Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

Equity Action Plan Summary

U.S. Agency for International Development

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency of the United States government that is primarily responsible for administering civilian foreign aid and development and humanitarian assistance. On behalf of the American people, USAID promotes and demonstrates democratic values abroad, and advances a free, peaceful, and prosperous world.

Delivering equity through USAID

As USAID engages with its partners, USAID democratizes the development process by integrating equity into agency policies, strategies, and practices. USAID is enhancing the ability of non-traditional partners to pursue USAID opportunities, preventing discrimination in agency programs, and strengthening the agency's capacity to advance inclusive development in overseas programming.

New strategies to advance equity

- **Continue development of the WorkwithUSAID.org platform, a free resource hub built to empower new and existing partners with the knowledge and networks to navigate how to work with USAID**

  As evidenced by a recent poll, organizations do not know where to start or what they need to do to partner with us. Organizations can struggle to navigate the complex requirements for funding eligibility, understand our government terminology, and sort through all of the systems needed to register. These bureaucratic hurdles have prevented USAID from partnering with small or local organizations, many of which represent underserved and historically marginalized communities around the world. To address this barrier, USAID launched WorkwithUSAID.org, a new platform that serves as the first step towards becoming a partner with USAID. WorkwithUSAID. org gives prospective partners a place to start, current partners a place to grow, and the Agency a place to build new partnerships. This website provides a one-stop-shop where anyone can access and benefit from our resources, regardless of who they are and where they work.

- **Invest in resources to help advance civil rights**

  Advancing equity rests on the presumption of equal opportunities and protection under the law. As noted in the Executive Order, Government programs are designed to serve all eligible individuals. To meet this objective and to enhance compliance with existing civil rights laws, agencies were obligated to address the operational status and level of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities. To meet this mandate, USAID intends to explore strengthening the implementation and oversight of its existing policies of nondiscrimination for beneficiaries in several ways, including expanding training and developing a beneficiary's bill of rights and expanding engagement with communities and beneficiaries in the planning and evaluation of activities. Together, these approaches will increase the number of staff and implementing partners who are aware of the

New strategies to advance equity

policy of nondiscrimination for beneficiaries, promote awareness among beneficiaries of their rights under the policy, and strengthen compliance. Additionally, the Agency plans to develop a USAID Accountability Mechanism, which will help receive and resolve complaints filed by beneficiaries who have experienced environmental, social, or economic harm caused by a USAID project or activity or could potentially experience such harm. The Agency will also work with the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division to help determine the best approach to reinvigorate the Agency's Title VI program. USAID will identify the organizations operating in the United States receiving federal financial assistance through USAID funding mechanisms to ensure their compliance with Title VI.

- **Lower internal and external barriers for USAID awards, to include reduction of acquisition and assistance administrative burdens that negatively affect partner capacity**

  USAID's existing acquisition and assistance processes present an administrative burden and can make proposal and application submissions cost-prohibitive for organizations, especially those serving historically marginalized groups. Often staffed by smaller teams and having limited operating budgets, potential partners from underrepresented groups may not be familiar with Federal acquisition and assistance regulations, policies, or award processes and may not have the operational capacity to hire or designate writing teams to respond to solicitations. In response to this barrier, USAID will explore the flexibilities possible under the law to limit competition; streamline proposal and application requirements; encourage the use of flexible solicitation methods as appropriate; and minimize the compliance barriers that are preventing local organizations or underserved communities from being competitive for awards.

- **Designate an Inclusive Development Advisor at each Mission and procure inclusive development support mechanisms managed through the Agency's Inclusive Development Hub**

  USAID's Missions often have the funding, interested generalist staff, and political will to design programming that is inclusive of and equitable for

New strategies to advance equity

underserved and underrepresented groups. However, most Missions do not have advisors specifically dedicated to the full inclusive development portfolio, which requires technical knowledge and expertise about the challenges and barriers faced by marginalized groups in the local context. To address this barrier, the Agency will begin ensuring that each Mission appoints an Inclusive Development Advisor, a Foreign Service or Foreign Service National staff member who specializes in issues of inclusive development. This will be in addition to the current structure of Gender Advisors. The presence of a Gender Advisor has been cited as one of the most important factors in ensuring the integration of gender equity into USAID programming.

Building on USAID's progress

This equity action plan builds on USAID's progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.

- **Integrating equity into program policy**

  USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning developed policy updates in August 2021, including one titled "Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in USAID Programming." This policy update acknowledges the urgency of an Agency-wide approach to address marginalization, increase inclusion, and foster diversity through its global programming by using an inclusive development approach. This is not policy guidance intended to require shifts in programming or strategies; rather it reiterates the Agency's commitment and current standing guidance on Inclusive Development. The forthcoming June USAID Policy Framework will provide new policy guidance as needed in addition to existing requirements.

- **Expanding and diversifying the USAID partner base**

  USAID's Administrator released updated guidance in October 2021 for the Agency's New Partnership Initiative that incorporates guidance from EO 13985. The New Partnership Initiative's Action Plans are strategic and operational documents within which operating units describe how they plan to expand their use of partnerships. These plans are critical to diversifying the Agency's implementing partners, expanding engagement with local partners, and working with traditional partners in new ways to strengthen local capacity. This year, USAID missions and operating units must specifically outline plans for enhancing equity and inclusion through acquisition and assistance practices and activity implementation abroad.

- **Strengthening accountability through performance management**

  USAID collaborated with the State Department in June 2021 to add a key issue on racial equity to the FY 2021 Operational Plan and Performance Plan and Report. USAID will use the data collected on racial equity, along with other key issues on gender, youth, disability, LGBTQI+, and religious

Building on USAID's progress

minorities, to have a more informed approach when allocating resources. This data-informed resource allocation will help advance racial equity, promote equitable delivery of government benefits, and support local organizations that advocate for equity for historically underserved or marginalized racial and ethnic groups, along with other local initiatives.