



February 14, 2019

Coalition statement on the White House Women's Global Development & Prosperity Initiative

The Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality (CWEEE) acknowledges the importance of the launch of the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) effort by the White House and ten agencies delivering U.S. foreign policy and assistance. The U.S. government has supported gender equality globally for decades, and we recognize that this specific initiative is the culmination of over a year of interagency work to elevate attention to women's economic empowerment (WEE) within the context of the U.S. government foreign assistance and diplomacy. As a diverse coalition representing organizations focused on women's economic empowerment from a variety of angles, we strongly believe that efforts to effectively advance WEE should be predicated on [these principles](#).

The Coalition has provided a number of recommendations to the officials shaping the initiative in the course of the last year, and is pleased to see a number of our recommendations reflected in [the website](#), Presidential Memorandum, and official messaging surrounding the launch. We are encouraged by the initiative's focus on building women's skills for workforce readiness, supporting women entrepreneurs, and eliminating legal barriers to women's participation in the economy. The effort articulates a multi-agency approach to how the United States will advance women's economic empowerment globally, and specific, unified goals and objectives thereto.

It was announced alongside an initial attribution of \$50 million for a dedicated fund to be administered by USAID and a call for collective attribution of \$300 million through agency budgets across the 10 agencies involved in the initiative. CWEEE will seek further information to ensure that this funding represents new and additional funding over and above existing global efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, and with no proportionate cuts to existing international development assistance priorities, before embracing this allocation.

CWEEE welcomes that this initiative includes a focus on global development, impacting those living in poverty in addition to established women business leaders at the top, though we note that the emphasis is on the latter. Empowering women at the bottom of the economic pyramid to access the tools they need to not only economically advance, but to also make economic decisions and act on them, is essential to supporting their human rights and unlocking the global economic growth the initiative seeks to unleash. We strongly encourage the agencies and Working Group tasked with implementing this initiative to leave

no woman behind, ensuring that programs made available through the initiative include assisting women living in poverty to also access tools and support to enter or advance in the economy.

We note in particular that the third pillar's focus on strengthening the "enabling environment" for women's economic empowerment includes many of the issues and challenges our members have worked for decades to address. We welcome the initiative's focus on establishing an "enabling environment for women in the economy [that] encompasses the legal and regulatory framework, policies and practices (public and private sector), or improve basic conditions for women working in the informal economy." For example, we are pleased that this pillar focuses on ensuring that women and girls have the same rights as men and boys to own and inherit land and property, to open businesses, or obtain credit, and highlights the critical barrier of disproportionate care burdens borne by women that impede their safe, meaningful participation in economic activities. These are critical issues foundational to successful strategies to empower women economically.

However, we are disappointed that the initiative does not adequately address the critical gap in addressing women's health needs and only references the barrier of gender-based violence on the website, not as part of the Presidential Memorandum. Clear evidence suggests that an environment that aims to encourage women's meaningful participation in economic activities requires addressing women's ability to exercise agency and access their rights to the highest standards of health and well-being. We hope that as the agencies involved work towards establishing an enabling environment, they also include an emphasis on global health. Clear evidence exists as to the linkages between ensuring a healthy workforce and enabling economic growth. [Our core principles](#) hold that efforts to foster women's economic empowerment should address all elements of the enabling environment, and we are concerned about this omission.

We also strongly encourage the Administration and Interagency Working Group to further expand the focus on creating enabling environments where women can thrive by ensuring that critical issues that are mentioned on the website, but not the memorandum - such as gender-based violence - become high priorities for supporting women's economic empowerment across all agencies' implementation.

We appreciate the initiative clearly identifying civil society as an important stakeholder. To meaningfully engage with civil society, both in the U.S. and in countries where programming takes place, officials should ensure access to information that allows tracking progress towards implementation and the initiative's goals.

We appreciate the progress the launch of this initiative represents and look forward to working with U.S. Government officials to continue to hone and implement this initiative in line with existing evidence and the spirit of our guiding principles in the months and years ahead.