

factsheet

USAID *Gender Plan of Action:* Bringing Beijing Home

In March of 1996, Brian Atwood, Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), announced a new *Gender Plan of Action* -- an Agency-wide blueprint designed to ensure that gender considerations are institutionalized throughout USAID development programs and projects.

This significant milestone caps a 20-year history of USAID efforts aimed at enhancing the status of women in developing countries. The USAID Office of Women in Development (WID) was established in 1974 in order to comply with the "Percy Amendment," which directed that U.S. foreign assistance efforts focus on integrating women into the economies of developing nations. Since then, USAID projects have worked to increase women's participation in the development process and improve their access to education, health care and jobs. Such gains have been achieved through technical assistance and gender analyses; the establishment of WID working groups and regional bureau WID advisors; staff and contractor training programs; information dissemination efforts; and active participation at the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September of 1995.

The new *Gender Plan of Action* builds on this track record. Highlights of the plan include:

- **Modification of the USAID strategic framework.** The USAID strategic framework sets the Agency's development course by linking its overall mission of sustainable development with key national interests -- such as economic development, and with more specific USAID goals and objectives -- such as population stabilization and environmental protection. Under the new *Gender Plan of Action*, strategic objectives will be revised to reflect the central role of women in development.
- **Better data collection and analysis.** USAID's "menu" of indicators, which are being designed to help mission staff evaluate program results and effectiveness, will include indicators to measure impact on the social and economic status of women.

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- **Revision of personnel policies.** Position descriptions for USAID program officers and project development officers will specifically include responsibility for addressing gender issues. Future recruitment for these positions will emphasize the need for candidates to have experience and understanding of gender issues. In addition, attention to gender issues will be part of the evaluation process used by staff and committees that rate the performance of civil service and foreign service personnel, and the boards that select foreign service personnel for promotion.
- **Staff training and technical assistance.** USAID staff will be offered information and resources to help strengthen their knowledge of gender issues.
- **New guidelines for USAID grantees and contractors.** USAID competitive assistance guidelines will require that grant applicants demonstrate their abilities to address gender issues. In contracting with USAID, a methodology will be developed for including a technical requirement regarding gender issues in statements of work for RFPs (requests for funding proposals).
- **Enhanced USAID policy.** The "Automatic Directives System"--USAID's guide to operational policy under federal regulations--will incorporate language specifying that strategic planning and results-reporting-documents address gender issues. In addition, each mission will be required to review and revise its "mission orders" to ensure that gender issues are considered at all appropriate points in the process of planning, achieving and evaluating program results.

Other measures in the *Gender Plan of Action* include the establishment of a WID Performance Fund to award supplementary funds to Agency development programs that best address gender issues; and the implementation of a WID fellows program designed to help build a technical cadre to support the integration of gender issues in development.

The crafting of specific policies and procedures needed to implement the *Gender Plan of Action* are underway, and full implementation is expected by the end of the year.

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