

USAID's Women-Centered Approach to Development

USAID Global Health



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Since its inception, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has recognized that women and girls represent a tremendous untapped resource in the developing world. Our half a century of experience has shown that health programs targeting women improve development outcomes overall. When women are educated and can earn and control income, infant mortality declines, child health and nutrition improve, agricultural productivity rises, population growth slows, economies expand, and cycles of poverty are broken.

USAID's technical experience and expertise provide the Agency a leading role in the implementation of President Obama's visionary Global Health Initiative (GHI), which calls for an even greater focus on women-centered health programming. The Pres-

ident's \$63 billion, six-year GHI will help partner countries improve health by strengthening health systems and by focusing on women, newborns, and children through programs in infectious disease, nutrition, maternal and child health, family planning, and safe water.

Women and girls in developing countries struggle with gender discrimination, which has a negative impact on their health and curbs their full participation in society. Helping women get healthy and helping them stay that way will help women overcome these barriers and permit them to contribute to the strengthening of families, communities, and economies around the world. Incorporating women into development planning and programming not only improves their life chances but it also improves those of men, children, and society.

Since 1965, the Agency has provided women and couples with voluntary family planning programs and services. Maternal and child health programming became an important focus in the early 1980s, and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs have been adjusted to focus on women's unique vulnerabilities to infection. Other health interventions that address women include malnutrition, malaria, and pandemic diseases programs. These programs have enjoyed positive results and set the global standard for health care delivery to women.

Despite the progress to date, there is much left to do. World estimates show that six out of 10 of the world's poorest people are women and girls. Roughly 500 million women lack basic literacy skills. At some point in their lives, 20 to 50 percent of women are subjected to partner violence. An estimated 215 million women want to use family planning but don't have access to it, and at least half a million women die each year of pregnancy-related causes.

Focusing on women is critical to fulfilling U.S. development priorities as well as many other internationally agreed-upon objectives, including the U.N. Millennium Development Goals. It is also crucial for recipient nations if they are going to end the cycle of poverty. A country that discriminates against half its population is not utilizing its full development potential.

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Web site

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/mch/index.html

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