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What is Gender—and How is it Different from Women?

Too often, gender is equated with women, but gender is about women *and* men. **Gender** refers to the different roles, resources, rights, and responsibilities of women and men in a society. Decades of research and experience have shown that these differences between women and men are profound in the developing world. Furthermore, women and men face differing constraints and opportunities—especially in terms of their needs for, and access to, services and programs.

Why Does it Matter to U.S. Foreign Assistance?

In order for our U.S. foreign assistance framework to be effective, it must take these differences into account. Otherwise, foreign assistance programs and projects will not adequately address the needs of those they are intended to benefit. When gender is not integrated into our foreign assistance strategies up front, we end up having to make costly fixes after the fact, increasing our foreign aid dollars, rather than spending them as efficiently as possible.

How Can Prioritizing Gender Make U.S. Foreign Assistance More Effective?

U.S. foreign assistance programs must incorporate gender analysis in order to ensure that they effectively meet the needs of their intended beneficiaries—both women and men. **Gender analysis** is a *tool* that examines the differences between women and men, boys and girls, in a society. For example, a gender analysis of agricultural projects in Africa would reveal that women constitute the majority of farmers, yet they receive less than 10% of small farm credit and own just 1% of the land.¹

Also, gender integration *must* be a part of broader efforts to achieve greater coherence and coordination in U.S. foreign assistance programs. **Gender integration** is an *approach* that refers to integrating gender analysis and the resulting recommendations as a crosscutting approach in all policies, budgets, programming, and performance monitoring and evaluation. Integrating gender into our foreign assistance strategies is crucial to ensuring not only that both women and men benefit, but also that both contribute to the growth and development of their countries.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality is an *outcome* that means equal opportunities for all people, women and men and boys and girls alike, to achieve their personal potential and maximize their contributions to the development of their families, economies, and societies. The promotion of gender equality is a powerful tool for effective development, contributing directly to poverty alleviation, economic growth, a reduction in violence, stronger community institutions, and better governance.

Although gender integration can lead to investments in men and boys, as well as women and girls, when gender differences are *not* addressed, women and girls are most often the ones left behind. As such, achieving gender equality requires **empowering women** because in most situations, women and girls are disadvantaged relative to men and boys.

U.S. foreign assistance strategies will fall far short of their potential unless both women and men benefit. Not only are women at the greatest risk of being poor, but also the same social, cultural and economic barriers that predispose them to poverty often lead to them being left out of foreign assistance interventions. Yet, investments in women lead to direct payoffs for reducing poverty and growing economies. Decades of research and experience have shown that when women living in poverty have any extra income, they invest it in their children, creating a positive cycle of growth for entire families and communities.

¹ “Gender: Working Towards Greater Equality,” in *Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Action Plan*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2007.