to end cycles of poverty; to build resilient, democratic societies; to improve health and nutrition outcomes; and to strengthen economies. Yet the social, legal, health, nutritional, and economic challenges that adolescent girls experience constrain their ability to be self-determining and to realize their human rights.

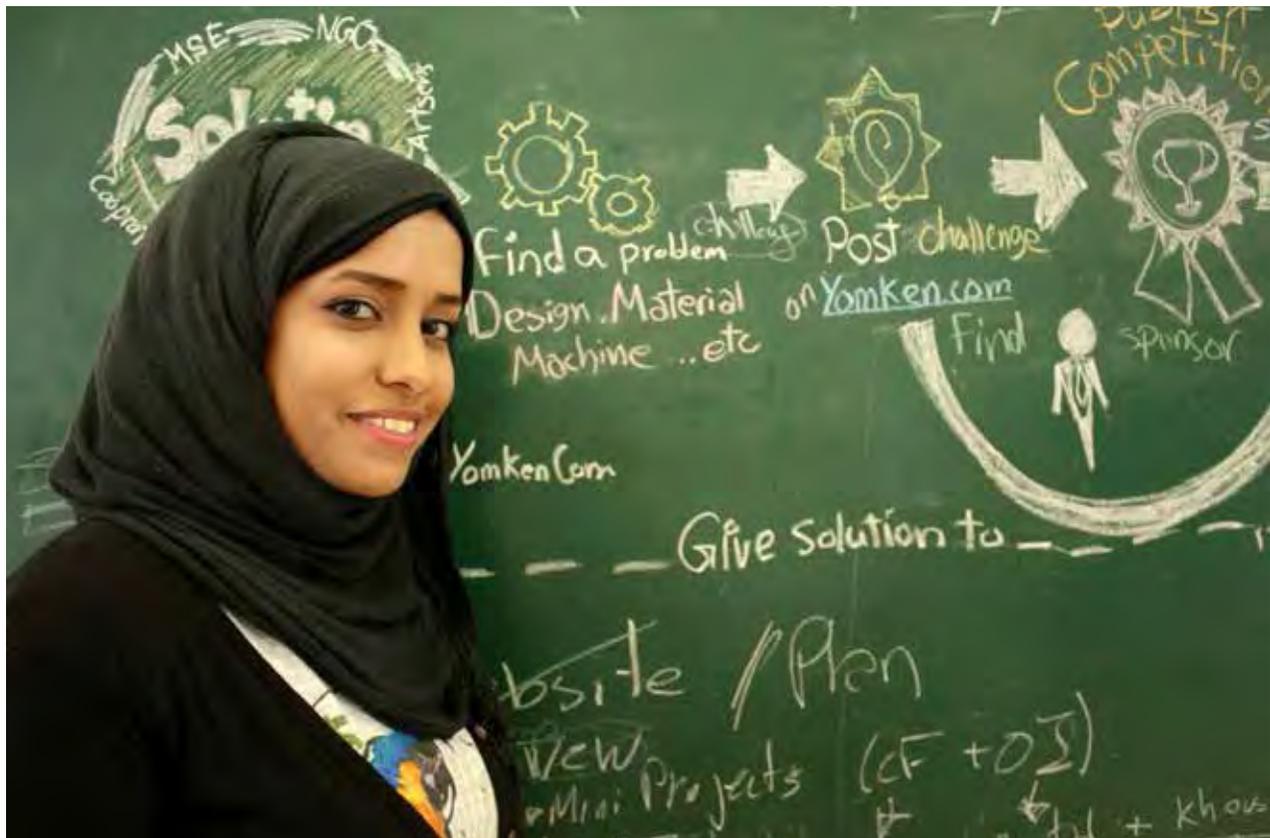
OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Consistent with USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy (Gender Policy), addressing adolescent girls' equality and empowerment is a shared Agency responsibility. Success depends on the commitment of all Agency staff. Over the last three years under the Gender Policy senior managers and Mission Directors have been held accountable for ensuring that gender equality and female empowerment are addressed strategically in their portfolios.

Regional bureaus serve as the primary liaison between USAID/Washington and mission Gender Advisors and focal points, and provide information on research findings and programming approaches related to women's and girls' empowerment. Pillar bureaus provide guidance on how gender equality and female empowerment can be advanced or achieved through their technical sectors, ensure gender integration in training, and develop related tools and resources.

The Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GenDev) within the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and the Environment (E3) not only provides guidance to E3 sectors, but also coordinates Agency-level communications, training, and technical assistance support. The Office of the Administrator uses the power of that office to highlight the importance of gender equality and female empowerment as key development objectives. Within the Administrator's Office, the Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment spearheads the advancement of U.S. development assistance efforts to serve and empower women and ensure gender equality goals are met. The Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning tracks the implementation of the Gender Policy at the Agency level and ensures that gender equality and female empowerment objectives and results are incorporated into Agency-wide policies and strategies.

PHOTO: USAID



As articulated in the Gender Policy, Gender Advisors and focal points based at headquarters and in USAID’s missions around the world support their respective operating units to advance this effort. Accompanying the Gender Policy, detailed policy implementation guidance (in ADS 205) outline the core practices for USAID staff. These include gender integration throughout the program cycle, mandatory country-level and project-level gender analyses, and inclusion of gender in solicitation documents and activity monitoring and evaluation. As a result, there has been high demand from missions for technical assistance and training to help support Policy implementation. In response, USAID has been, and will continue, training all staff about gender issues via a suite of in-person and online trainings, increasing in-house expertise and using internal and external technical experts. The Agency also developed additional training and resources on how to integrate gender-based violence prevention and response, as well as women, peace, and security objectives into USAID’s work across sectors. To strengthen coordination, information, and resource sharing USAID utilizes its gender working groups, which include representatives of various bureaus and offices across the Agency.

While the Gender Policy provides an important framework through which the Agency structures its approach to adolescent girls, USAID’s Youth in Development Policy establishes the Agency’s efforts to mainstream youth programs and priorities. The new Youth Coordinator position is proposed to provide leadership and oversight for the Agency’s implementation of USAID’s Youth in Development Policy. The Coordinator is responsible for youth development issues, advocating for and integrating youth into Agency initiatives, overseeing policy coherence, supporting implementation and training, and serving as a senior representative on youth issues in the interagency and external community in coordination with bureaus, missions, and other relevant Agency coordinators. This position will provide technical leadership and direction on youth programming trends and consult on program design, implementation, evaluation, and outreach. The Coordinator will work collaboratively to develop tools, action plans, and provide technical support for policy implementation. Youth Advisors are strategically placed in regional and pillar bureaus and in the missions that have youth outreach and programming in their portfolios. Moving forward, the Agency’s approach to adolescent girls will establish increased coordination and integration between youth- and gender-focused programming.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

USAID bases its development efforts for adolescent girls on the Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, which establishes three objectives for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Programs designed to advance adolescent girls’ development reference these goals as part of the Agency’s whole-of-girl approach:

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

Through these goals USAID advances gender equality throughout a woman’s life, including childhood and adolescence. Investments made in her early childhood are built upon during adolescence and prepare her with the skills, competencies, analytic abilities, and better health and nutrition, which all will benefit her as an adult.

USAID programs are implemented in sectors where the specific needs of adolescent girls and the barriers they face are well understood, such as in child, early, and forced marriage; in others, USAID continues to develop and implement approaches to ensure that these areas are addressed, including, for example, adolescent girls' greater inclusion as users of digital technology. USAID is increasing efforts in all of its work to break down silos and to coordinate across sectors. These efforts continue to improve the Agency's efficacy in producing desired outcomes, and are essential for addressing the interlocking barriers that disempower and disadvantage adolescent girls. The success of the Agency's development efforts depend on engaged collaboration with women and girls themselves, soliciting their knowledge and solutions while deepening their capacity for decision-making and driving social transformation. USAID forms partnerships with community leaders, governments, change agents, organizations, and experts to support local advocacy and change, and advances efforts to influence social beliefs, behaviors, and gender norms that are harmful to women and girls across society. Overall, programs and interventions build on the evidence base for how women's and girls' increased equality and empowerment benefit all of society.

Reducing Gender Disparities: Access to Resources

USAID supports programs and interventions to improve adolescent girls' access to resources pertaining to education, economic empowerment, technology and innovation, and health and nutrition information and services that include family planning, and water, sanitation and hygiene programs. Barriers to accessing resources are frequently interlocking or cumulative, demonstrating the importance of eliminating silos and working across sectors. A key implementation approach to improving girls' access to resources is working with communities to change social norms surrounding the value of girls. These approaches include developing societal attitudes supporting the importance of educational attainment; enhancing girls' potential as future wage earners and entrepreneurs; improving services for survivors of violence; and the cross-generational positive effects of providing adolescent girls with age- and developmentally-appropriate health and nutrition knowledge, skills, and reproductive health services.

Adolescent girls' access to resources is affected by their life circumstances, such as their experiences of poverty, their exposure to gender-based violence, and the low value their families and communities place on educating girls. Globally, many adolescent girls are married and already mothers, heightening the importance of development approaches that take the diversity of adolescent experiences into account in designing interventions to expand women's and girls' access to resources. USAID's Vision for Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children illustrates the critical necessity of ending child, early, and forced marriage practices, as well as designing interventions to address the specific needs of married children, such as addressing their frequent social isolation, increased risk of gender-based violence, and high prevalence of early and frequent childbearing. Vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls are disproportionately affected by gender discrimination and inequalities, including girls who are out of school; unemployed; married and/or parenting; disabled; lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (LBT) individuals; and girls from ethnic- or religious- minority communities. The barriers these girls face with regard to accessing basic services, such as education, employment, and health and nutrition are often compounded and reflect larger constraints, such as gender discrimination in nationality laws and gaps in universal birth registration. USAID focuses on extending interventions and programs to these girls so they can also benefit from their societies' development.

Reducing Gender-based Violence

USAID takes a whole-community approach—engaging women and girls and men and boys—to change attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence; and promote positive cultural norms and gender roles such as through community and school programs to support dialogue on gender

norms with adolescents of all ages. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, with their own set of unique needs that must be met to provide quality assistance.

USAID's gender-based violence response and prevention programs that highlight adolescent girls' needs pertain to health policy and services; community mobilization; life skills and gender transformative education for adolescent girls and boys; educational programs, including training teachers in preventing school-related gender-based violence; responding to and preventing gender-based violence in contexts of conflict or instability; and integrating gender-based violence prevention and response programs into workforce trainings and workplaces. The Agency's gender-based violence portfolio also includes work that seeks to end harmful customary practices that have strong repercussions for adolescent girls, such as child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting. USAID's efforts to partner with men and boys increase the sustainability and social integration of efforts to address the challenges that adolescent girls encounter.

The Agency addresses programmatic areas where gender-based violence is cross-cutting, such as Crisis, Conflict, and Emergencies; Trafficking in Persons; and Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

Increase the Participation of Women and Girls in Decision-Making

To fully participate in all sectors of society women and girls must not only have access to resources, but be empowered to use their access, to make decisions about the best course of action for their lives, and to effectively advocate for themselves, their families, and the broader community. Women often do not have equal decision-making roles in households, communities, or societies, and yet women's and girls' participation from the community to the national level is shown to lead to more sustainable solutions. Adolescent girls have even less decision-making power than adult women, and yet the decisions made for adolescent girls—and to a lesser extent by them—directly shape their adult lives. Addressing women's and girls' ability to make critical choices in their lives—such as pertaining to education, marriage, economic activities and investments, civic participation, health, and reproductive choices—is central to USAID's work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

STRATEGIC GOALS

USAID works cooperatively across U.S. government agencies and with governments around the world to create the change women and girls need to fully participate in their societies, as reflected in the three goals of the Gender Policy: to improve access to resources; reduce gender-based violence; and increase women's and girls' participation in decision-making. To capture the impact of program activities and to drive improved evaluation and learning USAID collects sex- and age- disaggregated data that document the programming that best achieves desired outcomes at different stages of adolescence and across sexes. Increased collection of data disaggregated by established age bands consistent across the Agency would advance efforts to design more effective programs for age-specific populations, such as the newly established Let Girls Learn ALC metric (discussed below). USAID continues to coordinate, amplify, and sharpen programming that engages and benefits adolescent girls, and advances the three objectives of the Gender Policy.



The Agency does this by furthering efforts to mainstream and integrate gender throughout programs and interventions; by documenting progress, integrating lessons learned, and promoting best practices; and by expanding collaborations and partnerships. Within these activities the Agency’s focus on adolescent girls is maintained and strategically enhanced. Below are key activities within each category to demonstrate the Agency’s efforts in these areas.

GOAL 1. MAINSTREAM AND INTEGRATE ISSUES THAT IMPACT ADOLESCENT GIRLS ACROSS SECTORS

Education Policy: USAID’s Education Strategy is currently under revision, but will emerge with increased integration of gender into the Agency’s educational programs, including highlighting the attention given to adolescent girls independently and through the Let Girls Learn Initiative. The Education Strategy establishes the Agency’s gender-equitable approach in its initial goals to improve reading skills in primary grades, to improve workforce development programs, and to increase access to education in crisis and conflict affected environments, all of which support the Agency’s gender-sensitive equitable approach. Through these goals, USAID’s education services will continue to reach girls, including adolescent girls, in programs that target later grades or provide accelerated learning opportunities for out-of-school youth and prepare adolescent girls with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. The strategy will integrate a focus on adolescent girls across all education goals where appropriate and will call for underlying education programming with a gender-sensitive approach that promotes gender equality.

Updated FGM/C Guidance: USAID’s Automated Directives System program implementation guidance on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is under review and will be updated. As this harmful practice is frequently performed on adolescent girls in areas where FGM/C is prevalent, updating this guidance contributes to efforts aimed at effectively directing

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED



A young girl sits quietly after undergoing FGM/C in Indonesia.

development investments to end this practice. Revisions will include incorporating the Agency's adoption of "mutilation" in the terminology to align with the UN agencies' efforts to highlight the human rights violations inherent in this practice.

Updated Gender Key Issues: Key Issues are topics of special interest that cut across the Agency's work. As part of the 2015 review of the four gender Key Issues, new examples have been created to illustrate the Agency's work on adolescent girls. The examples provide models for what programs with a gender focus on adolescent girls might entail. Through these examples, adolescent girls are elevated as an important focus for programming and within the Agency's priority to integrate gender throughout sectors.

Training: USAID trains staff and implementing partners on the Agency's priority to integrate and mainstream gender across programs and in USAID's internal operations. Gender 101: Gender Equality and USAID is an online training course required for all employees. Gender 102: Putting ADS 205 into Action, and Gender 103: Roles and Responsibilities for Gender Advisors, and the instructor-led course Achieving Development Outcomes through Gender Integration are highly encouraged and/or required for staff working at the program level. The Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health training is an e-learning course that looks specifically at the intersection of adolescence and gender. New resources have been developed to help staff integrate gender-based violence prevention and response into their programs. These include the in-person training, Integrating Gender-based Violence Across Sectors, and various sector-specific toolkits (education; energy and infrastructure; monitoring and evaluation; rule of law; child, early and forced marriage). Additionally, the Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the GenDev Training Director engage across the Agency to ensure that gender is integrated into new training resources, including awareness of the specific needs of adolescent girls.

USAID's Positive Youth Development (PYD) Training Course is designed to increase the capacity of Youth Advisors, Youth Advocates, and Youth Points of Contact at Missions. This Agency training focuses on defining and implementing positive youth development approaches; operationalizing the USAID Youth in Development Policy; increasing understanding of youth development including the influence of cultural norms on adolescents and the transition from youth to adulthood; identifying ways to build soft skills for improved outcomes; communicating global best practice tools for actively and appropriately strengthening youth engagement and leadership in all aspects of programming; supporting cross-sectoral youth programming implementation; and measuring PYD.

GOAL 2. DOCUMENT PROGRESS, INTEGRATE LESSONS LEARNED, AND PROMOTE BEST PRACTICES

Girls Count Act: An important new focus on available data comes from the Girls Count Act. This legislation supports actions to ensure that children in developing countries are officially registered at birth. Through this legislation, U.S. government agencies such as USAID are positioned to assist in progress towards registering all children, particularly girls, in developing countries. Birth registration is essential for accessing many critical services and the protection of rights throughout life, including proving one's identity, owning property, enrolling in education, gaining employment, opening a bank account, conferring citizenship on one's children, and voting. While this legislation is important for all individuals, it has particular positive ramifications for girls who are less likely globally to have their births officially registered. In addition to the benefit birth registration confers on all children, the improvement in population data will be a

valuable tool for designing evidence-driven programs and to ensure that adolescent girls have equal access to services and rights.

Let Girls Learn ALC Metric: USAID's Agency Leadership Council (ALC) is an internal body that advances strategic programmatic and administrative issues. ALC metrics measure and report on specific milestones across programs to monitor progress on key development goals at established intervals. Through the Agency's Let Girls Learn ALC metric that requires age- and sex- disaggregated data in new Let Girls Learn program reporting requirements, the Agency will capture the investments made in adolescent girls in education programs and the continued progress in reaching this population. Through this data, the Agency will also be able to articulate more precisely where programming for adolescent girls is clustered and how programs across sectors are delivering programming for adolescent girls within defined age ranges. With this data, USAID will be able to better design programs and interventions, and use enriched evidence to determine program priorities.

Passages: The Passages project aims to develop evidence and promote application of effective, scalable interventions to transform social norms related to sexual and reproductive health among youth, especially newly married couples, first-time parents, and very young adolescents. Passages will bridge the gap between science and effective policy and practice by: piloting, replicating, and scaling-up social norm interventions and applying implementation science principles to explain what makes interventions effective and sustainable at scale in real-world contexts; strengthening in-country capacity to plan, implement, and monitor and evaluate the scale-up of effective pilot initiatives; and distilling and sharing evidence and fostering dialogue on integration, measurement, and evaluation of normative interventions.

Building an Evidence Base to Delay Child Marriage: Building an Evidence Base to Delay Child Marriage is a USAID-funded program designed to evaluate the effectiveness of four strategies to delay the age of marriage among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan African countries with a high prevalence of child marriage. The study produced data on the most effective strategies for delaying child marriage, including findings that point to the critical importance of approaches that elevate girls' status within their families and communities, that increase their skills and knowledge, and that can be economically implemented. Overall, interventions to delay child marriage designed to be simple and sustainable were found to be most effective. With detailed information about each of the three countries in this study, the program provides important evidence that USAID will utilize in continued program design, evaluation, and implementation.

YouthPower: USAID's YouthPower project strengthens local, national, and global systems to achieve sustainable, positive youth outcomes in health, education, civic participation, and economic empowerment. YouthPower supports cross-sectoral, positive youth development (PYD) investments, and promotes significant youth engagement as essential to ensuring all youth are empowered to reach their full potential. YouthPower promotes a culture of learning by conducting evaluations and disseminating technical reports, tools, and products through its website, which is a repository of shared learning as well as an active site for use by communities of practice, PYD practitioners, and youth advocates.

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI): The WEAI is a first of its kind standardized tool which measures the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector in an effort to identify ways to overcome obstacles and constraints women face. The WEAI has been used to explore the linkages between empowerment and well-being outcomes for households, women and children across different countries and contexts. Gender parity is

also measured by the WEAI, grounded in evidence showing that equalizing access to assets and opportunities for women, and men helps achieve better development outcomes—such as better health and nutrition for women and their families, greater investments in education for children, and poverty reduction. A suite of tools and trainings relating to the WEAI can be found on the Feed the Future website.

GOAL 3. EXPAND COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Let Girls Learn: The Let Girls Learn initiative is a collaborative approach enabling USAID to work with other U.S. government agencies, and to partner with civil society and the private sector to find solutions for keeping adolescent girls in school. Through Let Girls Learn, the U.S. government is working to address the range of challenges confronting adolescent girls around the world, building upon the broad portfolio of existing programs all aimed at addressing the complex and varied barriers preventing adolescent girls from attending and completing school and from realizing their potential as adults. Through the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund, USAID will use a multi-sectoral approach to create innovative solutions for removing the barriers that prevent girls from continuing their education.

SPRING Accelerator: The SPRING Accelerator is a public-private partnership formed by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Nike Foundation, and USAID. SPRING is designed to accelerate economic empowerment for girls in parts of Africa and Asia by delivering technical and financial support to early-stage enterprises developing life-enhancing products and services that enable girls to safely learn, earn, and save. This five-year program is now underway in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda with planned expansion to other countries in South Asia and East Africa over the next two years. The first eighteen participants were selected in May 2015 and attended an ideation training that resulted in strategies, product prototypes, and initial marketing and development using design principles specialized for adolescent girls. Local and global mentors are paired with participants to ensure the proper available support for achieving the accelerator's objectives.

Women and Girls Lead Global (WGLG): WGLG is a media-based public-private alliance between Independent Television Service, the Ford Foundation, USAID, and CARE that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. The partnership includes a ten-episode documentary film series each year about women and girls rising above dire circumstances to establish better lives and conditions for themselves, their families, and communities. Currently active in Bangladesh, Colombia, El Salvador, India, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, and Peru, WGLG combines the power of media with locally led social action campaigns to engage schools and communities to take action to address the challenges faced by women and girls across the globe.

MEASURING USAID'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADOLESCENT GIRL STRATEGY

USAID's Gender Policy guides the Agency's efforts to increase gender equality and women's empowerment, which encompasses efforts to address the specific development needs of adolescent girls through the whole-of-girl approach. The objectives of the Gender Policy are met, in part, through advancing the goals of the Adolescent Girls Strategy. The progress and continued success of this implementation plan will be measured by indicators marking progress on meeting the three strategic goals below. Progress will also be captured through broader indicators designed to address gender equality and youth empowerment.

Advances Towards Meeting Strategic Goals

Since standard indicators are not currently in place to measure progress on improving development outcomes for adolescent girls, new custom or standard indicators specific to adolescent girls will be proposed in consultation with missions, program staff, and the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F) to measure progress on the implementation plan's goals. Illustrative indicators²³ are suggested below. In addition, existing processes and standard indicators will be used to measure broad progress towards equality and empowerment for adolescent girls through a variety of USAID programs.

Data will be collected and reported through a variety of mechanisms such as the Performance Plans and Reports (PPRs) and, if necessary, data calls on USAID's work.²⁴ Data will be reported in coordination with reporting on the implementation of the broad Adolescent Girls Strategy as determined by the working group called for in the strategy.

Illustrative indicators aligned to each of the three strategic goals include:

GOAL 1. MAINSTREAM AND INTEGRATE ISSUES THAT IMPACT ADOLESCENT GIRLS ACROSS SECTORS, demonstrated by an increase in the integration of adolescent girls into new interventions across sectors.

- ◆ Number of new projects that are designed that integrate adolescent girls as primary beneficiaries or improve the status and value of adolescent girls in their societies.

GOAL 2. DOCUMENT PROGRESS, INTEGRATE LESSONS LEARNED, AND PROMOTE BEST PRACTICES, to enrich and expand available data disaggregated by sex and age which will inform program design and support best practices across sectors.

- ◆ Number of new projects that collect data disaggregated by sex and age (or age band).
- ◆ Number of research studies funded by the Agency to build evidence for interventions that best produce positive outcomes for adolescent girls.
- ◆ Number of new trainings or materials (e.g., toolkits, how-to notes, and fact sheets) developed to communicate best practices on adolescent girl interventions.

GOAL 3. EXPAND COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS, illustrated by the increase in USAID partnerships (host government, civil society private partnerships, other United States Government agencies, or donors) working to address the barriers facing adolescent girls.

- ◆ Number of new partnerships working on issues of adolescent girls.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE INDICATORS: These standard indicators measure results that are directly attributable to the U.S. government's programs, projects, and activities across agencies, as well as outcomes and impacts to which U.S. government programming contributed. Performance target and result data are collected against these indicators on an annual basis. At a programmatic level, some of the joint USAID-Department of State Foreign Assistance gender indicators may help to describe the impact of USAID's work on adolescent girls. As an example, the Foreign Assistance indicator on increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities could be used to monitor and evaluate progress on changing attitudes that inform the barriers disadvantaging and disempowering adolescent girls. For streamlining purposes, it is important to note that these indicators are already collected by missions through the existing PPR process. Relevant existing indicators include, but are not limited to:

GNDR-1: Number of legal instruments drafted, proposed, or adopted with USG assistance designed to promote gender equality or non-discrimination against women or girls at the national or sub-national level.

GNDR-4: Percentage of participants reporting increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities.

GNDR-6: Number of people reached by a USG-funded intervention providing GBV services (e.g., health, legal, psycho-social counseling, shelters, hotlines, other).

YOUTH INDICATORS: USAID's Youth Corps is currently developing new metrics to capture data in key areas to better inform the design of youth programming, including programming that engages and benefits adolescent girls. Overall, these indicators will measure the outcomes described in the USAID Youth in Development Policy. USAID Missions and Operating Units are highly encouraged to disaggregate all youth indicators by age and required to disaggregate by sex. These indicators will also be used by the Department of State.

NEXT STEPS

This implementation plan provides an overview of USAID's whole-of-girl approach and how the Agency's programming both addresses the challenges adolescent girls encounter and promotes opportunities for adolescent girls to advance and thrive. The Agency's forward-looking priorities include further development of best practices and investing resources into emerging fields.

Best Practices

Programs that benefit adolescent girls are integrated into the investments USAID currently makes across sectors, yet the Agency continues to adopt smarter, more efficient methods to improve upon existing efforts. USAID does this by increasing adolescent girls' participation in program design and implementation with attention to the diversity of the girl participants, including hard-to-reach girls. Program design also strives to reduce silos and prioritize cross-sectoral collaboration to increase the effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, the Agency builds upon its whole-of-community, intergenerational approach that engages men and women, boys and girls to address the barriers negatively affecting adolescent girls holistically, including negotiating social behaviors, gender norms, and the perceived social value of girls and women.

Emerging Fields

USAID continues to design programs and interventions that expand into new areas to address the challenges that adolescent girls face and to further opportunities for adolescent girls to benefit from, and participate in, the development of their nations. Key areas in which USAID is developing future programming include adolescent girls' mental health, their exploitation as domestic workers, the development of online privacy and security guidelines to protect adolescent girls as they increase their use of digital technology, and expanding the Agency's work on the role of adolescent girls in countering violent extremism.

CONCLUSION

USAID's commitment to adolescent girls is ongoing with an eye to improving outcomes and program efficiency as the Agency continues to work in smarter, more focused ways. Under the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy, USAID will continue to build on the established whole-of-girl approach both within the work of the Agency and in U.S. government Interagency efforts to maximize every avenue for meeting the development needs of adolescent girls, to expand on their opportunities, and to build more democratic and resilient societies.



When I visit with Peace Corps Volunteers in the field, I often meet the girls with whom they work — girls with big dreams and bright smiles, girls not so different from your daughters and mine. Yet all too often in their communities, the opportunity to pursue an education past primary school is a privilege for the lucky few, not a right for every girl. There is no other development investment that offers the long term inter-generational impact than educating a girl. When a girl's potential is unleashed, she becomes a powerful catalyst for change in her family, community, nation and the world. Peace Corps Volunteers work every day to unleash and cultivate that potential. That's why protecting and promoting the rights and abilities of girls — especially adolescent girls—is fundamental to everything we do.

—Carrie Hessler-Radelet,
Director of the United States
Peace Corps

U.S. PEACE CORPS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PEACE CORPS' COMMITMENT TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The Peace Corps holds girls' education and empowerment to be central to just and equitable development. Educating girls and ensuring that they have unfettered access to the resources and opportunities they require to develop, grow, and emerge is both a moral imperative as well as a known development accelerator. Universal standards informing the Peace Corps' approach to development specifically highlight the need to address matters concerning girls' education and empowerment. [Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states that access to education is a basic human right and [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) maintains the right for all to an inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Added to this moral imperative is the growing evidence base that demonstrates the quantifiable development gains that come from educating girls and creating economic and civic opportunities for women. Educating girls and facilitating the development of the skills and capacities they need to emerge and succeed as fully functioning members of society is not just morally obligatory; it is also the foundation for good development.

The Peace Corps recognizes that girls—especially adolescent girls—face challenges that are unique to their gender and that frequently interact in a multi-causal manner. Inequitable social norms such as lack of value placed on girls' education and participation in the workforce, gender-based violence, child marriage, as well as perceptions around appropriate roles and responsibilities for boys and girls (both in the household and the broader community) often lay the foundation upon which girls' exclusion is built.

Health challenges such as teen pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health issues, inadequate menstrual hygiene management resources, and poor nutrition compound girls' efforts to emerge. Add to this, common structural barriers such as school-related violence, gaps in critical soft skills among girls, gender-inequitable school practices, and inadequately planned and supported transitions from school to employment, and participation in the workforce. Finally, poverty/economic instability, disability, ethnic or religious discrimination, limited linguistic ability, and/or HIV status render already marginalized girls exponentially more vulnerable.

Given these unique and often compounding challenges girls and young women face, the Peace Corps prioritizes working with girls using an inclusive, social-ecological approach. Peace Corps Volunteers work with girls, but also with their parents and caregivers, teachers, school administrators, community and religious leaders, counterparts, and local service providers to address constraints and obstacles and maximize opportunities. Since its inception, the Peace Corps has worked with girls and young women in myriad capacities, with girls serving as students and beneficiaries, as well as partners and counterparts. Peace Corps Volunteers have worked with adolescent girls through direct classroom teaching as well as through non-formal tutoring and mentoring opportunities. Volunteers in all programming sectors from Education, Community Economic Development, Environment, and Agriculture to Health and Youth in Development find opportunities to work with girls, affirm their worth, and build their capacity. This multi-disciplinary, "whole-of-girl" approach leverages the unique access and entry afforded to Peace Corps Volunteers, enabling the Peace Corps to address the challenges girls face in a sustainable, systemic manner.

With 55 years of experience working with adolescent girls and their circles of support, the Peace Corps is poised to scale up its most successful community-based solutions in an integrated manner. The following implementation plan presents a programmatic roadmap by which the Peace Corps is enhancing the work already done by Volunteers in communities and school systems.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Given that the challenges girls face are inherently multi-faceted, the Peace Corps takes a multi-disciplinary approach to its girl-centered programming. Volunteers and staff in all programming areas (sectoral as well as geographic) are trained in gender analysis techniques as well as culturally relevant methods for promoting gender equity. This commitment to promoting gender equity as a shared value is reflected in the agency's guiding policy documents as well as organizational structure. [The Peace Corps Act of 1961](#), the legislation creating the Peace Corps, was amended in 1978 to include the Percy Amendment (Peace Corps Act, section 2502 (d) ensuring that all Volunteers include women in their projects in order to improve women's status and well-being. The Women in Development (WID) office was established in 1982 to ensure that the agency fulfills the mandate of the Percy Amendment. In 1991, the Peace Corps established a WID Policy to ensure that women have access to the skills and technologies offered in all Peace Corps program and training activities.

In 1994, the Peace Corps adopted a gender and development (GAD) approach and gender analysis, which are asset-based and address the needs of both women and men. In 1997, the Peace Corps released GAD resources and tools for Volunteers and staff such as the GAD Training Manual, Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA), and Community Content-Based Instruction (CCBI). In 1999, the WID office formally changed to WID/GAD to reflect the inclusion of both approaches in the Peace Corps' work and a Coordinator was appointed. The WID/GAD Coordinator is charged with supporting efforts to provide technical support to staff and Volunteers and ensuring that gender concerns are integrated throughout all projects and programs.

In 2012, WID/GAD was renamed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GenEq) program to better reflect current trends in Peace Corps' work. GenEq was established as one of the six Cross Sector Programming Priorities (CSPPs) within the Peace Corps. Cross Sector Programming Priorities are ongoing, cross-sector areas of development in which Peace Corps seeks to maximize quality, quantity, and impact of Volunteer activities.

The GenEq Coordinator initiated a strategy to support the formation of a gender working group at headquarters and Points of Contact (POCs) in the field to promote communication and share promising practices. The role of the POCs is to serve as mentors and trainers in gender equity and analysis for their respective posts. Today, the Peace Corps promotes the use of a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment approach to ensure that project activities address the needs of men, women, boys, and girls.

On March 3, 2015, Let Girls Learn, a whole-of-government initiative, was launched by the President and First Lady to address the challenges girls face in accessing education and completing secondary school. Peace Corps' Let Girls Learn program is staffed by a program direction team as well as a technical support unit comprised of gender, training, and monitoring and evaluation specialists. These staff work in close collaboration with various sector specialists to ensure the program promotes evidence-based interventions that complement Peace Corps'



PHOTO: PEACE CORPS

broader programming activities. This cross-sectoral team is responsible for developing programming resources and learning tools as well as implementation training for staff.

Gender Advisors are based in regional offices and each participating country program has a Let Girls Learn Coordinator to assist with program implementation, training, and reporting. The Peace Corps trains all Volunteers serving in participating Let Girls Learn country programs in gender theory and integration as well as in specific intervention methodologies. Coordination of the various aspects of program implementation is assured by the Let Girls Learn program direction team.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Peace Corps is a volunteer-sending development agency, with a mandate for community-led development rather than policy formulation. As such, our contribution to the implementation of the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy will be through accentuating and mainstreaming girl-centered, gender-transformative approaches to community development. The Peace Corps will use the Let Girls Learn (LGL) program as its principal vehicle for implementing and supporting the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy. Let Girls Learn is an enhancement to current girl-centered programming at the Peace Corps. The value-added of Let Girls Learn is integrating evidence-based components into existing successful programs and activities and tailoring training so that staff, Volunteers, and community leaders are competent and motivated to promote these LGL-aligned core activities.

In supporting the Adolescent Girl Strategy, the Peace Corps' goal is that: *Adolescent girls and young women (ages 10–24) are educated and thrive in an enabling environment to live healthy and productive lives.*

This strategy has three corresponding objectives:

- ❖ Improve opportunities for girls to attain quality education;
- ❖ Increase girls' leadership and overall perceived sense of agency; and
- ❖ Increase community engagement in support of positive, gender-equitable norms that facilitate girls' education and full participation in economic and community life.

Increased girls' leadership and overall perceived sense of agency: Agency here is defined as "girls' capacity to act and make informed choices in any given environment." It reflects girls' personal sense of empowerment and can be reflected in the development of soft skills or assets that research highlights are critical for success in education as well as in economic life.

Improved opportunities for girls to attain quality education: These opportunities are reflected in girls' educational attainment (attendance, progression and completion), as well as employability. [Recent findings](#) by the Brookings Institution highlight specific elements of a quality education, including gender-equitable school practices, teacher training and support, links to critical health and support services, and meaningful community engagement, including parents and guardians. ²⁵

Increased community engagement in support of positive, gender-equitable norms that facilitate girls' education and full participation in economic and community life: Engaging communities is essential for creating an enabling environment that champions girls' success, in and out of school. Such engagement, including men, boys, parents, guardians, mentors, and leaders, facilitates positive dialogue around norms as well as action and advocacy in support of girls and young women.

To achieve this goal and related objectives, Let Girls Learn has three specific domains of intervention:

- ◆ Individual girls;
- ◆ Schools;
- ◆ The community.

These domains are conventional areas of intervention for the Peace Corps and are areas where Volunteers can exert special influence. Volunteer primary assignments and core interventions occur in at least one of these domains.

Girls and young women are at the center of the Peace Corps' Adolescent Girls Strategy implementation. The Peace Corps program builds on the resilience of girls, young women, and communities. The social-ecological model captures how social factors influence a girl's education, health, and behavior. By strengthening opportunities and resources for girls and young women in these three levels (individual, school, and the wider community), the Peace Corps' evidence-informed programming seeks to improve education and empowerment outcomes.

The Peace Corps will implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy using the Let Girls Learn program as its principal methodology for enhancing and mainstreaming support to adolescent girls. The program is organized in three pillars: empowering local leaders; community-led interventions; and increasing impact. Through actions and interventions in each of the pillars, the Peace Corps will achieve its program goals for Let Girls Learn.

Pillar One: Empowering Local Leaders

The Peace Corps' theory of change is predicated on capacity and knowledge building as the foundation for sustainable change and development. As such, a major pillar of the Let Girls Learn program is training and skills building for Volunteers, staff, and community leaders in gender concepts, as well as key anchor activities that are proven to improve the lives of girls.

Volunteers serve for 27 months, working with communities and organizations to build capacity and achieve specific project objectives. Given the multiplicity of barriers to girls' education and empowerment, all Volunteers have the opportunity and ability to contribute to the impact of Let Girls Learn, regardless of sector or assignment.

The enhanced training for Volunteers begins with on-boarding of new Volunteers at Staging (pre-departure orientation) events. Volunteers departing for countries participating in Let Girls Learn receive an additional day of training on foundational concepts in gender, identity, inter-cultural competency, and inclusion.

This foundation is built on and expanded during the 9–12 week pre-service training that occurs in-country, where the Volunteers receive training in language as well as the technical skills needed to achieve their assignment's goals and objectives. For Education and Youth Development Volunteers, activities that align with the purpose and objectives of Let Girls Learn will be highlighted, ensuring that these Volunteers are able to use these evidence-based interventions in the course of carrying out their primary assignments.

Intensive trainings on Let Girls Learn-aligned activities will be organized by region and can incorporate both staff and Volunteers. Utilizing a cascading training approach, high-functioning Volunteer representatives and staff will come together for intensive technical training of trainers, promoting girls' education and empowerment from a cross-sectoral, holistic perspective.

These Volunteers and staff serve as program multipliers, returning to their posts and organizing In-Service Trainings (ISTs) for other Volunteers, their counterparts, and community leaders. Through these ISTs, Volunteers receive technical training and assistance in possible activities they can undertake as secondary projects in support of girls' education and empowerment. Community leaders receive high-quality training in the fundamentals of girls' education and empowerment as well as in actual interventions they can undertake in their communities and local context. Through this cascade training model a network of engaged, enthusiastic Volunteers, staff, and community leaders is quickly formed and equipped to promote Let Girls Learn activities locally.

Pillar Two: Community-led Interventions

A second major component of the Peace Corps' Let Girls Learn program is support for community-identified projects. Peace Corps Volunteers work with their communities to develop solutions that create an empowering environment for adolescent girls and young women. These activities are supported with a community contribution of 25% of the total cost of the project, often in-kind, as well as external funds and contributions collected from individual donors through a Peace Corps crowd funding mechanism called the Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP).

Volunteers submit their project proposal to Peace Corps headquarters, and after a thorough technical and financial review, the projects are posted on Peace Corps' website to collect donations from individual donors and private sector organizations. This mechanism provides Peace Corps with an opportunity to raise awareness and engage the American public in taking action to improve the condition of girls globally. In addition, the Peace Corps created the Peace Corps Let Girls Learn Fund, which accepts gifts from individuals, private sector organizations, and philanthropic institutions for the purpose of funding Let Girls Learn PCPP volunteer projects.

Illustrative examples of Let Girls Learn PCPP volunteer projects include funding a girls' GLOW (Girls Leading Our World) leadership camp, constructing latrines for girls at school, providing girls with STEM education and computer literacy training, or building a resource room for girls to study in a safe place. Projects with a focus on men and boys are also eligible for funding if there is an articulated, expected positive impact on the well-being of girls and young women. For example, a leadership camp for boys with sessions focusing on promoting gender awareness and transforming harmful gender norms.

Pillar Three: Increasing Impact

Finally, the Peace Corps is committed to increasing the impact of Let Girls Learn through several mechanisms. The first method involves growing the actual size of the program. Started with an initial group of 13 country programs, it is anticipated that the program will double in size each program year on an opt-in basis for country programs. This will result in more programs in more countries involving more Volunteers and their community leaders.



PHOTO: THOMAS CRISTOFOLETTI FOR USAID

The second mechanism for growing impact is through creating and maintaining active communities of practice in our participating country programs. As Peace Corps programming, training, and evaluation staff plays a critical role in supporting Volunteers in implementing LGL-aligned interventions and designing PCPP projects, the capacity of post staff will be intentionally built through strategic training. Let Girls Learn Gender Regional Advisors will form communities of practice with the Let Girls Learn Coordinators at posts and will offer annual capacity building trainings as well as continuous sharing of best practices. At the country level, Let Girls Learn Coordinators are encouraged to create communities of practice with other actors in the girls' education and empowerment space where none currently exist. This will also deepen the impact of the Let Girls Learn program.

Through the activities of the Let Girls Learn program, the Peace Corps aims to build on a growing body of global evidence that supports community-driven solutions to promote adolescent girls' education and equity. The Peace Corps is prioritizing evidence-based programming that is both feasible and appropriate to local context. Programs are routinely monitored and evaluated using a set of outcome indicators within and among all participating countries. A core set of indicators reflect internationally accepted milestones for achieving girls' education, leadership, and community engagement. In addition to monitoring outcomes in all countries, select promising interventions are evaluated using rigorous designs in order to assess for impact and scale-up. This current effort demonstrates a commitment by Let Girls Learn programs to measure outcomes and impact and to ensure that programs are performing at a level of high quality.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The Peace Corps operates at the invitation of the countries served and has a commitment to creating and supporting programs that address the development priorities of the host governments. Through Let Girls Learn, the Peace Corps has been able to engage with host governments strategically regarding girls' education and empowerment. To promote long-lasting sustainable improvements in the condition of girls, Peace Corps country programs convene local communities of practice, engaging local and national leaders in program design and management with a girl-centered lens.

Within the agency, the Peace Corps seeks the same degree of sustainable integration of enhanced gender awareness, mainstreaming evolving gender policy, and best practices into all programs and interventions, ensuring that gains for girls are not limited to "just" one initiative but are part and parcel of the Peace Corps.

GOAL 1. MAINSTREAM AND INTEGRATE GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAMMING ACROSS SECTORS

Let Girls Learn-Aligned Anchor Activities: Peace Corps Volunteers are encouraged to undertake as many Let Girls Learn-aligned anchor activities as feasible, given their context and the needs presenting in their assignment. These are girl-focused activities commonly undertaken by Peace Corps Volunteers to which an evidence-based enhancement has been added. One example of an anchor activity is Promoting Menstrual Hygiene Management: working with girls to create reusable menstrual pads with the enhancement of incorporating teaching on youth sexual reproductive health. These anchor activities are found in all the sectors in which Peace Corps works (i.e., Promoting Financial Literacy with Girls, Promoting Digital Literacy, or Student-Friendly Schools) and are adolescent girl age- and stage-appropriate. Identifying cross-sectoral anchor activities and developing the supporting technical resources which add a gender-equitable component is a major method by which the Peace Corps is mainstreaming girl-centered programming.

Training: Peace Corps trains all new Volunteers in the basics of gender in development, building skills to work with counterparts to undertake a gender assessment of the community as part of each Volunteer’s community integration plan. Volunteers must demonstrate competency in gender integration in project design and management in order to be sworn in for service. Through Let Girls Learn, the Peace Corps is developing advanced gender training materials for both Volunteers and staff, further refining the knowledge and skills base for improved implementation and mainstreaming. Volunteers, counterparts, and community leaders as well as staff will participate in technical in-service trainings on specific anchor activities.

GOAL 2. MEASURE RESULTS AND SHARPEN PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Country programs are routinely monitored and evaluated using a set of outcome indicators within and among all Let Girls Learn participating countries. A core set of indicators will reflect internationally accepted milestones for achieving girls’ education, leadership, and community engagement, with data disaggregated by sex and age. The Peace Corps also seeks to contribute to the ever-growing body of knowledge regarding successful community-led girls’ education and empowerment interventions. As such, select promising interventions will be evaluated using rigorous designs in order to assess for impact and scale-up. Through monitoring and evaluation, the Peace Corps will track implementation of girl-centered programming for both program management purposes but also with an eye towards enriching the field of girls’ education and empowerment.

GOAL 3. EXPAND COLLABORATION AND DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Recognizing that the issues that prevent girls from fully achieving their goals and aspirations are inter-related and complex, the Peace Corps embraces collaboration and partnerships as a way to enhance its adolescent girl programming and increase impact. Peace Corps will aim to expand collaboration with a wide range of development partners from community of organizations at the field level; to businesses and corporations that provide valuable technical expertise or resources to implement volunteer projects; to foundations, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and stakeholder organizations who share their knowledge and experience in designing and implementing programs benefiting girls; to service-oriented and volunteer-sending organizations that can enhance Peace Corps public outreach in support of Let Girls Learn.

A key goal of Let Girls Learn is to raise awareness and encourage the American public to take action in support of girls’ education and empowerment. This goal aligns with Peace Corps’ mandate to motivate American citizens to have a better understanding of other peoples and cultures, and presents an opportunity to work through Peace Corps’ *World Wise Schools Program* to engage the American public and seek new collaborations with educational institutions. Through *World Wise Schools* currently serving and returned Peace Corps Volunteers connect with local classrooms and domestic audiences, to promote cross-cultural understanding of the communities Volunteers serve, as well as American communities abroad. The American Public can also engage through the previously mentioned Let Girls Learn Fund and PCPP Program that support specific community-identified projects, sharing information about the issue or challenge to be addressed while offering them the opportunity to support through donations.



PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED

Educating and investing in adolescent girls is not only about equity, it's also about macroeconomics. It can truly change growth paths and poverty rates at the national level. That is why MCC supports activities that help girls become educated, healthy, productive members of their community and society.

—Dana J. Hyde,
CEO of the Millennium Challenge
Corporation

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION (MCC) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

MCC'S COMMITMENT TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS

MCC's commitment to adolescent girls is driven by its recognition of the role gender equality plays in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. MCC also recognizes that the ability of women to be productive members of society starts with the opportunities available to them during childhood and adolescence. Where and how MCC works on issues related to adolescent girls is driven by its principles of country ownership, its economic tools, and its policy commitment to integrating gender as it pertains to economic growth and poverty reduction. MCC's implementation plan reflects MCC's engagement on issues affecting adolescent girls, from country selection through compact development and implementation, as well as our work on policy and partnerships. MCC's implementation plan addresses all five objectives of the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy, through MCC's particular model. Since MCC developed its Gender Policy in 2006, MCC has incorporated a focus on addressing gender equality in the context of MCC's focused mission: poverty reduction through economic growth. While MCC recognizes the importance of gender equality as a human right, and the importance of women's role in political life, MCC's work on gender is focused on women as economic actors, and increasing equality for women and girls as smart economics and part of an inclusive growth strategy.

As the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy vividly describes, globally, 62 million girls are not in school, half of whom are adolescents, 250 million adolescent girls live in poverty, and an estimated 150 million girls have experienced sexual violence. Nearly half of these girls who have experienced sexual violence were younger than 16 years of age at the time. High rates of child marriage, early childbirth and associated health risks, trafficking, illiteracy, sexual harassment, and increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS are just a few of the preventable challenges that disproportionately burden adolescent girls. As the United States Adolescent Girls Strategy recognizes, "[g]irls' attendance in formal school during adolescence is correlated with later marriage, later childbearing, decreased fertility rates, lower rates of HIV/AIDS and other reproductive morbidities, fewer hours of domestic and/or labor market work, and greater gender equality."²⁶ A World Bank analysis of 100 countries determined that increasing the percentage of women with a secondary education by one percent can lead to annual income growth of 0.3 percent/capita.²⁷ A 2012 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that approximately half of the economic growth in OECD countries over the last 50 years was a result of an increase in educational attainment, especially among women.²⁸ Helping adolescent girls achieve quality education, health, empowerment, and safety gives them a chance to reach their economic potential. This leads to their overall ability to support themselves and their families, while contributing quality human capital at a local and national level.

MCC's approach to addressing the needs of women and adolescent girls is articulated through its unique model of foreign assistance. It starts with a competitive process for selecting countries eligible for MCC compacts: countries must achieve a passing score on MCC's indicator scorecard, which includes 20 indicators related to Ruling Justly, Economic Freedom, and Investing in People—many of which directly refer to or indirectly impact rights and opportunities for women and girls. Once a country is selected, MCC seeks to identify evidence-based pathways through which its investments can translate into economic growth. At each stage of compact development, we seek to address gender and other social inequalities and vulnerabilities that may limit women and adolescent girls' ability to benefit from MCC's planned investments. At each stage of compact development, MCC also seeks to create opportunities for

women and for girls as they grow up. MCC does this through investments in key sectors: education, health, nutrition, community development, water, sanitation, energy, transport, land, and agriculture. MCC also often works on legal, policy, and institutional reforms within these sectors, addressing gender and social inequalities in areas such as service delivery or rights. MCC’s work thus takes a holistic approach to the needs of adolescent girls, addressing different dimensions of their needs across the compact life cycle.

MCC’s new five-year strategic plan reaffirms MCC’s commitment to gender equality and to expanding gains from its poverty reduction model. This includes (1) identifying and supporting strategies for accelerating economic growth that are shaped by the latest and best evidence, and (2) helping the poor, women, and marginalized groups participate more in the benefits. MCC’s strategic plan recognizes that these two objectives should be mutually reinforcing. Together, these objectives provide new openings in economic analysis and programming, identifying new pathways through which MCC investments can benefit girls and thereby contribute to more inclusive growth and sustainable poverty reduction.

The U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy notes that agencies will implement the strategy through a range of approaches appropriate to their respective mandates and capacities. This implementation plan explains the structures and processes through which MCC’s work on adolescent girls is operationalized, and the strategic objectives of this work—consistent with MCC’s mandate, model and tools. MCC’s implementation plan for the Adolescent Girls Strategy reflects its current work, as well as new opportunities based on new approaches, emerging evidence, and promising innovations.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED



OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

MCC will continue to operationalize its work on adolescent girls through its country selection process, and through its policies, procedures, and structures for compact development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These policies, procedures, and structures—as they pertain to MCC’s work on gender and adolescent girls—are shaped by MCC’s Gender Policy and an implementation framework that identifies leadership, mandate, capacity, resources, and accountability as the requirements for success. MCC’s work on adolescent girls is operationalized through the following:

MCC Gender Policy

MCC’s Gender Policy²⁹ sets out the justifications and authorities for mainstreaming and integrating gender throughout MCC’s work, and the roles and responsibilities of MCC and its country-based accountable entities. The policy states that “in order to maximize the impact of compacts on economic growth and poverty reduction, MCC requires that eligible countries analyze gender differences and inequalities to inform the development, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs funded by MCC.” The policy also recognizes that because gender differences are structured by other social variables, gender is considered within the context of other relevant forms of social difference such as age and ethnicity. MCC’s Gender Policy was subject to a thorough review process, incorporating inputs from internal and external stakeholders.

Country-based teams and accountable entities

An important feature of the MCC’s model is country ownership, a process wherein compact-eligible countries identify their priorities for achieving sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. After identifying their priorities, compact-eligible countries develop compact project and program proposals through broad consultation with stakeholders in their society. Once MCC and its country partner agree on a compact program, a country sets up a local accountable entity (referred to most commonly as a “Millennium Challenge Account” or “MCA”) to manage and oversee all aspects of implementation. Both country-based compact development teams, and later, MCAs, must include a full-time, senior social scientist with gender expertise. Through compact development and implementation, MCC plays an important oversight role. MCC provides technical support and ensures compliance with MCC policies and processes, including MCC’s Gender Policy and MCC’s Gender Integration Guidelines. Compact-eligible and, later, grantee countries thus take the lead in determining where and how compacts will address the conditions and needs of adolescent girls.

Technical Sectors

MCC’s compact work is organized by technical specialties, including sectoral: agriculture and land; energy; human and community development; transport and vertical structures; finance, investment and trade; and water; and cross-cutting: economic analysis; environmental and social performance; fiscal accountability; gender and social inclusion; monitoring and evaluation; procurement, and legal. Each group assigns staff (as technical leads or in other supporting roles) on MCC’s compact development and implementation teams, as relevant to the compact’s sectors. MCAs have technical experts in each of these fields on their teams as well. MCC and MCA Gender & Social Inclusion (GSI) technical leads are on all compacts.

MCC’s approach to gender mainstreaming ensures that gender and other social and demographic variables are incorporated into each technical sector’s work. The GSI technical staff have a primary oversight role in ensuring that issues pertaining to gender and, as relevant, age are integrated as appropriate throughout

each project, and the Human Capital and Community Development group regularly considers gender and age in projects it leads. GSI staff also sit on committees and working groups that work on policy initiatives, guidance documents, and other internal initiatives, and develop and implement external partnerships that focus on gender and related issues.

Gender Integration Guidelines

Recognizing that a gender policy is not enough, MCC developed Gender Integration Guidelines as a comprehensive approach to operationalizing the integration of gender and social inclusion at every stage of compact development, implementation, and closure. For instance, MCC and its country counterparts must include a senior social scientist with gender expertise as a technical lead on all compact development teams, as well as at the MCAs responsible for compact implementation. These experts work with their team to ensure integration of gender and social concerns in all components and documents listed below. MCC also requires the development of a Social and Gender Integration Plan as a requirement for disbursement of funds, and MCC compacts often include gender and social analysis and integration in:

- ❖ Analyses pertaining to constraints to economic growth, and sector-specific research
- ❖ Concept notes and project proposals, including their due diligence
- ❖ Public consultations
- ❖ Terms of reference, contracts, and deliverables for feasibility studies, environmental and social assessments, economic studies, and other studies informing compact design and implementation, as relevant
- ❖ Economic rate of return analysis and beneficiary analysis
- ❖ Decision tools such as investment memos
- ❖ Project budgets, as relevant, and MCA administrative budgets
- ❖ Training for MCAs and their implementing partners
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation plans, study designs, and instruments
- ❖ MCC quarterly performance reviews
- ❖ Closeout plans

Compact Development Stages

Once a country is eligible for a compact, the government's compact development team begins the process of conceiving, proposing, and developing a set of proposed investments, interventions, and activities. There are five phases of compact development: preliminary analysis, project definition, project development and appraisal, compact negotiations, and preparation for entry into force. At each stage, MCC and country compact development staff are responsible for providing expertise and input for social and gender analysis, which may be relevant to adolescent girls. Specific approaches are detailed in the Sector Guidance, discussed below.

Sector Guidance

The GSI practice group has an internal guidance document that ensures that the use of consistent approaches and best practices in gender integration and social inclusion are applied in each type of project that MCC undertakes, and that these best practices are institutionalized. This is how GSI ensures that its approaches and processes for analyzing and addressing the conditions and needs of adolescent girls are addressed as relevant. This guidance also details how different sectors and specialists collaborate internally

and externally to ensure inter-disciplinary perspectives. For example, the GSI guidance document lays out how gender, social, and demographic characteristics such as age, as well as policy and institutional issues, are analyzed in each sector (e.g. agriculture, education, water, energy), and incorporated at each stage of compact development and implementation. The human and community development (HCD) sector guidance, for example, describes how the HCD team analyzes evidence of internal and external inefficiencies in school and health systems that might contribute to inequities in service delivery, including to adolescent girls and women. It also explains how HCD team members analyze exogenous factors that impact access to services, to illuminate specific constraints that should be addressed at the institutional, community, and household levels and identify new strategies for service delivery.

Public Consultations

Consultations are an important component of compact design, as stakeholder engagement with a wide range of government, non-governmental organizations and communities ensures that the information we gather is inclusive. This starts with consultations as part of the constraints to growth analysis, and continues throughout project development and design, environmental and social impact assessment, and compact implementation and monitoring. And throughout this evolution, the nature of, and participants in, MCC and partner country consultations also evolve. Compact consultations involve groups representing the interests of different populations, based on socioeconomic status, sex, age, and other relevant characteristics in the country. During compact implementation, MCAs also have mandatory stakeholder committees representing different government and non-governmental constituencies.

Economic Analysis and Monitoring & Evaluation

A focus on results is one of MCC's core founding principles. MCC uses a series of economic tools to identify investment priorities in a given country and to inform project selection and design. The conditions and needs of adolescent girls may arise in the context of these tools. For example, the initial constraints analysis systematically considers social and gender inequalities among children that may affect growth and poverty. Economic rate of return analysis conducted during compact development may consider data on adolescent girls where relevant to the projects. Program logics incorporate factors related to adolescent girls where relevant to the projects.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) considers gender, age, and other socio-economic characteristics as relevant to project activities, in its design and data disaggregation. MCC's M&E policy states, "When linked to program design, evaluations also should examine intra-household dynamics of male and female beneficiaries, the cost-effectiveness of delivering gender-differentiated interventions, and differential impacts on men and women, and how gender integration enhances income growth. M&E plans document how gender is being addressed in evaluations as relevant by country, and M&E staff will work with GSI staff to incorporate gender in evaluations and surveys as appropriate."³⁰

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

MCC will implement the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy by focusing on the following strategic objectives as they relate to MCC's specific investments in partner countries, and as consistent with MCC's model and authorities:

- ◊ Promote human rights and gender equality through country selection
- ◊ Improve human capital and increase economic opportunity

- ◊ Reduce risks during infrastructure construction
- ◊ Strengthen economic analysis and gender data collection, reporting and use
- ◊ Strengthen public and private partnerships

OBJECTIVE 1. PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH COUNTRY SELECTION

MCC addresses the human and economic rights of women and girls at the policy level: through country selection, ongoing monitoring of compliance with country selection indicators, and policy reforms that are part of MCC compacts.

Country selection

MCC's process of selecting countries as eligible for MCC compacts is an important tool for promoting human rights and gender equality. To be considered for eligibility, countries must have a passing scorecard. The scorecard is comprised of 20 indicators representing policy performance in three areas: Ruling Justly, Economic Freedom, and Investing in People. Countries must pass the Control of Corruption indicator, either the Political Rights or Civil Liberties indicator, and pass half of the 20 indicators overall. "Passing" and "failing" are benchmarked so countries are compared with their low-income and lower-middle income "peer groups".

Many of the country selection indicators and their components have direct and indirect implications for women and adolescent girls. The Gender in the Economy Indicator is the most far-reaching, encompassing 10 rights that must be conferred equally to men and women—from being able to pursue any job or profession, to opening a bank account, to be a designated a household head. These rights affect adolescent girls' aspirations and goals, and their social and economic status as they become adults. Other indicators that specifically mention women and gender include: Rule of Law: whether women have access to the judicial system, and equal access to land; Civil Liberties: including legal equality, violence against women, trafficking of women, gender discrimination in economic and social matters, and government control of marriage partners; Political Rights: including universal and equal voting rights for women, Land Rights and Access, Girls' Primary Education Completion Rate (a measurement for low-income countries), and Girls' Secondary Education Enrollment Ratio (a measurement for lower-middle income countries). Still other indicators do not mention gender but have implications for women and girls, including Control of Corruption, which may impact human trafficking and abuse of women and girls; Government Effectiveness, which includes quality of public services; immunization rates; Health Expenditures; Primary Education Expenditures; Child Health; Access to Credit; and others. MCC continuously re-examines its selection indicators each year, and may refine them based on agency priorities, stakeholder consultation, and data availability. Strict requirements are necessary for an indicator to be seriously considered, including data availability, country coverage, and a clear relationship with economic growth. As an example of the type of refinements MCC might consider in the future, MCC could explore indicators related to adolescent girls, such as child marriage, and secondary education for low-income countries, among others.

There is documented evidence that countries have reformed their policies in order to improve their scorecard performance and eventually be considered for compact eligibility. For example, when the MCC scorecard incorporated a new Gender in the Economy

indicator in 2011, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire used it to guide their efforts to improve their family code. In 2012, Côte d'Ivoire passed a new code giving women the same rights as men to choose where they live, apply for a passport, pursue a job or profession, and become head of household. Côte d'Ivoire now passes MCC's Gender in the Economy indicator.

Once a country is selected as eligible, it is monitored throughout compact development and implementation to ensure that they maintain their commitment to good governance. MCC may suspend or even terminate a compact or stop development on a proposed new compact if there has been a pattern of action inconsistent with the eligibility criteria.

Legal, policy, and institutional reform in compact development

MCC has increasingly focused on supporting legal, policy, and institutional reforms to make compact investments more effective and sustainable. Sometimes these reforms have a gender equality objective, for example, where a change in legal rights is necessary to enable women to benefit from compact investments or the economic growth anticipated from them. These reforms may be a condition required for compact signing or part of compact design. For example, in the first Lesotho compact, MCC made compact signing conditional on achieving gender equality in specific economic rights that had been supported broadly by Lesotho's civil society organizations. MCC also funded studies that identified additional legal reform needed to harmonize the legislation that granted those rights with earlier laws, and conditioned the compact's start on these additional reforms. The Lesotho compact also included a *Gender Equality in Economic Rights Activity*, which supported outreach and training on gender equality and economic rights across the country.

MCC compacts often support institutional reforms within ministries, departments, and other quasi-governmental entities, such as utilities, to address the needs of women and girls in the education, health, water, sanitation, and energy sectors. As MCC increases its focus on policy and institutional reform going forward, this work is likely to increase.



PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED

OBJECTIVE 2. IMPROVE HUMAN CAPITAL AND INCREASE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Most of MCC's work supporting adolescent girls takes place under this strategic objective, the components of which directly correspond to the objectives of the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy. The sections below describe MCC's current approach to working on issues affecting adolescent girls, and potential new areas of investment. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the sectors and projects selected, and project designs, are determined through the MCC model, which emphasizes processes of country ownership and rigorous economic analysis, as well as requirements for social and gender analysis.

Strengthen human capital

Promoting Education Access and Achievement

Girls' retention in school is a smart economic choice. There is a strong correlation between girls' education and accelerated economic growth, slower population growth, higher wages, increased agricultural yields and labor productivity, and improved health and well-being at the household level. As such, where consistent with its model and economic analysis, MCC supports activities designed to ensure that adolescent girls receive adequate preparation for the world of work, drawing on evidence-based best practices to improve access and achievement. The below strategies apply whether considering secondary schooling or early technical/vocational training.

To reduce inequalities of access, MCC has supported programs to reduce adolescent girls' time and distance to school, and to make school facilities girl-friendly. MCC has also supported efforts to reduce economic barriers to schooling girls, such as school fees, cost of materials, transport and/or school meals. Programs address the quality of the learning environment, as well as elements of school culture that drive adolescent girls' motivation to learn. This includes increasing the supply of well-trained female teachers and school administrators, and enhancing community engagement in girls' education and school management. High quality teaching and learning materials promote positive gender norms, reinforce foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and should provide skills essential to meeting the economic empowerment needs of adolescent girls in targeted areas—whether for productive agriculture or for the 21st century workplace. This includes effective preparation for science, technology, engineering and mathematics-oriented (STEM) career paths, where women are generally under-represented. For example, MCC's second compact with Georgia includes the development of a module focused on social and gender inclusion, among other training for secondary school teachers, principals, and school professional development facilitators, aimed at reducing gender bias in the classroom and in the broader school environment; additionally, public outreach encourages high school girls to consider higher education in STEM.

Within the framework of related policy and institutional reforms, MCC works closely with MCAs to promote mechanisms that foster innovation and flexible programming, and drive accountability for girls' learning, including through public-private and philanthropic partnerships, community-led schools, performance incentives, and disaggregated gender-data initiatives (in the labor, education and training spheres). For example, MCC intends to introduce graduated "pay for results" contracts in Morocco through its technical/vocational education public-private partnership grant programs. These will provide bonus payments to school budgets for meeting "stretch targets," such as reductions in secondary school dropout rates.

Reducing Vulnerabilities and Improving the Health of Adolescent Girls

Puberty marks a time when girls are increasingly vulnerable to leaving school, child marriage, early pregnancy, HIV, sexual exploitation, coercion and violence. This can be exacerbated in post-conflict and fragile environments. Improving the health of adolescent girls creates a virtuous cycle, improving their well-being in the present and school attendance—which in the future improves their economic opportunities and their children’s well-being. Thus, where MCC’s model identifies human capital constraints on growth and poverty reduction, leading to human capital projects, MCC addresses adolescent girls’ vulnerabilities in this context. For example, MCC works to ensure that there are safe and culturally accessible spaces for adolescent girls, reduce the threat of gender-based violence within and around schools and communities, promote psychosocial services, and engage male peers, male community leaders, policy makers and local authorities to be part of the solution as necessary. MCC will consider supporting programs to reduce health barriers that disrupt girls’ access to, and progression through, secondary school, including preventing and responding to HIV/AIDS, early pregnancy, nutrition, menstrual hygiene, early and forced marriage, and promoting school-based water, sanitation and hygiene.

Puberty is also a time when girls’ micro-nutrition needs increase significantly, due to the bodily demands that accompany a growth spurt “and the onset of menstruation. This is exacerbated by the need to share their nutrients with their babies during early pregnancy. It is a time when adolescent girls are likely to have developed habits that contribute to becoming overweight or obese. MCC has supported community-driven programming that improves the access of girls and women to high quality health services and to micronutrient supplementation. Where consistent with our model and relevant to the project objective, MCC might support a component on adolescent girls’ health, which could include, for example, access to gynecological health services offered either through school or at community-based clinics or hospitals. MCC has and will continue to pursue opportunities to prevent the spread of non-communicable disease through behavior change efforts in schools and communities, and development of diagnostic services that can reach young girls. MCC’s work in health and nutrition communications also extends to reaching men and boys, which is key to changing social norms and providing the enabling environment for the success of these initiatives.

Strengthen economic opportunity and build social capital in the transition to adulthood

MCC programs also provide adolescent girls with the power to make and act on economic decisions, which will affect their long-term livelihoods. This entails providing both marketable skills and social network support strategies necessary to enhance adolescent girls’ future prospects for participation in the labor market and to reduce their vulnerability at the workplace. Where consistent with MCC’s model and project objectives, MCC might consider programs for girls that include life skills, entrepreneurship, mentoring for and self-advocacy by girls. Given evidence that the obstacles to schooling for adolescent girls can be overwhelming, MCC will continue to consider both formal *and* non-formal training and learning services shaped around improving livelihoods—such as functional literacy and numeracy, vocational and financial skills, and opportunities for girls to learn and use new technologies. It is important to mention that engagement of girls from early adolescence in these economic empowerment initiatives may increase the likelihood of

their being able to delay early or forced marriage, as well as make healthy choices about their own sexual health.

Finally, MCC recognizes family decisions around adolescent girls' schooling are heavily impacted by the perception of potential economic returns. Thus, through some of its compact activities, MCC is supporting effective school-to-work transitions for adolescent girls through career guidance, job support or intermediation services, and important policy and legal reforms that reduce gender discrimination and female exploitation at and around community-based learning centers and the workplace.

Promote access to opportunities through water, sanitation, and energy investments

Over half of MCC's portfolio is in infrastructure, which includes large investments in water, sanitation, and energy. In many compacts, MCC not only builds infrastructure, but addresses barriers to access through institutional reforms, financing mechanisms, information provision and behavior change communications. MCC's work on service delivery in water, sanitation and energy has the potential to significantly improve the lives of adolescent girls, contributing to their human capital development and their long-term economic opportunity. Adolescent girls are often responsible for collecting water for their households, walking long distances, waiting in long lines, and facing risks of sexual violence along the way. Adolescent girls are also at risk of sexual violence when using latrines that are in dark or isolated locations. Poor sanitation facilities and hygiene practices also result in girls missing time at school, due to illness or when they are responsible for the care of other family members. Proper menstrual hygiene management (facilities, disposal and awareness) also affects school attendance and retention. MCC investments in water and sanitation can thus preserve adolescent girls' time that they can use for studying or other activities, and improve their health and schooling. In Zambia, for example, an innovation grant programs is supporting the installation of bio latrines at schools, hand-washing facilities, and hygiene education with particular attention to girls. Investments in energy can similarly save girls time by reducing the need to travel distances to collect firewood, and may improve their health where improved sources of fuel replace dirtier ones, improve safety through outdoor lighting, and provide lighting for studying at home. MCC's work on water, sanitation, and energy also supports employment opportunities for women in these sectors, and productive opportunities through energy and water use.

Increase economic security through land rights and value chain activity

MCC compacts have supported a variety of agriculture and land projects. Land rights in particular present a unique opportunity to transform equal access to these rights for girls and women, who often face cultural or legal barriers to acquiring land through inheritance, transfer or other means. MCC compacts have supported efforts in policy and legal reform, formalization of property land rights and information, education and communication campaigns in a gender transformative way. Efforts in irrigation and land reform projects have sought to specifically include women and their daughters as beneficiaries through joint titling efforts, lottery, or innovative group ownership in a way that is appropriate for the cultural context of the projects and that gains the buy-in of the targeted communities. In agriculture projects, the challenges affecting women and adolescent girls include their invisibility in the value chains. Women and adolescent girls are often thought of as support for the family farm, and their limited land rights have broad impacts, from cooperative membership to access to finance. MCC works to identify the

challenges and opportunities women and girls face within value chains and identifies and supports activities that increase the income earning potential of women, particularly in value added activities.

Make roads projects gender-responsive and increase economic opportunity

MCC compacts have supported the construction of primary and secondary roads in a number of countries. Road projects present gender-specific risks and opportunities, including those for adolescent girls. MCC has implemented various measures to address these. In the area of road design, opportunities have been sought to improve gender-responsiveness through design features, such as construction of restrooms, rest stops and safety features for pedestrians. These benefit women and girls in particular, as they are often more likely to use roads as pedestrians rather than as drivers. Job opportunities for women have also been emphasized through supporting training and hiring of women for positions such as flag wavers, welders or carpenters, as well as apprenticeships for adolescent girls (16 and older) in these areas. Women and adolescent girls benefit from these opportunities through acquiring skills in non-traditional but often more highly paid arenas than they may have otherwise pursued. Roads projects have also undertaken extensive community education campaigns on critical concerns that disproportionately affect adolescent girls, such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking in persons, and gender-based violence. These have helped raise awareness of girls' rights and safety risks not just among the girls themselves, but also among the broader communities in which they reside, helping create a safer environment for them.



PHOTO: STEPHANIE SINCLAIR/TOO YOUNG TO WED

OBJECTIVE 3. REDUCE RISKS DURING INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION

Counter-trafficking in persons (C-TIP)

Adolescent girls are highly likely to be the primary victims of trafficking in persons (TIP) in many contexts where MCC works. For instance, in the case where a construction project leads to resettlement, a poorly managed resettlement plan or a lack of safeguards could lead to impoverished families selling or coercing their daughters into the sex trade. Construction sites offer a particularly risky setting where an influx of predominantly male workers increases the demand for sex services, leading to potentially harmful sexual activity for adolescent girls and others, who are coerced or forced into sexual activity. A related risk is the recruitment of child domestic workers to meet demands of activities related to the construction site.

MCC has a zero tolerance approach to TIP, and has developed a strong C-TIP policy. The C-TIP policy demonstrates MCC's strong commitment to identifying and alleviating any potential risks for TIP associated with MCC-funded projects. Based on the U.S. State Department TIP Report, Tier 3 countries that have had sanctions applied cannot be included on MCC's annual candidate country list.³¹ In addition, a TIP risk assessment is conducted on every project. In newer compacts, MCC has worked with partner countries to prevent, mitigate and monitor TIP risks. This work has included adding TIP assessments to environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) processes; including anti-TIP provisions in the standard bidding documents and contract forms used by MCAs; and developing and implementing TIP risk management plans (TRMPs) for projects when a specific risk has been identified.

HIV/AIDS

Adolescent girls are at a disproportionately high risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS due to early marriage, sexual abuse, and economic vulnerability. As noted above, high inflows of mostly male construction workers in communities near construction sites often increases the risk of HIV/AIDS, along with the risk of prostitution and pregnancies. To address this, MCC's standard bidding documents include an HIV-related clause requiring that contractors conduct an HIV-AIDS awareness program in the project areas and undertake other measures to reduce the risk of the transfer of HIV between and among the contractor's personnel and the local community, to promote early diagnosis and to assist affected individuals.

Gender-based Violence

Evidence indicates that around 120 million girls worldwide have been victims of forced sexual acts within their lifetime. These abuses typically took place for the first time between ages 15–19, though in most countries at least 20% of girls who reported sexual violence said the first time occurred between ages 10–14.³¹² As part of its broader investments, MCC has implemented campaigns on women's and girls' rights and gender-based violence, often targeting adolescent girls. Given its relation to both HIV/AIDS and TIP, these gender-based violence awareness campaigns often have been conducted in construction site areas in conjunction with campaigns on HIV/AIDS and TIP.

OBJECTIVE 4. IMPROVE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND GENDER DATA COLLECTION, REPORTING AND USE

Economic analysis tools

As part of its new strategic plan, MCC will sharpen its economic and social analysis tools—deepening analysis of the relationship between gender and social inequalities and economic growth in the constraints analysis at national and sub-national levels, and seeking evidence on benefit streams most relevant to women and excluded groups. This opens new doors to incorporating evidence on the relationship between the conditions of adolescent girls, economic growth, and poverty reduction.

Monitoring and evaluation

MCC has increasingly worked towards improving gender integration in compact program logic, and in its M&E plans and tools. MCC's participation in the Data 2X initiative has accelerated these efforts. M&E indicators for MCC's work related to adolescent girls are developed on a project-by-project basis. In addition, MCC will participate in the U.S. Adolescent Girls Strategy inter-agency working group to establish metrics to measure the progress of the implementation of the strategy.

OBJECTIVE 5. STRENGTHEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Let Girls Learn

MCC's goals, mission and country-driven approach is consistent with the U.S. government's Let Girls Learn (LGL) initiative's objective to promote adolescent girl's education. MCC compacts are investing in education projects to ensure that students obtain the foundational knowledge and skills needed to get jobs and increase livelihoods, and MCC has also sought to reduce poverty by maximizing girls' and women's educational opportunities through improving quality and access, training teachers, administrators, counsellors, and community leaders, and conducting policy reforms.

CHARGE

The Girls CHARGE initiative includes more than 40 partners from government, NGOs, and the private sector, focusing on advancing girls' secondary education across five priorities: access, safety, quality learning, transitions and supporting local leadership on these issues. MCC's contribution has included hosting events to share resources related to these priorities, as well as discussing creative indicators and tools to promote girls' learning, girls' empowerment and social transformation within communities.

United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls

The United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, of which this plan is a part, has the goal of ensuring adolescent girls are educated, healthy, economically empowered, and free from violence and discrimination, thereby promoting global development, security, and prosperity.

Equal Futures Partnership

As a participant in the Equal Futures initiative to empower women politically and economically, MCC's work directly contributes to the initiative's commitments to action, particularly STEM and economic support for women entrepreneurs.

Data 2X

Data 2X, an initiative led by the United Nations Foundation, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, highlights global gender data gaps and develops and supports partnerships to fill priority gaps. Through its participation in this initiative, MCC committed to: (1) systematically review the data the agency has collected and prioritize the publication of all sex-disaggregated data, as well as increase future gender data collection and use through improved survey design and monitoring and evaluation; (2) work with partners to develop and implement recommendations for how gender data can be more fully incorporated into the International Aid Transparency Initiative reporting standard, with a special focus on sex-disaggregated results data; and (3) launch a gender-data challenge to increase the use of gender-data in selected partner countries. Where relevant and possible, these data efforts will further disaggregate by age.

MCC-PEPFAR Data Collaborative for Local Impact

MCC and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are partnering to invest up to \$21.8 million in Country Data Collaboratives for Local Impact in sub-Saharan Africa that will use data on HIV/AIDS, global health, gender equality and economic growth to address the root causes of insufficient or ineffective use of data for decision-making, improve programs and policies, and enable greater local impact. Country Data Collaboratives will leverage existing data and make it more accessible, strengthen data analysis and visualization, enhance opportunities for citizen contribution to data, cultivate talent, and ensure mutual accountability when implementing development aid so we can make a sustainable difference. Adolescent girls are an important focus of PEPFAR's work, and will thus also be an important part of this initiative.

CONCLUSION

As part of its work to reduce poverty through economic growth, the Millennium Challenge Corporation is committed to improving the well-being and opportunities of adolescent girls around the world. This implementation plan outlines our ongoing approach to utilizing our agency structures, processes, and compacts to address the challenges faced by adolescent girls, and by doing so promoting growth and poverty reduction. Through addressing human rights and gender equality, improving human capital and economic opportunities, reducing risks, improving economic analysis and monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening public and private partnerships, MCC will use the strengths of its model to contribute to the implementation of the U.S. Strategy on Adolescent Girls.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This document follows UNESCO's definition of adolescents as those individuals aged 10–19. More information on defining adolescence can be found here: http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/SOWC_2011_Main_Report_EN_02092011.pdf
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- 18 Schultz, P. (2004). "Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls." *World Development*, 30(2): 207-225.
- 19 Dollar, D. and R. Gatti. (1999). "Gender Inequality, Income, and Growth: Are Good Times Good For Women?" World Bank Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, Working Paper Series 1. Washington,

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- 20 Plan International. (2008). "Paying the Price: The Economic Costs of Failing to Educate Girls." <https://www.planusa.org/docs/PayingthePrice.pdf>
- 21 Although there is currently limited research about the impact of child marriage on economies, in 2014 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation announced a new \$4.2 million investment toward a three-year research program to measure the economic cost of child marriage, to be led jointly by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).
- 22 These objectives are based on key approaches that emerged from a systematic review of the evidence base on CEFM. This study, conducted by ICRW in 2011, reviewed evaluations of 23 programs to identify program interventions and policy strategies that had documented measurement of change in child-marriage related behaviors and/or attitudes. It is available at <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Solutions-to-End-Child-Marriage.pdf>. Although these strategies emerged from a review of programs to address CEFM, it is our view that these same strategies are the most effective to empower adolescent girls more broadly.
- 23 If it becomes necessary to collect data via data calls to missions before standard indicators are approved, requests for data calls will be submitted to the Streamlining Governance Committee (SGC) for review.
- 24 Pending the approval of the SGC.
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