

EMPOWERING GIRLS: ASSESSING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT AND ACTION

A THREE-YEAR ANALYSIS OF THE GIRL STRATEGY

BACKGROUND

Girls make up half of the world's largest population of adolescents in history. Their education, safety, and health are important now, and whether or not they attain these crucial aspects of their development will have reverberations for decades to come. The *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* was the first-ever, of any government strategy, to focus specifically on the assets and challenges unique to adolescent girls and originally included implementation plans from four U.S. government agencies: the U.S. Department of State, USAID, Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). In Fiscal Years 2021, 2022, and 2023, Congress required reports on the implementation of the strategy.

Since its release, there have been two changes in U.S. Administration and changes to or new strategies, policies, policy frameworks, leadership and bodies focused on youth and/or gender within U.S. foreign policy, all against the backdrop of a global pandemic. Despite changes to the world in which this historically large population of adolescent girls live, the U.S. government has not updated the strategy and, until 2023, had not publicly reported on progress made to implement it. Civil society was able to obtain copies of Congressional reports covering the years 2020 and 2021, and sought to analyze the reports to better understand trends and priorities.

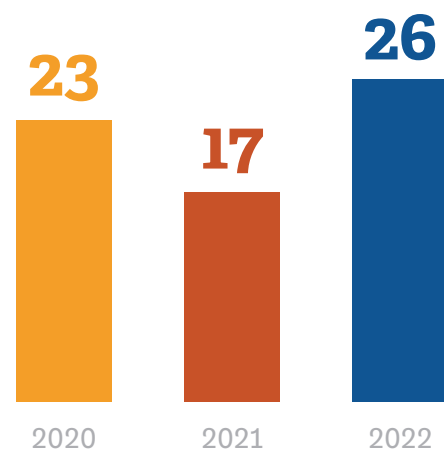
KEY FINDINGS

Through a detailed analysis of the three narrative reports that were obtained by civil society or posted publicly, results show that while diplomatic actions on behalf of girls have tripled to 33 actions in 2022 from 11 in 2020 and 2021 respectively, programs and activities have remained relatively low. While the details and activities in these reports have increased, gaps remain. The reports for 2020-2022 represent the work of two different administrations and their respective policy priorities and programmatic approaches in international development and humanitarian aid. These reports cover a period in global history that made program implementation and diplomacy difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic limiting in-person contact, as well as ripple effects on education, economies, and

more. In addition to high-level policy priorities changing between the two administrations, the reports differ in length and the level of detail given regarding statements, policies, programs, and activities. The report from 2020 focuses mainly on activities that intended to spur economic empowerment while later reports include multi-sector efforts to address the root causes of poverty and increase access to and attendance of secondary school for girls. Despite differences, there was some continuity across the reports in program and country-level areas of focus. For example, both reports include updates on the Girls' Resilience, Enterprise, and Technology (SHE's GREAT!) program, which launched in 2018 and, "advocates for girls to be economically and socially empowered, educated, and free from violence and discrimination," among others.

Across all years of reporting, it appears that the 2016 *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* is not being meaningfully utilized by U.S. government agencies, its diplomats or implementing organizations. There are no mentions of inter- or intra-agency coordination mechanisms to support the strategy. Rather, it appears that activities already underway and planned are reported on for the purposes of meeting this Congressional requirement, rather than as a key part of the strategy's implementation.

NUMBER OF U.S. GOVERNMENT-FUNDED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS GLOBALLY



RECOMMENDATIONS

Across all years of reporting, it appears that the 2016 *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* is not being meaningfully utilized by U.S. government agencies or its diplomats or implementing organizations. Ensuring that adolescent girls are healthy, educated, skilled and safe necessarily means measuring how and where the U.S. government is investing in them. To do this more effectively, we recommend:

- The President issue an executive order requiring the State Department, USAID, MCC, and Peace Corps to update their implementation plans for the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*, with a requirement that these plans be linked to key goals and indicators outlined in other recently updated strategies such as the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally*, *U.S. Strategy on International Basic Education*, *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security* (WPS), and the *USAID Youth in Development Policy*.
- USAID and the Department of State collect and transparently report annually on their programmatic and activities utilizing disaggregated data that includes information such as sex, age, marital status, motherhood status, and disability. This data should be accompanied by information on the amount of funding that goes towards programming specifically intended to support adolescent girls' empowerment.
- Future Congressional reports on the implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls include updates from MCC and Peace Corps and include funding levels and age- and sex-disaggregated data wherever possible. These reports should also contain information on the number of girls reached through activities in alignment with USAID's definitions of youth programming, including programs or activities which are girl-focused, -led, or -relevant.¹
- An increased number of consultations and a high-level list of recommendations garnered from those consultations with adolescent girls who are beneficiaries of U.S. government programs and activities on the ways in which U.S. foreign aid can be improved to better meet the needs of adolescent girls, and how the U.S. government is taking those recommendations into consideration.
- Future Congressional Reports should also include greater detail on efforts undertaken at bilateral and multilateral levels of diplomacy and a more detailed breakdowns of allocations for girls' empowerment programs and activities globally.
- Future public statements issued in support of International Day of the Girl Child on October 11th outline ways in which the U.S. government is working to empower girls around the world with specific statistics and programmatic examples.

¹ Girl-focused: Adolescent girls are the primary program participants; Girl-relevant: An activity that includes adolescent girls within its targeted participants or beneficiaries or has a girl-specific component; Girl-led: An activity in which girls are the primary implementers. A girl-led organization focuses on girl-led development, promotes youth participation, and often has adolescent girls and other young people as staff.

