Inclusion and Empowerment

One of the great commitments of the Sustainable Development Goals is to “leave no one behind.” Achieving that level of inclusion however, depends at least in part on recognizing that genuine empowerment of marginalized or excluded populations is community based, and not driven from abroad. Foreign assistance can reduce poverty and enable positive social outcomes by understanding the ability of disenfranchised populations to participate in society and by tailoring programs specifically to those groups which complement—but do not replace—generalized investments. Development and humanitarian aid can also focus on opportunities to include these populations across their existing programming. Through such inclusive programming, we can provide better tools for people to take control of their future and achieve true empowerment.

InterAction Recognizes

- **Conflict, disasters, and humanitarian crises affect different populations differently.** A comprehensive and context-specific analysis beginning from the perspective of the affected population helps to identify who is most vulnerable to a specific threat and what existing capacities can be used to minimize their risk. For example, a humanitarian crisis may exacerbate gender-based violence (GBV)-related risks such as sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and human trafficking. While studies show that women and girls experience GBV disproportionately because of gender inequality, we also know GBV-related risks for men and boys escalate during conflict due to social norms. As a result, analysis, strategy, and response services need to be inclusive and context-specific to ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive appropriate support.

- **Whenever practical, development and humanitarian programing should include local actors.** This helps them take ownership of their own future and treats them as implementing partners rather than victims in need of assistance. In addition to working with beneficiaries and local civil society in designing programs, the programs may also be made more durable and lasting by ensuring they are later smoothly handed off to well-equipped and empowered local actors.

- **Context matters when designing programs that seek to include and empower specific populations, and this work requires flexible, multifaceted approaches instead of a one-size-fits-all method.** A successful youth economic employment program in a country with a labor shortage may not have the same impact if the same model were applied to an LGBTI population in a country with high employment. The particularities of the local context will inevitably mean that excluded and marginalized populations in the community face specific political, economic, and cultural barriers to full participation that must be addressed.

- **Many people depend on the United States’ strong voice as an advocate for equality under the law and individual rights.** They look to this country to continue to prioritize populations which face discrimination in their daily lives. In countries where legal and informal methods of discrimination are more common, efforts to effectively deliver aid face greater challenges, and the U.S. should seek out and support efforts to address those challenges. The U.S. should also ensure that the democracy and governance assistance programs and policies it supports promote nondiscriminatory laws and equitable access to basic human, civil, economic, and labor rights.

- **Health and education services are particularly important ways to empower historically excluded and marginalized populations.** As such services become widespread, opportunities for marginalized populations to lift themselves out of poverty become more plentiful.
Upcoming Opportunities

- **Ensure more equitable treatment of vulnerable populations by supporting appropriate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [Ongoing]:** In particular, Goals 4 (education), 5 (gender), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) help empower and include vulnerable populations. The United States should use its great resources, leverage, and influence in multilateral institutions to put in place programming that allows these goals to be met.

- **Continue engagement with the G20 and other global convening bodies can act as force multiplier for U.S. government efforts [July 2017]:** Several of the changes being initiated by the G20 will assist individuals, organizations, and countries to increase their power. These G20 changes include advances in anticorruption efforts, increased financial transparency, reduced money laundering, and denying entry of corrupt officials. The changes also include reducing corporations’ ability to minimize taxes through base erosion and profit shifting, and increasing the availability of decent work.

- **Follow through and build upon U.S. government commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and the fall 2016 refugee summits [Ongoing]:** In addition to keeping its promises, the United States can build leadership through its response to populations facing humanitarian crises and displacement. The anniversaries of these summits form a logical point for the U.S. government to organize its efforts.

- **Continue integrating and mainstreaming vulnerable populations in U.S. development programs through the annual budget process or through a global assistance authorization [Annual]:** For example, USAID could use universal design principles in all buildings and infrastructure it funds. Such programs may be further strengthened through stronger monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements, which help assure that the goals of including targeted populations are met.

Additional Materials

- **High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2016—Ensuring that no one is left behind, 2016,** [bit.ly/2d4sTpF](http://bit.ly/2d4sTpF)