

## FROM DESIGN TO IMPLEMENTATION



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## How USAID's Solicitations and Resulting Awards Include Underrepresented Groups

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**Cover photo:** Marie Josef helps Remonde Moise up a hill after weeding a carrot field in Furcey, Haiti. Retrieved from USAID Haiti Watershed Initiative for National Natural Environmental Resources (WINNER) Project.

## 1. Executive Summary

Increasingly, development experts, policymakers, and practitioners are recognizing the importance of diversity and how the multiple layers of an individual's identity affect the individual's ability to fully participate in society.<sup>1</sup> The narratives historically associated with a group defined in terms of a social identity may privilege or marginalize that group and the individual members of that group. In addition to gender, experiences are also shaped by other demographic and cultural factors, such as age, ability, ethnic identity and religious affiliation, geographic location, and socioeconomic status, shape an individual's experiences, needs, and access to social benefits. These cultural factors, therefore, may profoundly influence how the individual interacts with development programs. Inclusive development programs must ensure that all social groups, particularly those historically excluded or most underrepresented,<sup>2</sup> can participate in and benefit from all program activities and opportunities. Ultimately, inclusive development approaches broaden participation in programs and the perspectives that contribute to them, thereby increasing the programs' impact and critically informing the trajectory of development.

International frameworks and organizations have indicated a real commitment to social inclusion and addressing inequalities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) was established with the premise of "leaving no one behind." Many of its goals and targets<sup>3</sup> reference the needs of individuals considered vulnerable or marginalized.<sup>4</sup> Several international treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, reinforce social inclusion as a goal. Likewise, most bilateral and multilateral donors have international policies, strategies, and guidance that require both staff and those receiving funds to address how, in disbursing or using those funds, they will prioritize the inclusion of all, including vulnerable groups. Given donor recognition of the importance of designing programming that includes people with diverse social identities — and not just people of different genders — programming must adapt. Specifically, programming must approach each participant as an individual with intersecting identities and recognize that every participant's intersecting identities will affect that participant's involvement in programming. USAID lists inclusion, valuing difference, and drawing upon strength from diversity as one of the six core values it maintains to achieve its mission to reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance, and help people emerge from humanitarian crisis and progress beyond assistance.<sup>5</sup> In pursuing this mission, USAID has developed several policies related to inclusion and diversity, including the 1997 Disability Policy, the Draft Policy on

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this paper wish to thank Kelly Cronen, gender equality and social inclusion practice director, for pioneering Chemonics' annual solicitation analysis, initiating and shaping the research question in this paper, in addition to contributing to reviews during the research and writing process.

<sup>2</sup> This study uses "social group" to refer to people with a characteristic in common (e.g., background, social status, or language) that is so fundamental to their identity that they cannot or should not be expected to change it.

"Underrepresented social group" refers to people with a characteristic in common and a smaller number of representational resources, decision-making positions, ways to access resources, and opportunities than usual in a given society.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. (2016). "Ensuring that No One is Left Behind: Reaching the most vulnerable." Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=20000&nr=348&menu=2993>

<sup>4</sup> A range of goals and targets refer to the poor and vulnerable or those in vulnerable situations, including goals and targets that concern poverty, food security, nutrition and agriculture, education and learning opportunities, water and sanitation, and cities.

<sup>5</sup> USAID. (2019). "Mission, Vision and Values." Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/mission-vision-values>.

## Indigenous People’s Issue, the Youth in Development Policy, and LGBT Vision for Action: Promoting and Supporting the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Individuals.

International development and humanitarian aid programs are intended to support all individuals in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Nevertheless, program designs frequently do not fully account for or accommodate underrepresented social groups, such as persons with disabilities; ethnic minorities; youth; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. Although the case for inclusion is sound and international frameworks and organizations are committed to inclusion, donors and implementers must still agree on how to make development programming truly inclusive. Furthermore, the extent to which specific social groups are included and prioritized across development programming remains largely under-reported and under-addressed.

To understand the extent to which development programming is inclusive and why some programs are more successful at inclusion than others, Chemonics analyzes how USAID programming has integrated the inclusion of four commonly underrepresented social groups — persons with disabilities, minorities<sup>6</sup>, youth, and those who identify as LGBTI — from solicitation to project implementation. This paper presents the study’s findings. The paper’s background section explains why the study focused on these four social groups and explores the diversity that exists across and within them. In addition, the paper examines whether it is effective to use the phrase “vulnerable groups” to refer to the collection of social groups that programming is intended to include. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of this phrase is not an effective way to ensure the inclusion of diverse social groups, there is insufficient quantitative and qualitative data to confirm this belief. The paper also reviews the implications of trying to address the needs of different social groups while designating them all with the term “and other vulnerable groups” and whether the use of this phrase affects inclusion during implementation. The purpose of this study is to examine how underrepresented social groups are included in two key stages of the program cycle: program design (through solicitations for funding) and implementation (through reports on implemented activities). The study draws lessons learned from this examination to advance inclusive programming in the future.

The study’s findings suggest that solicitations for funding minimally address the needs of different underrepresented social groups. The study also demonstrates that, even when USAID programs require inclusion, those programs often do not report on whether or how program interventions, activities, and events integrate different social groups. Although reports show that activities for youth and LGBTI populations tend to mirror the requirements within the corresponding solicitations, the scope of programming that includes persons with disabilities and other minorities (such as ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities) is much smaller. Just as importantly, the data shows that when social groups are only included or defined with the phrases “vulnerable groups” or “marginalized groups” in solicitations, most reports from the resulting programs either make no reference to vulnerable groups or provide no specific information on how the programs addressed these groups’ unique needs. This finding suggests that trying to promote the inclusion of different social groups while referring to them only as “and other vulnerable groups” is ineffective. To arrive at the most effective, comprehensive solutions to challenges in a given country context, the development community must identify the social groups most underrepresented in that context. Overall, the study’s findings indicate that what inclusive development interventions entail may not be well understood and that donors and implementing

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper, “minority populations” refers to ethnic, indigenous, religious and linguistic minorities.

partners need to strengthen their efforts to execute inclusive development interventions. Donors and implementing partners must take responsibility for their roles in improving inclusion for all. The bulleted lists below summarize recommendations for donors and implementing partners. Section 6 of this paper contextualizes these recommendations with specific information.

### **Recommendations for Donors**

- Recognize that designating different social groups with the umbrella term “vulnerable groups” does not guarantee inclusion.
- Improve the understanding of social groups within program design and implementation by using more specific language to discuss those groups in solicitations.
- Support additional research and evaluation to assess the quality of inclusion.
- Increase accountability for all partners to ensure that programs benefit all individuals.

### **Recommendation for Implementing Partners**

- At the headquarters and in the field, build the global workforce’s awareness of the importance of social inclusion within development programs; support the global workforce’s development of the skills necessary to implement inclusive activities.
- Develop and manage sectoral tools and support materials to guide staff in defining vulnerable groups more specifically, identifying effective responses to those groups’ needs, and ensuring that projects include underrepresented social groups.
- Continue with research on current programming to determine where the obstacles to including diverse social groups are.
- Integrate inclusive industry practices throughout organizations to ensure inclusion is intentional, both internally within the organizations’ policies and systems and externally within program design and implementation.

This paper consists of six main sections in addition to the Executive Summary (Section 1) and Conclusion (Section 8). Section 2 provides background information on the development of this study and research questions. It also explores the problem with designating all underrepresented social groups with the broad phrase “vulnerable groups” before elaborating on the diversity that exists within and across social groups. Section 3 presents the methodology used to conduct this study. Section 4 clarifies the study’s limitations and suggests areas for further exploration. Section 5 presents the study’s findings regarding how solicitations promote inclusion and what final reports suggest about how successful resulting program interventions were at achieving inclusion. Section 6 analyzes inclusion in the design and implementation stages and shares consistent trends across the development industry. Section 7 includes key recommendations for implementing partners and donors to support their more effective inclusion of underrepresented social groups in future development programming.

## **2. Background**

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Practice — a team of individuals with expertise in this field — at Chemonics maintains a database of information on how solicitations present gender and social inclusion. The database aggregates data from more than 400 solicitations from 2015 through 2019. These are only solicitations to which Chemonics has

responded.<sup>7</sup> The GESI Practice uses the database to identify annual trends relevant to gender equality and social inclusion in solicitations and to inform Chemonics' program design and implementation. The GESI Practice can disaggregate data in the database by technical sector and geographic region to highlight trends in how different sectors are addressing inclusion. Inclusion trends vary by year, yet it was unclear from the annual solicitation analysis how inclusion flowed through to implementation given what social groups are included in the design phase.

The practice's annual analysis of solicitations served as a foundation and impetus for this more extensive study, which compares the attention to and understanding of inclusion in project solicitations with how that impacts inclusion in those projects during implementation. While exploring the extent to which those projects addressed inclusion during implementation, this study considers whether they have yielded lessons learned on how to design programs to be more inclusive from the start. The study also uses data to evaluate how solicitations' use of the broad phrase "other vulnerable groups" to designate specific social groups — a trend the practice recognized during its annual analysis — may affect the inclusion of those social groups during implementation. These findings can shed light on the current status of inclusive programming and gaps within it for donors and implementing partners.

## 2.1. The Problem with "And Other Vulnerable Groups"

During its annual analyses of solicitations, the GESI Practice observed the prevalence of solicitations that frequently rely on the phrase "vulnerable groups" to represent a wide range of social groups that are considered marginalized. In these solicitations, donors are neither identifying who is vulnerable nor consistently requiring implementing partners to specify target populations in their responses. The first step of inclusive development is to recognize the unique needs and experiences of different social groups and the diversity that exists within each group. If the development community fails to identify the social groups most underrepresented in a given country context, the development community cannot craft effective solutions to the challenges that context presents. Increasingly, development experts who work on disability, LGBTI, youth, and minority issues, are underscoring the diversity of experiences and needs within the communities they support. Inclusion is an important priority within development. Not addressing the diversity within and between groups, however, can weaken efforts to promote inclusive development. It is ineffective to attempt to address the needs of all underrepresented groups while simply referring to them with the umbrella term "vulnerable groups." As the International Labor Organization summarizes:

Experience shows that whenever the specific exclusion mechanisms and specific needs of persons with disabilities are not explicitly identified, the related strategies and programmes also miss their specific target. A category like "vulnerable groups", though useful at certain levels of analysis, becomes an obstacle when it hides essential differences in poverty determinants of various vulnerable sub-groups and in strategies to apply.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Approximately 80 percent of solicitations Chemonics responds to are from USAID. The remaining 20 percent are from donors such as the U.S. Department of State, World Bank, European Commission, World Health Organization, Global Fund, Millennium Corporate Challenge, U.K. Department for International Development, and U.K. Foreign Common Wealth Office.

<sup>8</sup> International Labor Organization. (2002). *Disability and Poverty Reduction Strategies: How to ensure that access of persons with disabilities to decent and productive work is part of the PRSP process*. Retrieved from: [http://unipd-centrodirittumani.it/public/docs/31771\\_poverty.pdf](http://unipd-centrodirittumani.it/public/docs/31771_poverty.pdf).

USAID solicitations for contractors to submit proposals to implement USAID programs exhibit this lack of specificity when defining vulnerable groups. The solicitations often use the phrase “women, youth and other vulnerable groups” to encompass a wide range of social groups that are considered marginalized. The GESI Practice found that solicitations that use the phrase “and other vulnerable groups” rarely clarify which other groups are vulnerable. For instance, in one 2017 solicitation that focused on biodiversity conservation, USAID requested that the contractor provide a monitoring and evaluation plan with “disaggregation information as appropriate, to include women, youth, members of vulnerable populations and people with disabilities.” Another section of the same solicitation required the contractor to “ensure new livelihood opportunities are available for women and other marginalized populations.” The solicitation did not ever further define or provide background information on the vulnerable or marginalized populations, leaving their identity ambiguous.

The solicitations that define the vulnerable or marginalized groups in question tend to do so with long lists of possible underrepresented social groups, but they do not clarify which groups to prioritize. This practice of including a long list of social groups under the broad phrase “other vulnerable groups” allows ample room for interpretation during implementation, making it less likely that the needs of specific groups will be addressed. If the vulnerable groups are not defined at the solicitation stage, it is incumbent upon implementing partners to conduct social inclusion assessments to determine specific social groups’ needs to ensure that the project’s design and work plan address those needs and, in turn, promote truly inclusive programs.

## **2.2. Social Groups Typically Underrepresented in International Development**

This subsection provides an overview of the four underrepresented social groups the study has prioritized: persons with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people; youth; and other minorities (ethnic, religious, or linguistic). The overview addresses global demographic trends within each social group, how discrimination varies in relation to the group members’ intersecting identities or country context, and what to consider when designing programs that include these different social groups.

*Persons with disabilities.* “Disability” is a term often used broadly to represent a homogenous social group, but this population encompasses a range of people with diverse abilities and needs. There are many categories of disability. For example, there are sensory, physical, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities. The needs of a person with a disability will vary greatly depending on the type of disability and programming. For instance, a person with a disability that compromises mobility will have different needs than a person with a visual disability. Furthermore, two people with the same type of disability may experience it differently and, therefore, have different needs and preferences for accommodation.<sup>9</sup> Whereas one person who is deaf or hard of hearing may prefer sign language interpretation, another may prefer closed captioning. There is no one-size-fits-all approach regarding inclusive practices and accommodations. An estimated 15 percent of the world’s population (about 1 billion people) have a disability. That percentage is said to be increasing due to various factors, including the aging process, the rapid spread of chronic diseases, and improvements in the methods used to measure disability.<sup>10</sup> Because of various factors, disability rates are even higher in post-conflict

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<sup>9</sup> Center for Disease and Control Prevention. (2017). “Disability and Health Overview.” Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability.html>.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization (2018) Disability and Health Factsheet. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

settings among women, rural populations, and aging populations. From an early age, persons with disabilities often have limited access to public services, such as education and health services. Their limited access to public services impedes their full participation in society later in adult life, including by reducing their employment opportunities and financial independence.<sup>11</sup> Data also shows how other intersecting aspects the identity of someone with a disability, such as socioeconomic status, age, and gender, may increase that person's vulnerability. For instance, the World Bank estimates that 20 percent of the world's poorest people have a disability, and children with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged in LMICs due to factors such as malnutrition, disease, child labor, and the prevalence of conflict.<sup>12</sup> The intersection of disability and gender also compounds exclusion. Women and girls with disabilities experience multiple forms of discrimination based on their disabilities and gender, and they are particularly vulnerable to abuse.<sup>13</sup> Programs intended to include persons with disabilities should recognize that they have multifaceted identities and, therefore, that they may experience exclusion not only because they have a disability but also because of their other identifying characteristics. Programs should also acknowledge diverse abilities and needs in this community.

*Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.* Although those in the LGBTI community are frequently grouped together, there is significant gender diversity across the community. Gender varies according to ones' sexual orientation, gender expression, biological sex, or gender identity. Although there may be a relationship between different aspects of one's gender, they do not determine each other (e.g., orientation does not determine identity, and vice versa). The legal and cultural barriers individuals experience based on different aspects of gender may also vary greatly, even within the same country. For example, countries like the United States may show greater cultural acceptance of and offer more legal protections for people with non-normative sexual orientations — like people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual — than the cultural acceptance they show and legal protections they offer for members of the transgender community.<sup>14</sup> In Sri Lanka, the reverse holds true. Sri Lanka's legal code and cultural attitudes are more favorable to the transgender community than to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. These communities may experience overlapping forms of discrimination, but the members of these communities have distinct experiences and needs across and within each country context. Many who identify as members of the LGBTI community experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, yet there is a lack of data sufficient to rigorously document their experiences. Very few censuses include questions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation, and estimates of those who identify as intersex are generally gathered from published medical journals.<sup>15</sup> There is also a stigma associated with identifying as LGBTI in many contexts, which affects the accuracy of the data collected. Thus, there is a real gap in knowledge regarding the LGBTI community's size. However, increasing evidence attests to the other forms of exclusion and barriers this social group faces, such as

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations. (2019). Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Disabled World. (2019). "Disability: Benefits, Facts and Resources for Persons with Disabilities." Retrieved from <https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/>.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the terminology associated with the LGBTI community and the very concepts of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex are part of a Western ideology. In other countries and cultural contexts, the people in this group might be viewed very differently. Thus, it is necessary to nuance these concepts in local and cultural contexts to deliver effective development outcomes and services.

<sup>15</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). "LGBTI inclusiveness." Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/lgbti.htm>.

discrimination, bullying and violence that decrease education outcomes; higher unemployment rates; and a lack of access to adequate housing, health, and financial services.<sup>16</sup> Globally, discrimination against people within the LGBTI community varies greatly and depends on countries' legal frameworks and cultural stigmas. For instance, more than 70 countries have criminalized same-sex consensual activity. People may receive the death penalty for it in eight countries.<sup>17</sup> In 45 of the countries that have criminalized same-sex consensual activity, the law applies equally to men and women.<sup>18</sup> When designing and implementing inclusive programs for LGBTI people, it is important to be aware of the diverse experiences within the LGBTI community, a country's legal framework, and common cultural stigmas in it. Keeping these factors in mind will help reduce barriers to equal access and opportunity and avoid unintentionally exposing members of the LGBTI community to harm.

*Youth.* The global population is relatively young, with 42 percent of people under the age of 25.<sup>19</sup> Although the youth population has grown in the past twenty years, the youth labor force is shrinking.<sup>20</sup> The combination of a young population and a shrinking youth labor force presents an interesting challenge for the global economy. One goal the SDG outline is to “substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)” by 2020.<sup>21</sup> There is a far way to go to realize this goal, and it will be even more challenging to decrease the proportion of young women who are unemployed and not receiving education or training. These women face obstacles to employment and, more generally, opportunity not only because of their age but also because of their gender. More than 75 percent of those classified as NEET are young women, and they continue to fall behind young men in the labor force.<sup>22</sup> The limited economic opportunities for young people, particularly young women, contribute to a cycle of poverty. Overall, young people are much more likely to be in short-term or informal employment that lacks social protections, which is in part why there are 160 million working youth worldwide that live in poverty.<sup>23</sup> International development programs must consider the growing youth population and how the intersection of gender and other facets of identity, such as disability or socioeconomic status, may create additional barriers to education, employment, and full participation in society for youth.

*Other minorities (ethnic, religious, or linguistic).* This catch-all group is often the least understood, and it may encompass indigenous populations; ethnic minorities, who may also be religious or linguistic minorities; and refugees. There are no internationally accepted criteria to define ethnic minorities. Their identities vary widely from country to country and greatly depend upon contextual circumstances within a country. For instance, in some cases, it may be

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<sup>16</sup> World Bank. (2019). “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.” Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>.

<sup>17</sup> International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. (2017). “ILGA Launches State-Sponsored Homophobia Report 2017.” Retrieved from <https://ilga.org/ilga-state-sponsored-homophobia-report-2017>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank. (2017). “How is the World’s Youth Population Changing?” Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-how-worlds-youth-population-changing>.

<sup>20</sup> International Labour Organization. (2017). “Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017.” Retrieved from [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_598675.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_598675.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> United Nations. (2018). “World Economic Situation and Prospects: February 2018 Briefing.” No. 111. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-february-2018-briefing-no-111/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

appropriate to define ethnicity in terms of nationality (that is, in terms of country or area of origin as opposed to citizenship or legal nationality). In other cases, it may be more appropriate to define ethnicity in terms of race, language, religion, tribe, or combinations of all four.<sup>24</sup> Some minority groups have well-defined rights under international and national legal codes, whereas others do not receive protections from their country's legal codes. It is imperative that attempts to understand a country's ethnic demographic involve representatives of the ethnic groups in the country. It is also necessary that such attempts offer the flexibility to apply nuance to broad definitions. Inequality and discrimination based on ethnic identity are global phenomena. The lack of protection for minorities remains a challenge worldwide. People are often systematically excluded from decision-making roles and denied access to educational and economic opportunities based on their religious and racial ethnicities.<sup>25</sup> However, minority groups are diverse, and not all minorities are excluded from opportunities simply because of their status as minorities. It is important when designing programs to understand each country context and to prioritize the minority groups within it that are the most economically, politically, or socially marginalized and whose rights are particularly at risk.

### 3. Methodology

Initially, the impetus for this research came from Chemonics' annual analysis of how solicitations integrate gender and social inclusion. Using Chemonics' solicitation database, the research team identified USAID solicitations that mention the inclusion of persons with disabilities, LGBTI communities, youth, or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities within the proposed programming. The practice examined these solicitations as part of an extended study on how USAID programming has integrated the inclusion of these four commonly underrepresented social groups from solicitation to project implementation.

*Solicitation analysis.* The study reviewed a total of 32 solicitations that USAID publicly released between 2016 and 2017 for contractors to submit proposals to implement USAID programs. Chemonics was awarded 13 of the contracts that resulted from this process. The other 19 contracts were awarded to other implementing partners.<sup>26</sup> The study assessed the extent to which language in the solicitations required the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the LGBTI community, youth, or minorities as well as whether the solicitations mentioned the need to include these groups by designating them with the umbrella term "vulnerable groups." Solicitations ranged across all regions and sectors, such as agriculture, education, employment, environment, and health.

*Report analysis.* The study then analyzed and compared the quarterly and final reports from the projects corresponding to the solicitations to assess how the projects were meeting the inclusion

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations Statistics Division. (2017). "Ethnocultural characteristics." Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/popchar/popcharmehods.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2013). *Guidance Note of the Secretary General on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/GuidanceNoteRacialDiscriminationMinorities.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Partner reports analyzed as part of this study include reports from Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations, and Maintenance (AECOM); Creative Associates; Development Associates International (DAI); Deloitte, FHI 360; Fintrack; Financial Markets International (FMI); Forrest Trends; Global Communities, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX); Louis Berger; Management Sciences for Health (MSH); Management Systems International (MSI); Pan American Development Foundation (PADF); Palladium Group; Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International; Tetra Tech; University Research College (URC); and Winrock. This paper does not disaggregate information by organization to avoid highlighting specific programs.

requirement during implementation. The reports from projects that Chemonics implemented were available and easily accessible within the organization. The research team retrieved reports from projects awarded to other implementing partners from the USAID Development Exchange Clearinghouse (DEC). Although Chemonics' database included solicitations from 2018, the research team decided not to include these solicitations in the study, as it was unlikely that the reports from the resulting projects would be available on the DEC.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, although the research team initially reviewed 49 USAID solicitations, 17 of the resulting programs (34 percent) did not have public reports available on the DEC, so the research team did not include them in the study.<sup>28</sup>

By disaggregating data by social group, the study was able to highlight possible differences in how programming included distinct social groups. This disaggregation also enabled the study to assess any correlations between the solicitations' use of the broad phrase "vulnerable groups" to designate distinct social groups and how reports suggested that programming included the groups. The research team compiled and analyzed these reports to determine possible trends in funding and programming and how inclusion changes from the solicitation to implementation phases.

The research team categorized the collected solicitations and reports by the frequency in which the documents mention different social groups. Classification categories include:

- 1) Does not mention the reviewed social group (persons with disabilities, LGBTI communities, youth, or minorities)
- 2) Only includes the reviewed social group in a list that serves to define the terms "vulnerable groups" or "marginalized groups"
- 3) Lists at least one activity related to the reviewed social group
- 4) Lists more than one activity related to the reviewed social group

#### 4. Study Limitations

There were several limitations to the study. One main limitation was that the collection of solicitations reviewed — the sample size — was relatively small because the research team only looked at solicitations requiring the inclusion of at least one social group. The team did not assess how programs resulting from solicitations without the requirement to include at least one social group might have pursued social inclusion. Likewise, although Chemonics' solicitation database is comprehensive, it does not include every funding opportunity that USAID published in 2016 and 2017. There are some requests for application (RFAs) for cooperative agreements in the database, but the research team primarily reviewed request for proposals (RFPs) or task orders for indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQs) opportunities.<sup>29</sup> Only reports from task orders under IDIQs that Chemonics held were available. Therefore, the research team did not review reports from all task orders USAID issued during this timeframe. The study also does not compare solicitation types because the research team had limited examples of cooperative agreements and lacked full access to reports for all task order opportunities. Instead, the study

<sup>27</sup> Often, the timespan between solicitation release and award is between six to nine months. An additional three to four months are needed before writing and publishing a quarterly report on the DEC.

<sup>28</sup> Proposals are considered to contain proprietary information, and they are not publicly available, so they could not be reviewed a part of this study. Likewise, not all awarded programs are required to publish work plans or performance monitoring plans on the USAID DEC and, therefore, they also were not included as data points within this study.

<sup>29</sup> IDIQs are issued and competed between holders of the IDIQ that have been selected as part of an initial open and competitive process.

evaluates general funding trends within a select but relevant number of programs.

The study included only those programs which published either quarterly or annual reports on the DEC. Contractor proposals to implement USAID programs are not publicly available because some information they contain is considered proprietary, and many programs are not required within their contracts to submit work plans to the DEC. Consequently, the research team could only comprehensively analyze how the different stages of programs that Chemonics implemented addressed inclusion. The research team also did not assess the quality of programming focused on inclusion, which would have required more comprehensive evaluations of programs. The team only looked at the language within reports relevant to the number of activities and the involvement of the different social groups.

## 5. Study Results

This paper presents the study results in terms of solicitation reviews, report reviews, and the implications of using the broad phrase “vulnerable groups” to designate diverse social groups. The study results are as follows:

### 5.1. Results from Solicitation Review

The GESI Practice’s annual analysis of solicitations reveals that USAID solicitations continue to omit most social groups or only mention them tangentially. Although solicitations do not infrequently refer to youth, they typically do not mention persons with disabilities, the LGBTI community, or ethnic minorities, or solicitations mention these social groups only as illustrations of “vulnerable groups.”

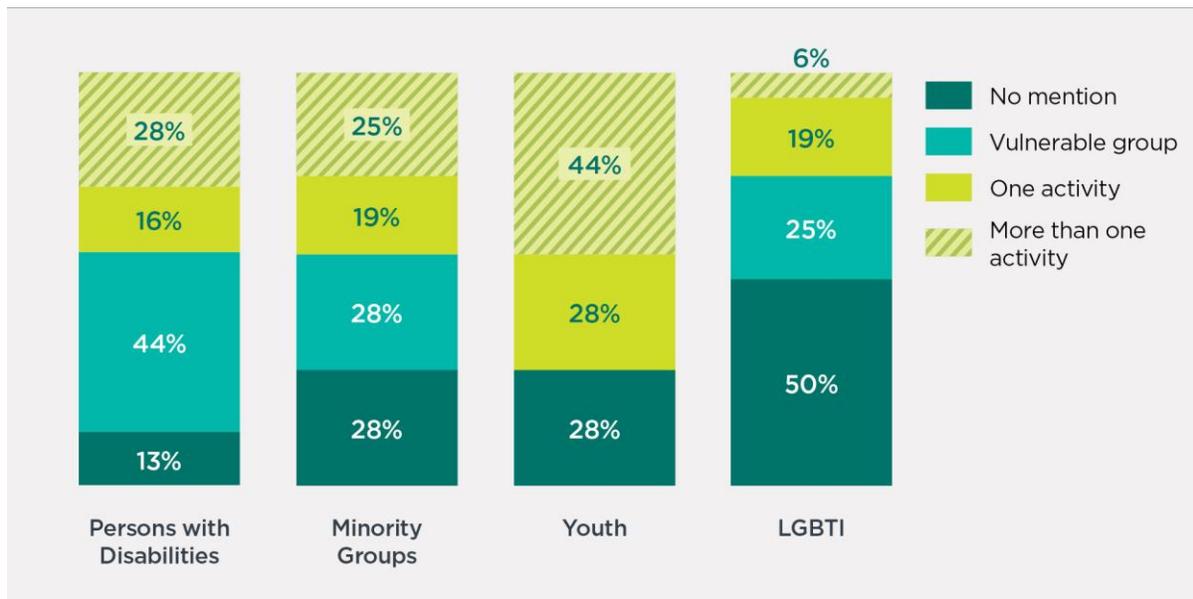
Few of the solicitations the research team reviewed for this study made two or more references to activities intended to include diverse social groups. Of the 32 solicitations the team examined, 6 percent referred to LGBTI populations, and 28 percent referred to persons with disabilities. Combined, these social groups represent many of the individuals who are most in need of and may benefit the most from USAID support worldwide. But since the majority of solicitations reviewed do not require the inclusion of these groups, this study’s results suggests the groups may be less likely to benefit from USAID programs.

The 32 solicitations reviewed include the fewest mentions of LGBTI issues. Just 50 percent of the solicitations refer to such issues. Although solicitation language is least likely to omit persons with disabilities — 13 percent of solicitations have no language related to disability — 44 percent of the solicitations reviewed only include persons with disabilities as an example of a “vulnerable group.” Similarly, the majority (56 percent) of solicitations either omit or only list ethnic or other minorities as examples of vulnerable groups. Of the four underrepresented social groups this study has prioritized, solicitations dedicate the most significant level of programming to youth; language in 44 percent of solicitations specifies the inclusion of youth in more than one activity. It is noteworthy that no solicitations reviewed cited youth only as an example of a “vulnerable group.” Exhibit 1 (next page) graphically depicts how the solicitations represented the four different social groups.

It is important to note that solicitations’ omission of certain populations is not necessarily intentional. A solicitation may not mention a given population because that population’s involvement does not seem as relevant to the USAID program the solicitation outlines. For example, most solicitations for early grade reading programs do not mention youth or LGBTI populations. In some contexts, highlighting ethnic minorities may present political challenges, as in Rwanda, where the government avoids discussing different ethnicities because of Rwanda’s

history of genocide. Given that persons with disabilities exist in all geographic regions, ethnicities, age groups, and socioeconomic brackets, it would be difficult to argue that solicitations have sound reasons for not requiring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in programming.

### Exhibit 1. Language Solicitations Dedicate to the Four Underrepresented Social Groups



## 5.2. Results from Report Review

The research team's analysis of program reports suggests that activities included the four underrepresented social groups only to a limited extent. Program reports are less likely to mention these groups (or, in other words, more likely to omit them) than solicitations. For example, although 87 percent of the solicitations reviewed mention persons with disabilities, only 37 percent of reports on implemented activities refer to persons with disabilities.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, 72 percent of the solicitations mention ethnic/minority groups, but just 35 percent of reports refer to these groups.<sup>31</sup> If solicitations do not require or encourage the inclusion of a social group in program design, the quarterly and final reports from that program do not refer to that social group. For instance, 50 percent of solicitations do not mention LGBTI populations and 78 percent of reports do not refer to them. Language dedicated to youth decreased the least from solicitations to program reports compared to the other three social groups, with no mention of youth in 28 percent of solicitations increasing to no mention of youth in 31 percent of reports. The team's analysis also indicates that programming was more likely to follow solicitation requirements regarding youth than solicitation requirements regarding the other three underrepresented groups.

References to persons with disabilities decreased the most (66 percent) from solicitations to

<sup>30</sup> This total combines reports in which persons with disabilities are listed as a vulnerable group (9 percent), in one activity (9 percent), or in more than one activity (19 percent).

<sup>31</sup> This total combines reports in which ethnic/minority groups are listed as a vulnerable group (13 percent), in one activity (6 percent), or in more than one activity (16 percent).

reports. References to youth decreased at the lowest rate: 28 percent. The research team’s analysis also suggested that efforts to include youth were more likely to increase from solicitation to implementation than efforts to include any of the other three underrepresented groups considered. Within programs, reported efforts to include youth increased at a rate of 18 percent. Comparable efforts within programs to include the other three groups increased at an average rate of 10 percent. The increase of 9 percent in reported efforts to include both persons with disabilities and ethnic/minority groups in programming corresponded to specific objectives or intermediate results dedicated to the inclusion of “vulnerable groups” in the relevant solicitations. Language in the reports from this programming emphasized the inclusion of both groups. Reported efforts to include the LGBTI community in programming showed the highest unchanged rate, 59 percent, which signifies that LGBTI people received the same representation in reports that solicitations required. Exhibit 2 (below) graphically depicts the findings of the research team’s analysis of language in partner reports. Exhibit 3 (next page) shows the reduction of language dedicated to the four underrepresented social groups from solicitations to the reports from the resulting projects.

**Exhibit 2. Inclusion within Program Reports Categorized by Social Group and Extent of Language within Quarterly or Annual Reports**



**5.3. The Relationship Between the Phrase “Vulnerable Group” and Inclusion**

One of the study’s significant findings was that, when solicitations designate different social groups only with the umbrella term “vulnerable groups,” reports from the corresponding projects will either continue only to refer to those groups with that phrase (without clarifying how their individual needs were addressed) or not mention them at all.<sup>32</sup> Eighty-two percent of reports either stop referencing different social groups or continue to denominate them with the umbrella term “vulnerable group.” When, however, solicitations specifically reference one or more social

<sup>32</sup> This suggests a significant correlation between omission from inclusion of social groups within solicitations to omission within program reports, yet the research does not argue a causal relationship between these two phenomena.

groups, just 51 percent of reports from the corresponding programs stop referencing those groups (see Exhibit 4 below).

### 6. Study Analysis and Findings

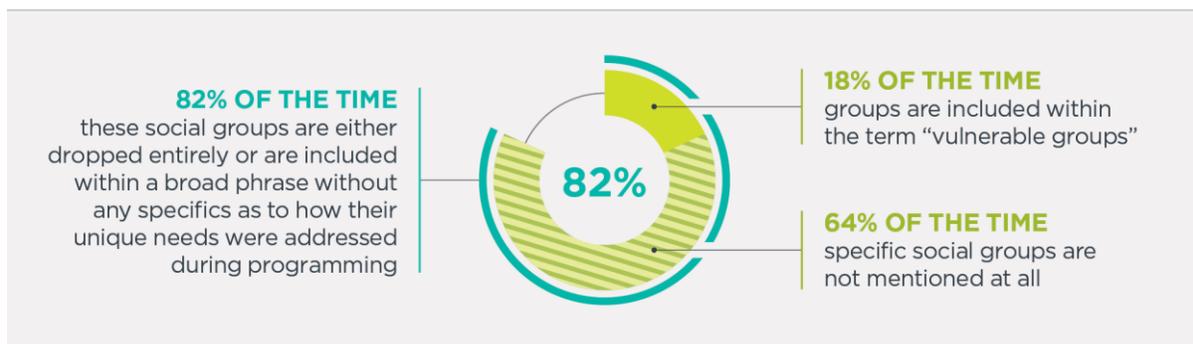
This study shows that despite the increased efforts of donors and their implementing partners to promote inclusive programming, most social groups still experience exclusion from international development and may not even benefit from it. The onus is on donors and their implementing partners to resolve this issue. The data suggests that it is ineffective for donors simply to state that programming must include social groups without clearly identifying them and specifying how programming should address their unique needs. The data also suggests that implementing partners are often not fulfilling the requirements in their contracts to include different social groups in programming. All relevant stakeholders must demonstrate greater accountability for ensuring that inclusion is taking place.

In addition, donors and implementing partners must conduct more research on why there is a seeming willingness to fully include youth in programs while only to minimally including persons with disabilities, the LGBTI community, and ethnic/minority groups. If this discrepancy is related to stigmas that partners hold, partners' biased views, or partners' lack of tools for and knowledge about how to effectively integrate these social groups, this issue must be tackled head-on by the entire international development and humanitarian community. Likewise, if the donors are not using accountability measures during the implementation phase to ensure inclusion, their failure to do so must also be addressed.

**Exhibit 3. Reduction of Scope from Solicitation to Program Reports**



**Exhibit 4. How Specific Social Groups are Integrated During Implementation**



This study also shows that solely designating different social groups with the terms “vulnerable groups” or “marginalized groups” is problematic. As the data demonstrates, this language does not help increase effective efforts to include the target groups. “Vulnerable groups” and “marginalized groups” can mean different things to different people. Implementers may interpret these phrases as they wish to, and in doing so, they may advertently or inadvertently exclude the very social groups from programming that the programming should serve. Solicitations that simply state that programming and reports should include vulnerable groups but that do not specify the measures implementing partners should take to ensure the groups; inclusion greatly reduces general accountability. To ensure that interventions are inclusive, language about those interventions must be clear and specific throughout the program cycle. The data shows that inclusion was a key element of programming (e.g., an objective or intermediate result) in the programs that used the phrase “vulnerable groups” or “marginalized groups” yet did achieve inclusion. This data indicates that underscoring the importance of inclusion in the right ways may in program design may be an effective way to promote inclusion.

The findings related to the use of the terms “vulnerable groups” and “marginalized groups” — that is, that these terms are generally ineffective at promoting the inclusion of social groups — may have far-reaching implications. As donors and implementers work to implement the SDG and while following the best practice of “leaving no one behind,” it is necessary for them to know what funding approaches are effective or ineffective for reaching social groups. If inclusion is to be realized, solicitations and resulting programs must support specific activities, efforts, and modifications for social groups or make highlighting their needs a core component of programming. Unless the inclusion of social groups across all sectors improves, groups will remain marginalized, and the SDG goal to “leave no one behind” will remain unrealized.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the research team developed recommendations for both donors and their implementing partners on how to address the inclusion of different social groups in the future. These recommendations are as follows:

### 7.1. Recommendations for Donors

- **Recognize that referring to different social groups with the umbrella terms “vulnerable groups” does not guarantee those groups’ inclusion.** The data shows that solely listing different social groups under “vulnerable groups” tends not to lead to their inclusion in reports. If reports do mention them, the reports typically continue to list the different social groups under “vulnerable groups” without explaining how the programming addressed the groups’ unique needs. Specific interventions for specific groups should be clarified within solicitations and throughout program design. Donors should be aware of the lack of impact the use of this term appears to have and adjust future solicitations accordingly. Purposefully including different social groups in programming signals all stakeholders that the donor prioritizes inclusiveness in all development activities.
- **Improve understanding of the needs of social groups within program design and implementation by strengthening language in solicitations.** It is critical for the language in solicitations to become stronger and clearer to ensure that USAID-supported programs benefit all of society and contribute to the SDG goal of leaving no one behind. One effective way to achieve this goal is to increase the visibility of social groups within solicitations by developing objectives or intermediate results related to the groups’ inclusion. USAID states that “societies that are inclusive of their diverse populations are more likely to be democratic, participatory and equitable. They are more likely to meet their development goals.” Elevating

the visibility of social groups in all development programs will the likelihood of reaching the diverse populations the international development community has pledged to support with funding.

- **Support additional research and evaluation to assess the quality of inclusion.** Although this study does not address the quality of inclusive programming, such a review would help all stakeholders in moving forward. Additional examinations of on why programs do or do not achieve inclusion that donors require in their solicitations is also needed. This key piece of missing information can critically inform future programming as well as help identify tools and resources that could be used to ensure diversity across all USAID-supported programs.
- **Increase accountability for all partners to ensure that programs benefit all individuals.** Activists have been advocating for the increased inclusion of different social groups within USAID and other donor solicitations for many years. Promoting inclusion in solicitations, however, is necessary but insufficient. For inclusion to be realized, donors must also ensure that partners are accountable for implementing inclusive efforts by following up with those partners and monitoring their work plans, budgets, activities, and reports. Support for inclusion must be holistic from program design through implementation, and evaluation is needed to support sustainable change in this area.

## 7.2. Recommendations for Implementing Partners

- **Increase advocacy and awareness of benefits of inclusion.** One of the first steps is to raise awareness and advocate for behavior change among staff. Implementing partners must commit to being inclusive to reach those most underrepresented. These partners must continue and augment the education of global staff on the importance of inclusion for *all* social groups. In addition, partners must provide global staff with the tools they need to successfully implement inclusive programs. Partners must also take ownership of the roles they play in realizing inclusion for all. Doing so entails using participatory and evidence-based practices as well as working alongside donors to improve the inclusion of the diverse social groups from the beginning of the solicitation phase.
- **Continue with research on current programming to assess possible obstacles to the inclusion of social groups.** Although this study has yielded important findings, many questions related to the inclusion of social groups in international development and humanitarian programs remain unanswered. International partners must undertake additional research. For example, more research is needed on why inclusion decreases from solicitations to reports as well as on the roles different stakeholders must take to eliminate this trend. Implementing partners should continue to explore why their programs have not fully included different social groups and evaluate the quality of inclusive programming.
- **Develop and manage sectoral tools and support materials to better guide staff in designing and implementing inclusive programs.** Global staff need adequate resources and tools to design, implement, and monitor inclusive programs. Meeting this need will include creating and sharing tools to define underrepresented social groups and then training staff on how to design appropriate interventions and activities to effectively respond to specific needs. Sectoral resources as well as general program resources to achieve inclusion are needed to ensure that global staff are equipped to include underrepresented social groups in their programming.

- **Integrate sound industry practices to achieve inclusion within organizations.** Inclusive development must be integrated within an organization’s internal systems and structures as well as within programmatic work. To ensure inclusion is intentional, an organization’s internal policies and systems must be inclusive (e.g., the organization must provide accessible workspaces, use non-discriminatory hiring practices, and make reasonable accommodations for staff). Who will participate in and benefit from activities and who may be excluded from them must be considered throughout the activities’ design. There are also sound practices for achieving inclusion in program activities that the entire industry should adopt (e.g., conducting a gender and social inclusion assessment at program startup, budgeting for accommodations, and engaging with civil society organizations and individuals representative of underrepresented social groups in program design and implementation).

## 8. Conclusion

Given the diversity across and within each social group, it is important for donors and implementers alike to identify the social groups they are trying to include and to articulate how individuals within those social groups uniquely experience exclusion based on specific program contexts. Too often, however, inclusion is viewed as a “add-on” to instead of a core component of programming that must be mainstreamed throughout organizations and programs. Focusing on inclusion from the very beginning of program design will make the program more impactful for the most under-represented groups and lead to greater social and economic benefits. Although the case for inclusion far outweighs the case for exclusion, donors and implementers have not reached a consensus on how good inclusive development programming is done. This research sheds light on what measures will allow for greater inclusion within development programs and provides quantitative data that demonstrates how designating different social groups with the term “vulnerable groups” does not guarantee their inclusion.

This study does not assume a causal link between solicitations’ use of the broad phrase “vulnerable groups” to designate different social groups and the exclusion of these groups during program implementation or in program reports. This study does, however, demonstrate a correlation between these phenomena, a correlation that confirms the need for additional research on this topic. In addition to raising awareness of relevant trends within solicitations and program reports, this study constitutes a step toward more comprehensive inclusion in development.

The study also offers recommendations that both donors and implementing partners can act on in the present to promote and ensure more inclusive development programming. The lack of robust data on this topic should not prevent stakeholders from supporting inclusive practices now to meet the needs of underrepresented groups.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the need to serve the most underrepresented groups through development programming is great. To be effective, donors and implementers alike must act with intention. As donors and implementers promote greater inclusion, they must ensure that all stakeholders are knowledgeable about good practices and committed to making inclusion a fundamental component of international development. Without this intentional inclusion, USAID, and other donors will not be able to meet their respective internal missions, and the SDG will not be realized by 2030.