

December 16, 2008

President-elect Obama

Cc: Gayle Smith, Aaron Williams, Larry Nowels, Sheila Herrling  
c/o Transition Team Headquarters  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President-elect:

Given the state of the U.S. economy and the ever-growing budget deficit, it is more essential than ever that U.S. government programs are as effective as possible. As you and your transition team begin your review of United States foreign assistance, we, the 42 undersigned organizations, ask that you pay special attention to the crucial nature of integrating gender across all U.S. foreign assistance programs.

During the presidential campaign, you regularly championed the need for the United States to take an active role in eliminating global poverty and tackling the challenges faced by the billions of people living on just dollars a day. We applaud your pledge to reaffirm our nation's commitment to international development and to strengthen America's national security and moral imperative goals through effective poverty reduction. Yet, U.S. foreign assistance will fall short of its potential if its programs and policies continue to overlook the reality that women and men in the developing world play vastly different roles. We must take that into account, whether we are helping to build democracies, roads, or more educated populations.

Integrating gender into our foreign assistance strategies, structures, policies and programs is one of the best steps our country can take to ensure that its investments are truly efficient over time. Decades of research and experience have shown that there are profound differences between women and men's roles, resources, rights and responsibilities in the developing world. We now know that if these differences are not taken into account, our foreign assistance will be less effective – and even risk doing more harm than good.

*Gender integration* is an *approach* that is critical to apply to all foreign aid and can lead to investments in men and boys, as well as women and girls. Gender integration is particularly important to reducing poverty, as analysis on the issue has revealed that women are at the greatest risk of being poor. Further, it has shown that the same social, cultural, and economic barriers that lead to poverty are often the same obstacles that cause women to be left out of development interventions. For example, an agricultural program working with land-owning farmers would de facto exclude most women, who, in many parts of the world, do not have the right to own land even though they make up the majority of farmers. U.S. poverty reduction efforts will fall far short of their potential unless both women and men benefit, particularly since women are more likely to invest extra income in the health and education of their children, which helps to break the cycle of poverty.

In addition, the promotion of *gender equality* as an *outcome* is a powerful tool for effective development, contributing directly to poverty alleviation, economic growth, a reduction in violence, stronger community institutions, and better governance. Gender equality means equal opportunities for all people, women and men alike, to achieve their personal potential and maximize their contributions to the development of their families, economies, and societies. Without equal

opportunities, individuals and families cannot invest, innovate, or lift themselves out of poverty and are prevented from reaching their full potential.

We would like to recommend a few essential first steps towards achieving these goals:

- **Make gender integration and gender equality a required strategic objective in foreign assistance;**
- **Establish a high-level central office on gender integration and create stronger gender focal points for each major development assistance agency or program within each sub-bureau and country mission;**
- **Require gender experts to be systematically involved in designing development strategies, programs and projects and monitoring and impact evaluations to ensure both women and men benefit from and contribute to U.S. development efforts.**

Also, integrating gender into U.S. foreign assistance should take place within a new and robust gender assistance regime. Specifically, we support the call to:

- **Develop a national strategy for global development;**
- **Reach a “grand bargain” between the Executive branch and Congress on management authorities and plan, design and enact a new Foreign Assistance Act;**
- **Streamline the organizational structure and improve organizational capacity, such as by creating a Cabinet-level Department for Global Development, by rebuilding human resource capacity and by strengthening monitoring and evaluation; and,**
- **Increase funding for and accountability of foreign assistance.**

Please see the attached memo, originally submitted to your office as part of InterAction’s Foreign Assistance Briefing Book, which was developed in broad consultation with many organizations, including some that have signed onto this letter. We look forward to discussing this further with your transition staff in the near future. To schedule a meeting, please contact Ritu Sharma, President of Women Thrive Worldwide, at 202-884-8398 at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to working with you and your Administration in the coming years on the vital role gender integration plays in U.S. foreign assistance and fighting global poverty.

Sincerely,

American Jewish World Service  
American Association of University Women  
Amnesty International USA  
Asian Brotherhood Concern  
Bahá’is of the United States  
Bread for the World  
CARE  
CAW/InterAction  
Centre for Development and Population  
Activities (CEDPA)

Center for Women’s Global Leadership  
Christian Children’s Fund  
Equality Now  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America  
FAIR Fund  
Family Violence Prevention Fund  
Global Aids Alliance  
Global Fund for Women  
Habitat for Humanity  
Heifer International

Hellen Keller International  
The Hunger Project  
Initiative for Inclusive Security  
International Center for Research on Women  
(ICRW)  
International Medical Corps  
Juarez and Associates  
Maasai Girls Education Fund  
Men Can Stop Rape, Inc.  
National Council of Women's Organizations  
Opportunity International  
Oxfam America  
PACT  
Population Action International

Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization  
Initiative  
Refugees International  
SEVA Foundation  
United Methodist Church, General Board of  
Church and Society  
The White House Project  
Winrock International  
Women's Environmental and Development  
Organization (WEDO)  
Women Thrive Worldwide  
Women's Funding Network  
World Learning