

ActionAid Australia submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia's foreign affairs, defence and trade

June 2020

1. Introduction

ActionAid Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade: Inquiry into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia's foreign affairs. ActionAid Australia supports women living in poverty to stand up and claim their human rights by collectively confronting the injustices they face. In more than 45 countries, ActionAid supports women to understand their rights, reflect on the people and systems that affect them, and harness their power to act with others to change their lives and positions in society. 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 including Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development and the Australian Pacific Climate Change Partnership.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating impacts on communities across Australia and internationally. Globally, more than 10 million people have been infected and 1.5 million deaths, and the impacts of the health crisis have been compounded by the economic consequences of social distancing and lockdown rules, which the IMF says will lead to the "the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression." The human costs of the pandemic are profound, particularly for women and girls already experiencing poverty and exclusion. ActionAid has documented an alarming spike in violence against women (VAW) in all regions of the world as a direct result of COVID-19. Emerging evidence also suggests that women have also been disproportionately impacted by job cuts and loss of a daily wages. These and other gendered impacts are likely to worsen as the crisis continues to spread in developing countries. Urgent international action is needed to support governments in developing countries, including Least Developed Countries (LDCs), to respond to the crisis and prevent a catastrophic loss of life.

The pandemic has also exposed serious weaknesses in the global economy and imbalances in the global rules-based system, which has for too long prioritised economic imperatives over human rights and security. It is crucial that the Government consider these deficiencies in its international COVID-19 response. Reform of trade policy and debt relief and restructuring are necessary to mitigate some of the worst impacts of the crisis and to ensure that the global community emerges from this pandemic stronger, healthier and more resilient to future crises. There are also key opportunities to advance the Australian Government's commitment to gender equality through targeted policies and investment.

Recommendations	
Support for Women's Rights Organisation	Recommendation 1: The Government should ensure that its coronavirus response includes targeted funding for frontline women's rights organisations and support services addressing VAW, in order to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic and ensure gender responsive approach.
Debt relief	Recommendation 2: The Government should use its influence within the IMF and the World Bank, the Paris Club, and as a member of the G20 to push for the cancellation of all principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debt due until 2022 so that all developing countries can effectively respond to the pandemic and deliver gender responsive public services.
	Recommendation 3: The Government should promote a long-term solution to the debt crisis to be brokered through the United Nations rather than be led by creditors, recognising the harmful impacts debt repayments are having on the provision of health and other public services.
	Recommendation 4: In light of the increasing risk of debt distress amongst Pacific Island Nations resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying global economic recession, the Government should reconsider the use of loans (commercial and concessional) through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, which has the potential to compound economic insecurity in the region.
Aid	Recommendation 5: The Government should increase the aid budget to 0.7% of its GNI to ensure that additional support is made available for coronavirus response efforts in developing countries, including LDCs, and that this support does not come at the expense of vital development programs. The health, gender and economic impacts of the pandemic are resulting in additional need and the government should respond to this need through additional resourcing.
	Recommendation 6: Aid should be targeted towards countries most in need, including 0.15-0.2% of GNI to Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Australia is encouraged to review its aid to the African continent, where the majority of LDCs are located, and where pre-COVID projections indicated that 90% of people living in extreme poverty are expected to reside by 2030.
Trade	Recommendation 7: In view of the urgent need to reconsider trading rules to protect the most vulnerable workers in global supply chains and to support economic development in developing countries, the Government should withdraw from negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and should not proceed with the implementation of PACER Plus Agreement.
	Recommendation 8: The Government should take immediate action to suspend ISDS provisions for COVID-19 measures in order to ensure governments are not constrained from responding to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government should also commit to exclude ISDS from all existing and future trade agreements.
	Recommendation 9: The Government should seek to renegotiate existing trading partnerships in light of the damaging impact existing trade deals are having on developing country trading partners and workers without social protection. These negotiations should strive to ensure an improved balance between economic and social objectives and specifically promote gender equality, decent working conditions and positive environmental outcomes, alongside trade and investment objectives.

	Recommendation 10: <i>The Government should oppose the inclusion of harmful intellectual property rules that can reduce access to affordable medicines and can impinge on developing country governments ability to provide vital medical treatment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</i>
Climate change	Recommendation 11: <i>In light of the potential for the climate crisis to intersect with COVID-19 with devastating impacts for Less Developed Countries, the Government must commit to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement without using carryover credit. Emissions reduction targets should be increased to 45% by 2030 and zero by 2050.</i>
	Recommendation 12: <i>The Government should ensure that climate action is integrated throughout its international COVID-19 response initiatives due to the potential for intersecting crises affecting people living in poverty in developing countries.</i>
	Recommendation 13: <i>Recognising the compounding impact of climate change on developing countries, the Government should renew its funding and commitment to the Green Climate Fund, targeting both climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives. This funding should be provided in addition to Australia's ODA.</i>
	Recommendation 14: <i>The Government should adopt an integrated, gender responsive framework for responding to interlinked health, economic and climate crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised populations, including women and girls. Alongside addressing harmful gender norms, this should recognise women's localised knowledge alongside scientific evidence, ensure women's representation at all levels of crisis prevention and response decision making and increased resourcing of women's networks and organisations.</i>

2. COVID-19 and the threat to women's rights

As the spread of COVID-19 intensifies in developing countries, women and girls are being disproportionately impacted, particularly those living in poverty and exclusion. Targeted initiatives are required to ensure that the pandemic does not worsen gender equality and undermine women's rights.

- **Women and girls face an Increased risk of infection** - women make up 70% of workers in the health and social sectors globally and are on the frontline of the response to the COVID-19 crisis, which increases their risk of infection. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates, at least 90,000 healthcare workers have already been infected with COVID-19 across the world.¹ Global shortages in testing kits and personal protective equipment (PPE) is increasing the risk for women workers in developing countries.

Gender roles also see women caring for sick family members, particularly in countries with inadequate public services. This also increases women's exposure to the virus, which is compounded in communities without access to running water or basic hygiene and sanitation where they are unable to take prevention measures such as regular hand washing.

- **Women and girls lack access to gender-responsive healthcare** - gender discrimination means that women have inequitable access to healthcare in comparison to men, with the lack of

¹ Mantovani, C (2020) *Over 90,000 health workers infected with COVID-19 worldwide: nurses group*, Reuters, 6 May, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-nurses/over-90000-health-workers-infected-with-covid-19-worldwide-nurses-group-idUSKBN2211XH>

availability of gender-responsive health services worsening the situation for women.² COVID-19 is increasing pressure on already under-resourced healthcare systems, with women from vulnerable and marginalised communities least able to access medical treatment. The diversion of funding towards the coronavirus response also means that women miss out on healthcare for other vital health needs, including maternal and reproductive healthcare services.

- **Increase in women's unpaid work** - women's domestic and caring responsibilities are also increasing due to the closure of education and child-care facilities and increases in domestic duties such as the collection of additional water for sanitation. Experience from the Ebola crisis suggests that the increased burden of unpaid work will force some women out of paid employment.
- **Worsening violence against women** - evidence is emerging that that violence against women, including intimate partner violence, is increasing as a result of the pandemic, with restrictions on movement and increased financial and food insecurity exacerbating gender inequality and tensions within the family.⁵ In Italy, calls to the national anti-violence hotline increased by 59% compared to 2019. Bangladesh has seen a tenfold increase in sexual and domestic violence over the same period.³ For women experiencing violence, social isolation can increase their experience of physical and sexual assault, while reducing access to healthcare, justice and other support services. In Uganda, ActionAid was forced to temporarily shut down 10 of its shelters due to lockdown restrictions, even though caseloads doubled in March and April 2020 during the outbreak, compared to the previous year.⁴
- **Increase in women's economic insecurity and poverty** - women and girls are amongst the most affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns due to their concentration in low-wage and insecure work and their exclusion from government response programs. Women who work as carers, vendors, farmers, fisherfolk and daily wage earners are facing income losses and without access to paid leave or government social protection programs their livelihoods are at threat and they are experiencing increased food and rental insecurity.

Recommendation 1: *The Government should ensure that its coronavirus response includes targeted funding for frontline women's rights organisations and support services addressing VAW, in order to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic and ensure gender responsive approach.*

3. Australia's international response to COVID-19

ActionAid Australia welcomes the release of *Partnership's for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*.⁵ The *Development Response* recognises the extent of the impact that COVID-19 is having on communities across the world, the disproportionate risk facing developing countries, and the specific impacts being experienced by women and girls who are more vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of the crisis. It also acknowledges the implications of COVID-19 for Australia's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade policies, and has framed its international response around a focus on health security, stability and economic recovery, with an emphasis on our near neighbours in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

The *Development Response* is an important framework for Australia's international response to COVID-19 and ActionAid applauds the high level of ambition and focus on women's rights. However,

² ActionAid, 2020, Who Cares For the Future: Finance Gender Responsive Public Services!, pp 17-20, <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/final%20who%20cares%20report.pdf>

³ ActionAid, 2020, Surviving Covid-19: A Women Led-response, <https://actionaid.org.au/resources/surviving-covid-19-a-women-led-response/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ DFAT (2020) Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response>

ActionAid is calling on the Government to increase its aid funding to ensure that Australia's financial contribution to COVID-19 response efforts matches both the severity of the crisis and the level of ambition outlined within the *Development Response*. COVID-19 is the largest global humanitarian crisis and it is crucial that rich nations such as Australia step up support for developing countries can respond effectively, particularly the least developed countries who are most vulnerable to the pandemic. 33 of the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are in the African region and experts are predicting that across the African continent 300,000 people could die from the virus and 27 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic.⁶ This builds on the SDG Progress Report in 2019, which identified that by 2030, 90% of all people living in extreme poverty would be living in sub-Saharan Africa. The Government's focus on the Pacific and Southeast Asia is justified, however given Australia's significant commercial interests in the African region⁷, we also have a responsibility to ensure the region is not left behind.

The *Development Response* also identifies the risk of growing debt distress across the Pacific region and the Government has committed to working with International Financial Institutions to secure additional finance without increasing debt distress. ActionAid welcomes this commitment; however, additional action is needed to respond to the emerging debt crisis. ActionAid is appealing to the Government to use its influence within the IMF, the World Bank, the Paris Club, and the G20 to push for the cancellation of all principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debt due until 2022 for all countries in need. It is imperative that Australia's development initiatives are also designed so as not to worsen debt distress in partner countries. The Government is also encouraged to ensure policy coherence in its COVID-19 response so that the gains made through development interventions are not undermined by initiatives that pave the way for liberalisation and privatisation⁸ at the expense of women's rights; and that have the potential to worsen climate change with devastating consequences for women and girls.

3.1. COVID-19 and the new debt crisis

ActionAid is concerned about the impact that the growing debt crises is having on developing countries ability to respond to the pandemic and its health and economic impacts. Many developing countries were already experiencing debt distress, or a risk of debt distress, before the pandemic emerged and high debt servicing costs meant that they were forced to divert vital funding away from healthcare and other public services in order to make payments to international creditors. This has left healthcare systems under-resourced and ill-prepared to respond to a crisis of this magnitude. Ghana, for example, spends 59% of government revenue on debt servicing. This dwarfs spending on health, with \$4.1 billion spent on foreign debt payments compared to \$1.3 billion on health.⁹

Debt distress is likely to worsen as developing country economies continue to contract due to local lockdown rules and the global economic downturn. The need for additional resources to respond to the crisis is also leading governments to request additional loans from the International Monetary

⁶ UNECA (2020) *COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies*, <https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies>

⁷ 170 Australian mining and resource companies operate in 35 African countries, with the overall value of current exploration, extraction, and processing estimated to be more than A\$40b - <https://www.mining-technology.com/features/from-australia-to-africa/>

⁸ See analysis from the Pacific Network on Globalisation on the PACER-Plus agreement - Defending Pacific Ways of Life: A Peoples Social Impact Assessment of PACER-Plus, <http://www.pang.org.fj/media/PANG%20Trade%20Documents/For%20Upload/8>; See also Kate Lappin and Michelle Higelin, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership spells danger for 1.1 billion women, <https://johnmenadue.com/kate-lappin-and-michelle-higelin-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-spells-danger-for-1-1-billion-women/>

⁹ ActionAid, 2020, *Who Cares For the Future: Finance Gender Responsive Public Services!*, p. 14, <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/final%20who%20cares%20report.pdf>

Fund (IMF) and other sources, increasing the unsustainability of debt levels in developing countries.¹⁰ Research by the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD) estimates that at least 45 countries are likely to require a minimum of US\$ 93.8 billion to meet minimum foreign exchange reserve thresholds and fiscal buffers to face the ongoing crisis until the end of 2020.¹¹

There has been some international action to provide debt services relief to developing countries - the IMF has cancelled six months of debt payments for 25 of the poorest countries in the world,¹² and the G20's has suspended debt payments by 77 countries to G20 and other governments from 1 May to the end of 2020.¹³ These announcements provide some temporary relief for LDCs, but additional action is required to extend this immediate relief and to develop a long-term solution to the crisis. The Government must also ensure that Australia's bilateral support initiatives, such as the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), do not worsen debt distress in partner countries.

The *Development Response* signals the Government's intention to keep the AIFFP as a key pillar of the Pacific Step-Up. The coronavirus has exposed the significant need for investment in social infrastructure across the Pacific, including in health services, as well as for social protection. However, six of the 15 countries eligible for AIFFP financing were already considered to be at a high level of debt distress before the emergence of the coronavirus (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu), with a further three countries at a moderate level of debt distress (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).¹⁴ There is a danger that the AIFFP will further heighten this debt distress, with flow-on effects for gender equality and women's rights.

Recommendation 2: *The Government should use its influence within the IMF and the World Bank, the Paris Club, and as a member of the G20 to push for the cancellation of all principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debt due until 2022 so that all developing countries can effectively respond to the pandemic and deliver gender responsive public services.*

Recommendation 3: *The Government should promote a long-term solution to the debt crisis to be brokered through the United Nations rather than be led by creditors, recognising the harmful impacts debt repayments are having on the provision of health and other public services.*

Recommendation 4: *In light of the increasing risk of debt distress amongst Pacific Island Nations resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying global economic recession, the Government should reconsider the use of loans (commercial and concessional) through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, which has the potential to compound economic insecurity in the region.*

Financial support critical for COVID-19 response

COVID-19 is causing a catastrophic loss of lives and livelihoods, with vulnerable and excluded communities in developing countries being disproportionately impacted. International cooperation is essential to support developing countries to respond to the crisis. A globalised response is also crucial to maintain regional and global security - there is a significant risk that COVID-19 could

¹⁰ Dayant, A and Rajah, R (2020) How much is too much? Covid loans for the Pacific, The Interpreter, 16 April, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/how-much-too-much-covid-loans-pacific>

¹¹ Eurodad (2020) Emergency financing for Low-Income Economies to tackle COVID-19: Cost estimates for the impact of the crisis and emergency financing requirements, https://eurodad.org/covid19_emergencyfinance

¹² IMF (2020) IMF Executive Board Approves Immediate Debt Relief for 25 Countries, media release, 13 April, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/13/pr20151-imf-executive-board-approves-immediate-debt-relief-for-25-countries>

¹³ Saldinger, A (2020) G20, IMF deliver on debt relief, but more is needed, experts say, Devex, 17 April, <https://www.devex.com/news/g20-imf-deliver-on-debt-relief-but-more-is-needed-experts-say-97021>

¹⁴ IMF (2020) List of LIC DSAs for PRGT-Eligible Countries, <https://www.imf.org/external/Pubs/ft/dsa/DSAlist.pdf>

worsen existing conflicts and further undermine multilateral institutions and action. UNCTAD has estimated that an additional US \$500 billion is needed in overseas development aid for this response.¹² ActionAid is calling on the Government to urgently increase aid to 0.7% of GNI to ensure that additional resources are made available for COVID-19 response efforts, as part of mounting a global response to the pandemic. It is crucial that Australia's international response to the crisis is proportionate to the impact that it is having on the world's most vulnerable communities and reflects a fair contribution to the resources needed at the global level.

It is also critical that additional aid comes in the form of grants and not loans to ensure that developing countries are not burdened with additional debt. Aid should be targeted towards health services, personal protective equipment, testing and treatment. Aid should also be directed to social protection measures targeting women, as well as the rapid scale up of VAW support services, and access to clean water and treatment for the most vulnerable communities, including those living in informal settlements and refugee camps.

Recommendation 5: *The Government should increase the aid budget to 0.7% of its GNI to ensure that additional support is made available for coronavirus response efforts in developing countries, including LDCs, and that this support does not come at the expense of vital development programs. The health, gender and economic impacts of the pandemic are resulting in additional need and the government should respond to this need through additional resourcing.*

Recommendation 6: *Aid should be targeted towards countries most in need, including 0.15-0.2% of GNI to Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Australia is encouraged to review its aid to the African continent, where the majority of LDCs are located, and where pre-COVID projections indicated that 90% of people living in extreme poverty are expected to reside by 2030.*

4. Trade policy reform needed to support an inclusive economic recovery and to protect women's rights

ActionAid is concerned by the incorporation of free trade as a key pillar of the *Development Response's* economic recovery package. The promotion of the PACER Plus trade agreement as central to kickstarting economies across the Pacific is particularly alarming given its risk to women's rights and economic empowerment, and the sustained opposition to the agreement across the region. The PACER Plus agreement is anticipated to lead to an erosion of public services, loss of sustainable livelihoods, and adverse health impacts in Pacific Island countries,¹⁵ all of which will disproportionately affect women, and their social and economic empowerment.¹⁶

Similar concerns have been raised about the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, which is also referenced within the *Development Response*. The RCEP is currently being negotiated by Australia and 14 partner countries across the Asia-Pacific region. Negotiations have continued during the pandemic, which has restricted public participation in a negotiation process that was already highly secretive and anti-democratic.¹⁷ As with the PACER Plus agreement, the RCEP includes provisions that could impact on public services, women's livelihoods and rights at

¹⁵ Pacific Network on Globalisation (2016), *Defending Pacific Ways of Life: A Peoples Social Impact Assessment of PACER-Plus*, <http://www.pang.org.fj/media/PANG%20Trade%20Documents/For%20Upload/8>

¹⁶ ActionAid (2020), ActionAid Australia submission to the Inquiry into Australia activating greater trade and investment with Pacific island countries, https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/TradewithPacific/Submissions

¹⁷ Bagshaw, E (2019) *Australia leads secret trade negotiations that will sideline US*, The Sydney Morning Herald, 26 June, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-leads-secret-trade-negotiations-that-will-sideline-us-20190626-p521hf.html>

work and public health.¹⁸ ActionAid is calling on the Government to withdraw from these negotiations.

Beyond these two agreements, the pandemic has also demonstrated the fragility of global supply chains and exposed serious failings in the global trade system, reiterating the need for trade rules to be reoriented around decent work conditions, human rights and environment sustainability rather than the promotion of trade liberalisation as an end in itself.

4.1. Access to medicines

Strains on medical supply chains and supply chain profiteering has meant that developing countries have been unable to access the medical supplies they need to respond to COVID-19 and to protect health workers on the frontlines of the crisis.¹⁹ ActionAid welcomes the Government's commitment within the *Development Response Plan* to work with international partners to ensure equitable access to a COVID-19 vaccine.²⁰ However, systemic reform of intellectual property rules, including TRIPS²¹ and TRIPS plus rules²², is necessary to ensure trade agreements facilitate affordable access to medicines in developing countries rather than extending medicine monopolies for pharmaceutical companies. Women are most impacted where trade rules increase the price of medicines due to their disproportionate risk of poverty, specific reproductive health needs and increased vulnerability to illness is due to their experience of gender-based discrimination and violence.²³

4.2. ISDS should not impede COVID-19 response efforts

Reports that Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) could be used by multinational corporations to sue governments for COVID-19 response efforts are extremely concerning and reiterate the need for these provisions to be removed from trade agreements.²⁴ ISDS provisions give multinational companies the right to sue governments, particularly in low-income countries, for billions of dollars in secret tribunals for policy decisions that impact on their investments. It is crucial that ISDS provisions are suspended for COVID-19 response measures so that governments are not restricted from implementing legitimate and necessary policy responses to the pandemic. The Government should commit to exclude ISDS mechanisms from existing and future trade agreements.

4.3. Decent employment for women workers

New concerns have been raised about labour rights abuses for workers at the bottom of supply chains due to widespread layoffs, which have impacted women workers disproportionately in garment and manufacturing industries across developing countries. Women's ability to access decent work is a critical vehicle for the realisation of gender equality. Trade liberalisation has been instrumental in facilitating the rise of export-oriented manufacturing sectors in developing countries, with women representing the majority of workers. However, power imbalances between

¹⁸ Lappin, K and Higelin, M (2019) *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership spells danger for 1.1 billion women*, <https://johnmenadue.com/kate-lappin-and-michelle-higelin-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-spells-danger-for-1-1-billion-women/>

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/world/coronavirus-equipment-rich-poor.html>

²⁰ DFAT (2020) *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*, p.9.

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response>

²¹ WTO (1994) *Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights*, https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/27-trips_01_e.htm

²² Médecins Sans Frontières, *Spotlight on: TRIPS, TRIPS Plus, and Doha*, <https://msfaccess.org/spotlight-trips-trips-plus-and-doha>

²³ Third World Network (2011) *Trade, Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and Gender Issues in India*, Trade and Gender Briefs No. 3. http://www.twm.my/title2/women/2011/a.economic/HBF-TWN/Trade_and_Gender_Brief_India_TWN-HBF_Vol_III_IPRs.pdf

²⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development (2020) *As COVID-19 Continues, Governments Must Shield Emergency Measures From Investor-State Arbitration*, <https://www.iisd.org/library/covid-19-support-litigation>

multinational corporations and workers mean that labour rights continue to be suppressed in these industries. Women workers are locked into insecure employment and working conditions are also notoriously exploitative - collective bargaining and union rights are suppressed and workers rarely have access to sick leave, maternity leave or pension provisions.²⁵ It is critical that the Government respond to labour rights concerns in supply chains by including enforceable labour rights provisions in all trade agreements.

Recommendation 7: *In view of the urgent need to reconsider trading rules to protect the most vulnerable workers in global supply chains and to support economic development in developing countries, the Government should withdraw from negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and should not proceed with the implementation of the PACER Plus Agreement.*

Recommendation 8: *The Government should take immediate action to suspend ISDS provisions for COVID-19 measures in order to ensure governments are not constrained from responding to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government should also commit to exclude ISDS from all existing and future trade agreements.*

Recommendation 9: *The Government should seek to renegotiate existing trading partnerships in light of the damaging impact existing trade deals are having on developing country trading partners and workers without social protection. These negotiations should strive to ensure an improved balance between economic and social objectives and specifically promote gender equality, decent working conditions and positive environmental outcomes, alongside trade and investment objectives.*

Recommendation 10: *The Government should oppose the inclusion of harmful intellectual property rules that can reduce access to affordable medicines and can impinge on developing country governments ability to provide vital medical treatment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

5. COVID-19 response must centre climate change action

The emergence of COVID-19 does not negate the impacts of climate change. Rather, women and girls in developing countries are now facing intersecting crises as the health and economic impacts of the pandemic couples with the existing reality of worsening climate change and continuing gender inequality. It is critical that the Government's international response to COVID-19 centres on climate action, in order to address the significant impacts that climate change is having on women and their ability to build resilience to future crisis. This response must also include domestic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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.

ActionAid's *Framework for gender responsive alternatives to climate change and related crises* identifies four core approaches: 1) value women's localised 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, as well as promote integrated approaches and

²⁵ Oxfam Australia (2019) Made in Poverty: The true price of fashion, <https://whatshemakes.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Made-in-Poverty-the-True-Price-of-Fashion.-Oxfam-Australia..pdf>

drive transformative change in gender relations. The Government is encouraged to consider this framework in its international COVID-19 response.

Recommendation 11: *In light of the potential for the climate crisis to intersect with COVID-19 with devastating impacts for Less Developed Countries, the Government must commit to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement without using carryover credits. Emissions reduction targets should be increased to 45% by 2030 and zero by 2050.*

Recommendation 12: *The Government should ensure that climate action is integrated throughout its international COVID-19 response initiatives due to the potential for intersecting crises affecting people living in poverty in developing countries.*

Recommendation 13: *Recognising the compounding impact of climate change on developing countries, the Government should renew its funding and commitment to the Green Climate Fund, targeting both climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives. This funding should be provided in addition to Australia's ODA.*

Recommendation 14: *The Government should adopt an integrated, gender responsive framework for responding to interlinked health, economic and climate crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised populations, including women and girls. Alongside addressing harmful gender norms, this should recognise women's localised knowledge alongside scientific evidence, ensure women's representation at all levels of crisis prevention and response decision making and increased resourcing of women's networks and organisations.*

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