



Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Inquiry into

International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015

Submission

**Oxfam Australia
June 2015**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Oxfam Australia fully supports the passage of this bill into law. The proposed *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Act 2015* will make the Australian aid program directly accountable to realising the equality of women and men, girls and boys.
- 1.2. Over the past 30 years, no other indicator has demonstrated a greater impact on development outcomes than gender equality.¹ For this reason, gender equality must be a core objective of the Australian aid program and central to each project funded by Australian aid. As well as being critical to achieving sustainable development outcomes, gender equality is essential to women and girls realising their full social, political and economic potential.
- 1.3. The purpose of the Australian aid program is to promote prosperity, reduce poverty, and enhance stability.² To achieve this Australian aid needs invest in development outcomes that reduce inequality and partners that are able to efficiently achieve lasting, positive impacts.
- 1.4. Gender inequality is arguably the most acute and persistent form of inequality that inhibits the realisation of rights and wellbeing particularly of women and girls. It is the fundamental obstacle to eradicating poverty and achieving economic and social development.
- 1.5. The promotion of gender equality and the rights of women and girls through strengthened accountability and reporting will help ensure Australia's aid program is achieving the greatest possible development impact and that women and girls can influence and benefit equally from development processes.

2. About Oxfam Australia

- 2.1. Oxfam Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, secular international development agency whose vision is of a just world without poverty. We have more than 500,000 supporters in Australia who contribute skills, time and financial support to advance our work.
- 2.2. Oxfam Australia is a member of Oxfam International, a global confederation of 17 organisations that together invest over \$1,085 million a year to overcome poverty and injustice in more than 90 countries.
- 2.3. Oxfam:
 - Undertakes long-term development programs;
 - Provides emergency response during disaster and conflict;
 - Conducts research, advocacy and campaigning to advance the rights of poor and vulnerable people, focussing on gender justice for women and girls; and
 - Promotes fair trade by supporting local producers through our 'Fair' food brand.
- 2.4. In 2013-2014, we responded to 20 emergencies and worked with partners in 30 countries in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and Indigenous Australia to improve the lives of 6 million people.
- 2.5. A focus on gender justice is core to Oxfam's work. We recognise the needs and rights of women and girls and support them to claim their rights and influence and achieve change.
- 2.6. Oxfam works with people, communities and organisations to change attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that result in women and girls disproportionately experiencing poverty. One of our core goals in the *Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2014 – 2019* is that more women and girls

¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010* (UNDP, 2010)

² <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/australian-aid-development-policy.pdf>

are economically independent, participating in decision making, holding positions of leadership and living free of violence by 2019.

3. Scope and focus of this submission

- 3.1 This submission is informed by Oxfam's:
- Long track record of high quality gender programs in the Indo-Pacific region; and
 - Research, advocacy and campaigns to advance the rights of women and girls.
- 3.2 This submission supports the proposed *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Act 2015* as a means of realising the equality of women and men, girls and boys in Australia's aid program and strengthening Australia's reporting on, and accountability of, ODA.

4. The International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015

- 4.1 The International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill reinforces the Australian Government's recently adopted international development policy and performance framework³ by ensuring Australia's official development assistance (ODA) takes into account how ODA contributes to reducing gender inequality and reporting on it annually to Parliament.
- 4.3 Oxfam welcomes this investment in further strengthening the Government's commitment to prioritising gender equality in aid investments across the portfolio. Developing detailed systems and processes for tracking investments in gender equality in both targeted and mainstreamed initiatives is essential. Equally important is ensuring that rigorous systems for evaluating the quality and impact of initiatives across the portfolio are in place. This will enable a transparent assessment of the systemic change realised as a result of gender equality investments.
- 4.4 Australian aid and development NGOs such as Oxfam hold considerable expertise in implementing gender-sensitive development, and in the design of systems and processes for tracking investment and measuring outcomes. It would be highly valuable to consult with NGOs in the implementation of this bill and more broadly on promoting stronger gender outcomes through the aid program.
- 4.5 The proposed annual report to Parliament by the Minister for Foreign Affairs should be based on rigorous analysis of expenditure on gender equality and the change realised as a result. This will require the design of specific mechanisms to enable monitoring of expenditure on gender equality and to assess the impact of these investments.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the proposed *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill* is passed.

Recommendation 2:

To improve clarity of purpose and scope of the Bill, Oxfam recommends:

- The Bill use the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) definition for Official Development Assistance (ODA) that includes the DAC List of ODA recipient countries;

³ <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/aid-policy-summary-doc.pdf>

- Humanitarian assistance is recognised as a sector of ODA, as defined by the OECD DAC, that aims to ‘save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies’; and
- The following text to replace clause 4.2: That a Commonwealth aid official who proposes to make a decision relating to the provision of humanitarian assistance must, in making the decision, recognise gender differences, inequalities and capacities of those affected by the disaster or emergency and respond to them.

Recommendation 3:

Should the Bill be passed, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade should consult on and invest in the design of specific mechanisms to effectively monitor expenditure on gender equality and assess the impacts of projects on achieving greater gender equality.