

ActionAid Australia Submission to the 2020 Review of Australia's International Development Policy – February 2020

With the latest progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals indicating that the world is not on track to end poverty by 2030 and millions more people living in hunger than a decade ago, the review of Australia's International Development Policy comes at a critical juncture. The 25 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action also calls for renewed commitment to the global imperative of gender equality with women and girls continuing to experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and being left behind in many areas of progress. ActionAid Australia welcomes the review into Australia's International Development Policy. This can be a defining moment for the Australian Government to set an ambitious agenda as a wealthy nation to contribute meaningfully to advancing sustainable development, gender equality and poverty eradication. Australia's ambition should be matched by adequate resourcing, targeted to where there is greatest need.

The key recommendations of this submission are that:

- With women comprising the majority of people living in poverty, gender equality should remain a core goal of Australia's International Development Policy with a twin-track approach that promotes standalone and integrated programming, matched by increased resource commitments.
- An integrated framework should be adopted that addresses climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised and climate affected populations, particularly women and girls.
- Australia should target its development cooperation where there is greatest need, which includes re-instating an increasing portion of aid to Africa, where 90% of people living in extreme poverty are expected to reside by 2030.
- Australia should invest in the strengthening of civil society in partner countries with targeted and direct support to national civil society organisations (CSOs), including women's rights organisations, through both its development and humanitarian programming.
- Australia's increasing focus on aid for trade should include assessment of the gender and environmental impacts of Free Trade Agreements and support the increased participation of women and their organisations in trade negotiations, as well as investment in other measures to advance our international obligations and support women to benefit equitably from trade.
- Australia's funding for development cooperation should increase to at least 0.7 GNI over the next five years recognising that without significantly increased investment, governments globally will fail to end poverty by 2030.

ActionAid Australia is a global women's rights organisation working to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication in 45 countries (www.actionaid.org.au). More than 60,000 Australians support our efforts to advance economic and climate justice for women and their rights in emergencies. ActionAid is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and partners with DFAT through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and a number of other schemes focused on gender, climate change, humanitarian, the Pacific, and Afghanistan, among others.

Priority 1: Gender Equality as a central objective

Gender equality should remain a core goal of Australia's International Development Policy with a twin-track approach that promotes standalone and integrated programming, with 20% of all investments having gender equality as their primary objective within the next 3 years and 85% of ODA having gender equality as their primary or secondary objective during the same timeframe.

Sustainable development and poverty eradication, longstanding objectives of Australia's development cooperation, cannot be achieved without gender equality. UN Women's *Turning promises into action* (2019) indicates that women and girls continue to experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and are often left behind or excluded from progress. Women make up a majority of people living in poverty, are more likely to experience food insecurity and die in a disaster than men, and rates of maternal mortality, violence against women and girls dropping out of primary school continue to remain unacceptably high. Furthermore, women continue to be underrepresented in decision making, holding just 23.7% of parliamentary positions and 27% of managerial positions globally.

UN Women has highlighted the critical importance of integrated approaches to harness policy synergies across efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the need to prioritise gender responsive investments, policies and programs, which the Australian Government is urged to consider in its new policy framework. A new development cooperation policy should retain gender equality as a central goal and adopt a twin track approach that invests in both standalone programming which has gender equality as its central objective, alongside integrating gender equality outcomes across all other investments. Gender equality should not be assumed under a broad category of social inclusion. Women make up 50% of the world's population and have been subjected to systemic discrimination across all spheres of life, including denial of access to decision making and resources, and devaluing of their labour, both paid and unpaid. Harmful gender norms also continue to pose a barrier to progress.

The 2014 aid performance framework, *Making Performance Count*, included gender equality as one of 10 performance targets for the aid program with the commitment that "[m]ore than 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, will effectively address gender issues in their implementation." While this target was not met, it increased technical capacity for gender analysis within DFAT, and ensured that new investments were designed with gender considerations in mind. DFAT should look to build upon this progress. This could be supported by complementary *investment* targets that ensure Australia's international development cooperation efforts are directed towards gender equality initiatives. Specifically, ActionAid encourages DFAT to set a three year target to ensure 85% of ODA integrates gender equality as the primary or secondary objective, with 20% specifically going to investments where gender equality is the primary objective. Based on the OECD DAC Gender Marker, 60% of Australia's aid is currently spent on initiatives with gender equality as the primary or secondary objective, which makes an achievable yet ambitious target.

ActionAid Australia encourages DFAT to examine the quality of its aid investments to advance gender equality. Under the current Australian Aid Program, DFAT has focused on three thematic priorities, namely women's leadership and decision making, women's economic empowerment, and ending violence against women. These at times have been regarded as shorthand for achieving gender equality. However, the importance of addressing discriminatory gender norms has been lost in this focus, along with the need to interrogate and dismantle the individual, institutional and structural biases that militate against substantive gender equality outcomes. DFAT is encouraged to consider strengthening this focus in the next iteration of its development policy.

Priority 2: Integration of climate change, gender equality & interlinked crises

An integrated framework should be adopted that addresses climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised and climate affected populations, particularly women and girls.

Climate change is altering weather systems and driving unprecedented economic challenges, conflict, and humanitarian disasters, while also increasing challenges for women, particularly those living in poverty and exclusion. The impact of climate change is complex, and requires integrated approaches to risks and hazards, across multiple scales and policy settings. It requires responses that recognise the intersections of the environmental crisis with other crises such as armed conflicts, health pandemics, and economic recessions.

To date, global and Australian policy responses continue to pursue “siloed” thinking. And while the 2017 Australian *Foreign Policy White Paper* recognises that climate change will be a political, economic and security disrupter, that gender equality is a core Australian value, and that it will be vital to promote collective responses in an interdependent world, Australian Government policy settings should recognise the need for genuine integration of thinking on climate, security, development and humanitarian responses. The impact of non-integrated thinking is that policy responses to hazards and risks are separated under different policy goals and priorities, which has profound implications for coordination, efficiencies and resourcing.

ActionAid, in collaboration with Monash University and funded by DFAT’s Gender Action Platform, has developed a framework for *Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change and Related Crises*, which proposes an integrated framework aimed at systematically addressing climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises. It is designed to drive more effective response for the most marginalised and climate-affected populations, particularly women and girls, and builds on research with women in Cambodia, Kenya and Vanuatu.

The research identified three key findings: one, there is low mutual awareness of scientific and women’s localised knowledge of climate change, its causes and consequences. Two, women’s participation in crisis response provides the groundwork for sustainable alternatives to climate change. And, three, women’s collective action in forging community networks enables integrated responses to climate, humanitarian disasters, conflict and other crises.

Building from the research findings, ActionAid’s *Framework for gender responsive alternatives to climate change and related crises* identifies four core approaches: 1) value women’s knowledge; 2) support women’s participation; 3) recognise women’s collective action; and, underpinning the first three approaches, 4) address unequal gender norms. The *Framework* is designed to foster a shift from crisis responses to sustainable, long-term development outcomes, promote integrated approaches and drive transformative change in gender relations.

DFAT is encouraged to consider this framework in its International Development Policy, as well as consider development of a *Gender and Climate Change and Related Crises: Good Practice Note* to provide additional guidance in aid investment design.

Priority 3: Strengthening Civil Society

Australia should invest in the strengthening of civil society in partner countries with targeted and direct support to national CSOs, including women’s rights organisations, through both its development and humanitarian programming. This should include a commitment to allocating 5% of bilateral allocable ODA towards women’s rights organisations.

The *CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report* (2019) indicates that the space for civil society is under serious attack in 111 countries around the world and that only four per cent of the world’s population live in countries where the fundamental human rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression are respected. This has serious implications for Australian’s International Cooperation Policy, both in terms of bilateral relations, delivery of aid and opening up of trade opportunities. This shift has also been accompanied by attacks on human rights defenders, a sustained assault on humanitarian response and a reversal of hard-won gains on women’s rights in many of the countries that Australia partners with.

A healthy and vibrant civil society is important in achieving democracy, good governance and progress in vital areas such as gender equality. In fact, it is widely recognised that the sustained advocacy of feminist organisations has been the most important contributor to new laws, policies and programs to tackle violence against women globally.

Australia's International Development Policy should take into consideration the shrinking space for civil society and the role Australian Aid can play in supporting a flourishing civil society that strengthens democracy, transparency and women's rights. It should also consider the growing calls by local and national actors for a greater localization of aid and humanitarian response. This is more effective in a context of the growing frequency of disasters as well as more sustainable in terms of strengthening local capacity to respond. Australia is encouraged to ensure it has a clear pathway to meet the Grand Bargain commitment to ensure at least 25% of all humanitarian financing goes as directly as possible to local and national organisations. It is also encouraged to ensure direct funding to women's rights organisations as important actors in ensuring the diverse needs of women are met in times of crisis.

Women's rights organisations are firmly rooted in local communities, contexts, needs and experiences, reaching women in marginalised communities, and enabling those without power and status to have a voice and to advocate for basic rights. Despite this, women's rights organisations receive just 36 cents for every \$100 of official development assistance worldwide. Australia is currently performing above the OECD average in this area—coming in at seventh for its funding to women's equality institutions and organisations. This represents just 1.24% of our bilateral allocable ODA. Australia has a significant opportunity to match its policy leadership on gender equality with financing leadership and unlock an additional \$130 million per year in funding for women's rights organisations by increasing our contribution to just 5% of our bilateral allocable ODA. [Click here to enter text.](#)

Priority 4: Increase ODA with more strategic targeting to LDCs

Australia's funding for international development should increase to at least 0.7 GNI over the next five years recognising that without significantly increased investment, governments globally will fail to end poverty by 2030. Australia should target its investments where there is greatest need, which includes re-instating an increasing portion of aid to Africa, where 90% of people living in extreme poverty are expected to reside by 2030.

430 million people are expected to be living in extreme poverty by 2030, despite economic growth reducing poverty by one third. This is 30 million more people than the previous estimate in 2018. These figures indicate that the world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end poverty and that progress is not even across all regions. This limited progress has been matched by a 2% global decline in ODA, and a 3% decrease in ODA to Less Developed Countries (LDCs).

Through its revised International Development Policy, Australia is encouraged to meet the global target of 0.7% of GNI going to ODA over the next five years and allocating half of this aid to the poorest LDCs. As a wealthy nation that ranks sixth in UNDP's Human Development Index, we have both the capacity and the moral obligation to step up our contribution and ensure no one is left behind.

Australia has made a clear shift to the Indo-Pacific region through the Australia Aid Program, with a significant portion of aid directed to our nearest neighbours in the Pacific. It is important that the Pacific remain a focus as the region with the lowest rates of women's representation in leadership and some of the highest rates of violence against women in the world. However, if Australia is to contribute to ending poverty, then it is critical that LDCs are given greater prioritisation in aid investments as countries where levels of deprivation are acute. As of 2018, 47 countries were classified as LDCs by UN ECOSCO's Committee for Development - 33 of these are in the African region, with 8 in Asia and 4 in the Pacific. While this still presents strong justification for a focus in Asia and the Pacific, Australia's refocusing of aid away from Africa is untenable with 70% of LDCs in the region.

Global aid flows to Africa have declined by 4% over the past year. The latest SDGs progress report indicates that of the 736 million people living in extreme poverty in 2015, 413 million were in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2030, 90% of people living in extreme poverty are expected to reside in Africa, unless governments chose to urgently intervene and avert human suffering. Already in the region women are less likely than men to own property, to complete their education or have paid work. Two thirds of women

who die in childbirth globally are in Sub-Saharan Africa and vulnerabilities to climate change are high, with 45 million people expected to face starvation this year alone in Southern Africa.

Increased investment in aid to Africa will also serve to protect Australia's national interests. ActionAid's report *Undermining Rights* (2019) highlights that Australia now has the highest number of extractives companies operating in the region. Investment in the region will serve to ensure greater peace and stability, a more educated workforce, good governance and the ability to avert humanitarian crises; all of which will create a more stable base for private sector investment.

Priority 5: Transform Trade for Women

Australia's increasing focus on aid for trade should include assessment of the gender and environmental impacts of Free Trade Agreements and support the increased participation of women and their representative organisations in trade negotiations, as well as investment in other measures to advance our international obligations and ensure women benefit equitably from trade.

Australia's existing *Strategy for Australia's Aid for Trade Investments* identifies three objectives, all of which identify the economic empowerment of women as a priority area. While the principles of free trade can play an important role in creating vital economic opportunities for women, trade policy as it is configured today is often failing to protect the rights of women, particularly in lower income countries. Increasing attention is being given to the relationship between gender equality and trade at the national and global level. With careful design, trade rules and policies can help address the structural barriers that prevent women from fully benefiting from trade.

Through its increasing focus on aid for trade, the Australian Government can do more to ensure that Australia's trade policies do not exacerbate gender inequalities and address the potential negative impacts on the lives and livelihoods of women in some of the poorest countries in the world. This should include a commitment to resourcing comprehensive and independent gender impact assessments before and during the FTA negotiation process, and ongoing monitoring and review of gendered impacts for the life of the FTA. These gender impact assessments should be made available to relevant stakeholders; and negotiators should commit to making any negative findings publicly available.

There is also an opportunity for Australia to ensure integration between trade and international agreements that protect and strengthen the fundamental rights of women and girls such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Not only should these be taken into account during FTA negotiations, but these can also be reinforced through investments in aid for trade.

Through Australia's development cooperation, the Government can also ensure that women and the organisations which represent their interests are guaranteed a seat at the table during FTA negotiations and are resourced to participate and meaningfully engage in negotiations. Aid for trade initiatives can also serve to increase the transparency of negotiations, including more meaningful consultation with civil society groups and representatives.

ActionAid Australia appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia's International Development Policy. Full references are available upon request.

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