
INQUIRY INTO THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC

SUBMISSION

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
DEFENCE AND TRADE**

1. INTRODUCTION

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) is an Australian-based organisation, resourcing diverse women's rights organisations primarily in Asia and the Pacific, and contributing to global feminist movements to advance our vision of gender equality for all. We welcome the opportunity to present this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. The conviction that everyone, regardless of gender, race, colour, language, religion, political opinion, place of birth, sexuality, or other status, should have full exercise and protection of their human rights is fundamental to Australia's identity, and underpins our promotion of the global rules-based order.¹ As outlined in the Foreign Policy White Paper, Australia's shared values include "political, economic and religious freedom, liberal democracy, the rule of law, racial and gender equality and mutual respect".² Gender equality is a precondition for the full exercise of human rights by women and girls; without it, the rights of women and girls remain impeded by discrimination and a lack of autonomy. However, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, the Pacific and East Asia region is estimated to be 163 years away from closing the gender gap, meaning that without concerted action, women and girls living in these regions will not see gender equality in their lifetime.³

The Australian Government has demonstrated a clear commitment to promoting the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific. This includes through key initiatives such as: the flagship program Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*); DFAT's twin-track approach to gender equality in Australia's foreign policy, economic diplomacy and development program; and, the appointment of the Ambassador for Women and Girls (now Ambassador for Gender Equality). These investments have supported stability and poverty reduction in our region, leading to increased access to services for women and girls and improved legal frameworks supporting women's rights.⁴ The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, however, present significant risks to past gains and future progress towards gender equality, including in the Pacific. The UNDP Human Development Report has noted that for the first time in 30 years, human development is on track to decline in 2020.⁵ Women and girls in the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to both the immediate and longer-term impacts of COVID-19, as an often marginalised group.⁶ This moment of significant flux requires Australia to strengthen its investment in transformational gender programming and work with local women leaders to enable the universal enjoyment of human rights by women and girls in the Pacific.

The focus of this submission is on future steps that the Australian Government can take to promote gender equality in the Pacific, to build on the strong legacy of existing investments. We look forward to the release of the six-year evaluation of *Pacific Women*, which will provide further learnings to guide Australia's future engagement in promoting gender equality in the region. The structure of this submission is as follows:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Summary of recommendations
- 3 Adopt a holistic approach to supporting the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.
 - 3.1 Promote the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific through Australia's international COVID-19 response (TOR 4).
 - 3.2 Take a holistic approach to ending violence against women (TOR 1).
 - 3.3 Address climate change and its gendered impacts.
- 4 Support Pacific women and girls to drive their own movement to achieve gender equality (TOR 1 and 3).
 - 4.1 Ensure local women and girls are provided meaningful influence in Australia's gender programming.
 - 4.2 Increase direct funding to Pacific Women's Rights organisations.
 - 4.3 Invest in measurements of transformative change.

Throughout this submission, we provide examples of key groups and figures working to promote the human rights of women and girls (TOR 3).

¹ Based on the wording of the UN Declaration of Human Rights

² Commonwealth of Australia 2017, p 11.

³ World Economic Forum 2020, p 21.

⁴ Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development 2018, p 4.

⁵ UNDP 2020.

⁶ UN Women 2020a, p 15.

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

ADOPT A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC

Recommendation 1: Move beyond a ‘protection’ approach for women and girls in the implementation of *Partnerships for Recovery — Australia’s COVID-19 Development Response*, by investing in gender equality and transformational change.

Recommendation 2: By 2022, adopt a feminist foreign policy framework, which makes gender equality a central purpose of Australia’s international engagement covering trade, diplomacy, defence, and security, to ensure Australia’s resilience and that of our region.

Recommendation 3: Support Pacific countries to design post-COVID-19 recovery policies based on equality and inclusive growth, rather than austerity.

Recommendation 4: Advocate for the G20, IMF, and Paris Club to permanently cancel all foreign external debt repayments to be made until end of 2021 for all developing countries in need. This should apply to all bilateral, multilateral and private creditors.

Recommendation 5: Support and champion the establishment of a multilateral framework on sovereign debt restructuring under UN auspices to help prevent the emergence of future debt crises

Recommendation 6: Build on prior investments in gender data and renew funding support to individual-level, gender-sensitive data collection in the Pacific in partnership with national statistics offices and civil society.

Recommendation 7: Embed flexibility and surge capacity within long-term development strategies to respond to emerging humanitarian crises, supported by new and additional funding.

Recommendation 8: Invest \$2bn of new funding between 2020/21 to 2023/24 into Australia’s contribution to international COVID-19 response and recovery.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen efforts to end violence against women by designing programs that seek to engage with, and transform, the collective power systems and norms that underpin gender inequality.

Recommendation 10: Recognise the diversity of women and their experiences and ensure that women with disabilities, young women, and women with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are expressly considered and included in efforts to end violence against women.

Recommendation 11: Commit funding for diverse Women’s Rights Organisations that support women leaders to participate in climate and disaster risk reduction institutions and advocacy at all levels, with particular attention to young and rural women leaders, and leaders from intersectionally marginalised groups.

Recommendation 12: In line with DFAT’s current Climate Change Strategy, ensure that Australia’s efforts to combat gender inequality and climate change in the Pacific are mutually reinforcing.

Recommendation 13: Better align domestic and foreign policy objectives by revising Australia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to include commitments towards decarbonisation and net zero emissions by 2050.

SUPPORT PACIFIC WOMEN AND GIRLS TO DRIVE THEIR OWN MOVEMENT TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY BY DELIVERING FIT-FOR-PURPOSE GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMMING.

Recommendation 14: Embed opportunities for meaningful input and decision-making by diverse local voices within program governance mechanisms, research processes and design, including at priority setting, management, implementation and evaluation stages.

Recommendation 15: Ensure engagement with Pacific partners is situated within an adaptive programming model with necessary supports to ensure programs can respond to feedback, learn and adapt in real-time and evolve according to context.

Recommendation 16: Steadily increase the proportion of long-term and flexible funding support provided directly to local Pacific WROs, in order to support meaningful and transformative change for gender equality and the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

Recommendation 17: Unlock AUD 33 million annually by committing five per cent of Australia's ODA for Pacific regional and bilateral programs towards Pacific women's equality organisations and institutions.

Recommendation 18: Rebalance and tailor DFAT's risk assessments, in order to support greater direct investment in Pacific WROs where appropriate.

Recommendation 19: Ensure fair competition and a fit-for-purpose supplier base by tailoring standards and payment modalities to organisational needs and risk profile, to reduce barriers to entry.

Recommendation 20: Reduce the burden of administrative requirements to create a more favourable balance between effective program delivery and compliance.

Recommendation 21: Invest in the capacity of DFAT to actively manage tailored partnership arrangements.

Recommendation 22: Set performance benchmarks for intermediaries to strengthen the fiduciary and compliance capacity of local partners to receive direct funding in future.

Recommendation 23: Select intermediaries with values that are aligned to the change they are funded to create. For example, gender programming intermediaries should demonstrate organisational commitment to feminism and mitigating power imbalances inherent in funding relationships.

Recommendation 24: Invest in transformative change measurement practices by providing implementers the flexibility to measure and adapt to unexpected impacts.

3. ADOPT A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC.

3.1 PROMOTE THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC THROUGH AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

The social and economic implications of the COVID-19 crisis are significantly affecting the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, even though many Pacific countries have so far escaped widespread COVID-19 outbreaks.⁷ Drops in tourism revenue and remittances due to travel restrictions have significant implications for Pacific economies, with Palau, Vanuatu and Fiji reliant on tourism for approximately 40 per cent of their GDP, and Tonga dependent on remittances at a similar rate.^{8;9} Times of crisis tend to amplify existing inequalities, and women are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks and job losses, as they are over-represented in part-time and insecure work.¹⁰ Such losses in revenue and income streams risk entrenching poverty and gender inequality in ways that, if left unchecked, could reverberate for years, and possibly decades, to come.

In recognition of this, the Australian Government's *Partnerships for Recovery — Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* has made "protecting the most vulnerable, especially women and girls" a cross-cutting action for the Whole-of-Government international response.¹¹ While protection is an important first step, it addresses the symptoms of gender equality rather than the causes. It is therefore unlikely to create meaningful and sustainable change to the status of women and girls alone. As one of the Pacific's strongest allies, Australia's COVID-19 Response should therefore look beyond protection towards expanding transformational interventions, by investing in policies and programs that challenge the power relations, systems and norms that underpin gender inequality. This would pave the way for the adoption of a whole-of-government feminist foreign policy by 2022, which prioritises and mainstreams gender equality across all aspects of foreign policy, including diplomacy and international development cooperation, but also trade, defence, migration and multilateral engagement.¹²

Recommendation 1: Move beyond a 'protection' approach for women and girls in the implementation of *Partnerships for Recovery — Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*, by investing in gender equality and transformational change.

Recommendation 2: By 2022, adopt a feminist foreign policy framework, which makes gender equality a central purpose of Australia's international engagement covering trade, diplomacy, defence, and security, to ensure Australia's resilience and that of our region.

To support a transformational response to the COVID-19 crisis, Australia should support Pacific countries to invest in recovery policies based on equality and inclusive growth, rather than turning to austerity to finance debt. Austerity measures, which cut or privatise essential services to reduce government debt, pose significant risk to states' ability to provide social protections and public services, which are needed more than ever in the context of COVID-19.¹³ The impacts of austerity policy are felt more strongly by women, with care responsibilities shifting from the state to the home, and the loss of precious safety nets particularly impacting those in precarious socio-economic positions.¹⁴ Research in the UK found that since 2010, women had borne 86 per cent of the cost of austerity policies imposed by the British Government in the wake of the global financial crisis.¹⁵ During the Asian Financial crisis (1997-99), cuts to the Indonesian health budget saw a fall in the number of antenatal and postnatal check-ups and an increase in unattended births.¹⁶ To assist Pacific governments to reduce debt, Australia should use its middle power status and expertise in multilateral

⁷ COVID-19 Pacific Community Updates 2020.

⁸ Ratha D. et al. 2019.

⁹ Damon et al. 2020.

¹⁰ ILO 2018, pp 20-21.

¹¹ DFAT 2020.

¹² Ridge et al 2019.

¹³ Gender and Development Network 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stewart, Heather 2017.

¹⁶ Stavropoulou & Jones 2013, p 21.

engagement to push for debt cancellation in the short term, and reform of the international debt financing system in the long term. This would free up Pacific state revenue to respond to and recover from COVID-19.

Recommendation 3: Support Pacific countries to design post-COVID-19 recovery policies based on equality and inclusive growth, rather than austerity.

Recommendation 4: Advocate for the G20, IMF, and Paris Club to permanently cancel all foreign external debt repayments to be made until end of 2021 for all developing countries in need. This should apply to all bilateral, multilateral and private creditors.

Recommendation 5: Support and champion the establishment of a multilateral framework on sovereign debt restructuring under UN auspices to help prevent the emergence of future debt crises

Critically, there must also be attention paid to tracking the human development outcomes of financial investments in COVID recovery. While availability of state revenue is an important first step in responding to COVID-19, understanding how investments are leading to change, for whom, and where, must be part of Australia's development support. Australia has invested in developing a survey tool that captures individual level data and makes analysis by social group possible.¹⁷ Currently data from this tool is available for Fiji and Solomon Islands in the Pacific. Australia should continue its investments in closing gender data gaps in the Pacific to support Pacific partners to track progress towards gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery. This is also aligned with the identified priorities in the *Pacific Roadmap on Gender Statistics*, a regionally developed and endorsed framework to support Pacific National Statistical Systems to produce data required for gender equality.¹⁸

Recommendation 6: Build on prior investments in gender data and renew funding support to individual-level, gender-sensitive data collection in the Pacific in partnership with national statistics offices and civil society.

COVID-19 has highlighted how international crisis responses frequently threaten long-term development progress, by reshaping interventions to focus solely on immediate life-saving needs at the expense of ongoing development programs. Far from being separate, competing issues, long-term development challenges are deeply connected to prospects of recovery following a humanitarian crisis. As our region faces growing instability as a result of closing civil society spaces and climate change, the Australian Government should look to invest in long term development strategies with inbuilt flexibility and surge capacity to respond to crises, supported by new and additional funding. Both the imperative and the opportunity are now; COVID-19 plans that are being introduced under the new *COVID-19 Development Response* policy to replace Aid Investment Plans are reportedly being drafted in haste and with limited external consultation. A lack of new funding is forcing DFAT to make cuts to long term, effective and essential programs promoting gender equality in order to fund the immediate crisis. This presents a risk to the effectiveness and sustainability across all current development cooperation. There is a clear need to improve government's capacity and resourcing to react to short-term priorities within existing strategies, to ensure that crises do not undercut hard-won development gains or compromise evidence-based and best-practice approaches.

Recommendation 7: Embed flexibility and surge capacity within long-term development strategies to respond to emerging humanitarian crises supported by new and additional funding.

Recommendation 8: Invest \$2bn of new funding between 2020/21 to 2023/24 into Australia's contribution to international COVID-19 response and recovery.

¹⁷ From 2016-2020 the Individual Deprivation Measure was a partnership between IWDA and ANU with strategic support by the Australian Government through DFAT. www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org From 1 August 2020, IWDA has taken forward this work under a new banner, Equality Insights equalityinsights.org

¹⁸ Pacific Community; UN Women, 2020.

3.2 TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, INCLUDING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE.

The terms of reference of this inquiry underscore a particular interest in “responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence”, out of the many possible human rights issues faced by women and girls in the Pacific. This interest reflects a long-term priority of Australia’s international promotion of gender equality as articulated in DFAT’s Gender Equality and Empowering Women Strategy, the mandate of the Ambassador for Women and Girls (now the Ambassador for Gender Equality), and most recently as a Tier 1 priority of the new *COVID-19 Development Response*. This focus on ending violence against women and girls (EVAW) is extremely important, reflecting the priorities of women in the Pacific and supported by global evidence; however, it should not be Australia’s sole focus in promoting the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, but instead serve as an entry point for wider efforts to transform gender inequality.

The Pacific is well known to have high rates of gender-based violence (GBV). According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), women’s safety in Pacific countries continues to fall behind the wider Asia Pacific region; the Pacific includes the five countries with the highest proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in the region.¹⁹ In Papua New Guinea, it is estimated that over two-thirds of women have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.²⁰ Adding to these already high figures, COVID-19 is expected to dramatically increase GBV rates. UNFPA has projected that a 6-months lockdown period could lead to 1 million additional cases of GBV globally.²¹ Fiji has recorded a six-fold increase in the number of calls to its national domestic violence hotline between February and April, with nearly 50 per cent of those reporting a correlation between COVID-19 and increased violence.²² IWDA partners in Papua New Guinea have raised concerns of an increase in conditions that are often correlated with domestic violence, such as stressors being blamed on women, and consumption of alcohol and other substances.²³

Effective EVAW programming requires integration with wider efforts to support gender equality. Australia’s national body for the primary prevention of violence against women, *Our Watch*, has found that high levels of violence against women can be predicted by the presence of “beliefs and behaviours reflecting disrespect for women, low support for gender equality and adherence to rigid or stereotypical gender roles, relations and identities”.²⁴ Similarly, *What Works*, funded by the UK’s Department for International Development, has undertaken significant reviews of violence prevention projects in 15 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These reviews found that effective design and implementation is “based on theories of gender and social empowerment that view behaviour change as a collective rather than solely individual process, and foster positive interpersonal relations and gender equity”.²⁵ For this reason, investments in gender equality and transformational change to power systems and norms are a key part of prevention EVAW programming, and should accompany response interventions that focus on supporting survivors of GBV.

Broader and intersecting power imbalances, beyond gender equality, can also exacerbate the experiences and prevalence of violence for individuals. Of note, Triple Jeopardy research conducted by IWDA, Banteay Srei, the Cambodian Disabled People’s Organisation (CDPO), CBM Australia and Monash University demonstrated how intersections between different identities of marginalisation are related to experiences of GBV.²⁶ This research found that women with disabilities faced a ‘triple jeopardy’ of gender, disability and poverty, and endured sexual violence perpetrated by family members at a rate five times higher than women without a disability. As such, we cannot expect to successfully tackle violence against women without also addressing wider intersecting power imbalances in society.

¹⁹ UNESCAP 2020, p 41.

²⁰ Darko, Smith, and Walker 2015.

²¹ UNFPA 2020, p 2.

²² UN Women 2020b

²³ Eastern Highlands Family Voice, Femili PNG, International Women’s Development Agency, Voice for Change, and Wide Bay Conservation Association, 2020.

²⁴ Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, 2015.

²⁵ Kerr-Wilson, et al. 2020, p iv.

²⁶ Astbury & Walji 2013.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen efforts to end violence against women by designing programs that seek to engage with, and transform, the collective power systems and norms that underpin gender inequality.

Recommendation 10: Recognise the diversity of women and their experiences and ensure women with disabilities, young women, rural women, and women with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are expressly considered and included in efforts to end violence against women.

Box 1: Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation - tackling violence against women within a broader approach of promoting gender equality.

Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCfR) is the leading provider of crisis response services to women and children who have experienced family and sexual violence in Bougainville, including safe accommodation and counselling. NCfR was established by the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth in 2001, and is led by Sister Lorraine Garasu, who was instrumental in the Bougainville Peace Process and was awarded an Order of Australia in 2011 and the US State Department's International Woman of Courage Award in 2009.

In the absence of effective systems to support victims/survivors of violence, NCfR works with Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and male advocates. NCfR strengthens the capacity of WHRDs and Male Advocates to provide community education about gender-based violence and gender equality, and to increase opportunities for survivors to receive support, crisis response and referrals. The proactive engagement of WHRDs and Male Advocates has increased local ownership of initiatives. During the 2015 and 2017 Bougainville WHRDs Forums, WHRDs reported their work had helped: shift attitudes towards greater respect of women and non-acceptance of violence; reduce alcohol and drug sales and consumption; enable women to feel safer in their communities; and boost collaboration with police in responding to gender-based violence.

WHRDs act as agents of change beyond tackling violence against women, by building sustainable peace and security through the gradual transformation of gender norms and practices. WHRDs have also assumed leadership positions in their communities, included being elected to community government positions. In April 2017, 34 communities in North and South Bougainville elected WHRDs and 16 communities in Central and South Bougainville elected Male Advocates as ward members.²⁷

"The community saw that I liked to speak in public, they supported me and wanted me to take up a leadership position either in the community or in the church."

—Emelda Lomah, young WHRD (Bana District, Bougainville), Interview, 29 November 2017.

NCfR implements the 'From Gender Based Violence to Gender Justice and Healing' project in partnership with IWDA, which is supported by the Australian Government in partnership with the Autonomous Bougainville Government and the Government of Papua New Guinea as part of *Pacific Women*.

3.3 ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS GENDERED IMPACTS

The Pacific Region is facing significant consequences as a result of climate change. Global heating, for which Pacific countries are minimally responsible, has caused significant loss and damage to communities and livelihoods.²⁸ The Pacific is confronting unpredictable weather patterns, rising sea levels and temperatures, higher frequency and severity of storms, increasing salination of the groundwater, and severe air pollution.²⁹ The 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, signed by Australia alongside other Pacific Island Forum States, identified climate change as "the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples

²⁷ Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation 2017, interviews 7, 13,

²⁸ IPCC 2018.

²⁹ Weir, Dovey, & Orcheron 2017.

of the Pacific.”³⁰ Women and girls face disproportionate climate risks as a result of discriminatory gender norms and structures. For example, changes to natural resources increase the labour demands of gendered activities such as subsistence farming and collecting food, fuel and water.³¹ Evidence also demonstrates that in the aftermath of natural disasters, rates of violence increase against women, non-binary people, and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.³²

Gender-responsive climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation requires promoting under-represented voices in traditional and formal arenas, giving due consideration to indigenous knowledge and explicitly including the concerns of women. Women and girls are at the forefront of organising their families and communities to withstand extreme events, yet they are most likely to be excluded from formal positions of leadership within community and national governance structures.³³ In the face of these challenges, diverse Pacific women and girls should be supported to connect for collective advocacy, learning and solidarity, in particular through locally-led Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs). DFAT’s Climate Change Action Strategy provides a good example of placing a gender-responsive policy at the centre of climate change prevention, mitigation and resilience-building interventions, with a central aim to “support...the goals of the Paris Agreement to address climate change and strengthen...socially inclusive, gender-responsive sustainable development in our region”, and should underpin Australian engagement with gender equality in the Pacific.³⁴

Recommendation 11: Commit funding for diverse Women’s Rights Organisations that support women leaders to participate in climate and disaster risk reduction institutions and advocacy at all levels, with particular attention to young and rural women leaders, and leaders from intersectionally marginalised groups.

Recommendation 12: In line with DFAT’s current Climate Change Strategy, ensure that Australia’s efforts to combat gender inequality and climate change in the Pacific are mutually reinforcing.

Ongoing discrepancies between Australia’s international and domestic climate policies are undermining our credibility with our Pacific neighbours. Diplomatic tensions at the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum, where Australia was singled out for its lacklustre attempts to reduce domestic emissions, make it clear that Pacific island countries expect Australia to demonstrate concerted efforts to both prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change.³⁵ To support the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific authentically, Australia must take responsibility for its role in climate change by adopting domestic and foreign climate change policies that target prevention, as well as adaptation efforts. In particular, Australia should commit to meeting our 2030 target under the Paris Agreement without using carry over credits, and to moving to a carbon neutral economy by 2050, in line with international obligations.³⁶

Recommendation 13: Better align domestic and foreign policy objectives by revising Australia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to include commitments towards decarbonisation and net zero emissions by 2050.

³⁰ Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ Declaration 2018.

³¹ Terry, 2009, p 3.

³² Dwyer & Woolf 2018.

³³ Damon, Williams, & Barker-Perez, 2020.

³⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019.

³⁵ O’Keefe, 2019

³⁶ IWDA 2019, p 6.

4. SUPPORT PACIFIC WOMEN AND GIRLS TO DRIVE THEIR OWN MOVEMENT TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY BY DELIVERING FIT-FOR-PURPOSE GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMMING.

In working to support women and girls in the Pacific to exercise their human rights, *how* support is delivered is as important as *what* support is delivered. It is critical that Australia's aid programming create an empowering experience for Pacific women and girls. Involvement in driving policies and programs can be the first step towards greater access to power, leadership and civic space for Pacific women and girls, while also increasing the likelihood of success by ensuring programs are informed by local context and receive community buy-in.

4.1 Ensure women and girls from the Pacific are provided meaningful influence in designing development cooperation programs that affect them.

Australia's support for Pacific countries should focus on priorities identified and led by Pacific women and communities. As the largest development assistance partner in the region, the Australian government has significant influence over local civil society.³⁷ When donors set narrow priority areas, it can distort development trajectories, by encouraging local actors to refocus their work in order to receive funding; this may come at the cost of programs informed by local needs, or deter work across multiple and intersecting issues. Pre-designed programs risk causing harm as a result of limited grounding in the political positioning of Pacific women and multi-layered contextual sensitivities.³⁸ To counter such a power dynamic, the Australian development cooperation program should embed regular opportunities for meaningful input from local voices in decision-making processes, including through country- and regional-level governance mechanisms, regular consultation processes and commissioning Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR). According to forthcoming research by Guttenbeil, the FPAR approach "facilitates indigenous women to be able to collect information and document women's voices and perceptions in a safe way".³⁹ To ensure representation of a wide range of experiences, it is important to engage with representatives who have strong track records in women's empowerment, as well as varied and intersecting identities, including different ages, gender identities, ethnicities, locations (rural/regional/urban), migration experiences, faiths, and disabilities. In order to attract ongoing quality engagement from Pacific partners, processes should clearly communicate how such local engagement informs the direction of Australia's partnership with the Pacific, including through nimble programming that can revise direction based on feedback, real-time adaptive learning and evolving contexts.

Recommendation 14: Embed opportunities for meaningful input and decision-making by diverse local voices within program governance mechanisms, research processes and design, including at priority setting, management, implementation and evaluation stages.

Recommendation 15: Ensure engagement with Pacific partners is situated within an adaptive programming model with necessary supports to ensure programs can respond to feedback, learn and adapt in real-time and evolve according to context.

³⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2020b.

³⁸ Guttenbeil, Forthcoming.

³⁹ Ibid.

Box 2: Voice for Change – Women’s Rights Organisations empower women

Voice for Change is a women’s human rights organisation from Jiwaka Province of Papua New Guinea working to empower and mobilise rural women to take leadership roles in addressing gender-based violence and women’s economic empowerment.

Voice for Change actively engages young women in its work in order to build the next generation of leaders in Jiwaka Province. A key pillar of this work is the Young Women’s Empowerment and Mentoring Program (YWP), which began in 2017. Through this program, young women leaders participate in a training program designed to increase their understanding of gender equality and women’s human rights, develop their confidence and skills for leadership, and invest in their ability to advocate for women’s human rights within their communities. Young women leaders are also paired with mentors to support their leadership journey, while their parents and guardians also receive training so they can provide support. Graduates from the YWP have reported gaining respect from their family and community, and being more confident in making decisions both their personal lives and within their families.

In 2019, Voice for Change and participants in the YWP hosted the first Jiwaka Young Women’s Leadership Forum, engaging almost 200 participants. The forum provided a platform for information sharing about services available to support women and girls in the province and inspired a wider cohort of young women to consider leadership roles.

One emerging leader who participated in the YWP and the Leadership Forum, Georgelyn Marmar, has gone on to actively engage in regional and international events promoting the human rights of women and girls. Of note, Georgelyn was one of six women from the Pacific and Asia sponsored by WAVE^[1] to attend the UNESCAP Asia Pacific Regional Review of the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Bangkok. Here Georgelyn participated in the Youth Feminist Forum alongside 75 feminists under the age of 35, where she was able to highlight the reality of young Pacific women’s experiences.

‘It is really important in supporting young women, so we learn from the elders and then they pass on their knowledge down to us so that we can continue to work together’ Georgelyn, PNG.

^[1] Voice for Change is implementing the *Building Alliances to End Violence Against Women (VAW) in Jiwaka* a five-year project (2016 – 2020) being delivered in partnership with IWDA as a part of the *Women’s Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE)* Program and funded by the Government of the Netherlands’ Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Program.

4.2 Increase direct funding to local Pacific Women’s Rights Organisations, as the most effective drivers of change on gender equality.

Supporting local Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs) should continue to be a key priority in Australia’s efforts to promote gender equality in the Pacific. WROs have a strong track record of advancing the rights of women and girls, having played key roles in driving foundational human rights agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.⁴⁰ Local WROs focus on women-led solutions that are informed by local communities, contexts and needs. As representatives on the ground, WROs provide legitimacy, access to marginalised communities, and the ability to identify and adapt to evolving contexts.⁴¹ Research in 70 countries has found the mobilisation of autonomous feminist movements to be a more significant factor in combating violence against women than the wealth of nations, political parties, or the number of women politicians.⁴² The Australian Government has articulated the importance of local WROs and women-led solutions in DFAT’s Gender Equality and Empowering Women Strategy, and more recently at meetings of Pacific Women Leaders co-hosted by Minister

⁴⁰ IWDA 2018, p 2.

⁴¹ Derbyshire, Siow, Gibson, Hudson, & Roche 2018.

⁴² Htun & Wheldon 2012.

Payne and the Samoan Deputy Prime Minister, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa. The next phase of Australia's gender equality engagement in the Pacific presents an important opportunity to realise this ambition by increasing the proportion of direct funding provided to local WROs.

Pacific WROs are held back in what they can achieve by a lack of funding, and particularly core and flexible funding. As identified by the Office of Development Effectiveness, providing long-term core funding allows civil society organisations to invest in their own capacity in order to become agents of change.⁴³ Such funding can support work focused on long-term and strategic change, and allow the flexibility to react to emerging needs. Recent OECD figures show that global funding for women's equality organisations and institutions currently sits at 0.36% of global bilateral allocable aid, or 36 cents for every \$100.⁴⁴ Funding that goes directly to WROs is likely to be even lower, as this measure incorporates ODA supporting machineries of government, such as national offices for women, alongside grassroots women's organisations. In the Pacific, global direct funding for WROs is less than one per cent of all grant funding, according to research by Fiji Women's Fund and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia and Pacific.⁴⁵ As the largest funder of women's rights and gender equality in the Pacific, Australia is well placed to address the shortcomings in funding to local WROs. However, in 2017-18 just 0.95 per cent of Australia's overall bilateral allocable aid was directed towards women's equality organisations and institutions worldwide, translating to an estimated AUD 9.5 million in the Pacific.⁴⁶ To fulfil its commitment to supporting women-led development in the Pacific, the Australian Government must therefore outline a concrete plan to increase direct funding to Pacific WROs, starting by scaling up bilateral aid directed towards women's equality organisations and institutions to 5 per cent of Australian ODA for Pacific regional and bilateral programs.

Recommendation 16: Steadily increase the proportion of long-term and flexible funding support provided directly to local Pacific WROs, in order to support meaningful and transformative change for gender equality and the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

Recommendation 17: Unlock AUD 33 million annually by committing five per cent of Australia's ODA for Pacific regional and bilateral programs towards Pacific women's equality organisations and institutions.⁴⁷

A significant proportion of Australia's current funding to Pacific WROs is provided indirectly, through 'intermediaries' such as managing contractors, multilateral organisations and international non-government organisations (INGOs). According to DFAT, this is "to manage the risk of working with small local organisations...which may not have the capacity or systems in place, working alone, to satisfy Australian Government standards".⁴⁸ Such risk calculations, however, are heavily focused on institutional and fiduciary risk, creating burdensome compliance requirements and extra layers of decision-making that skew the balance between program effectiveness and compliance. To further facilitate local ownership and improve program impact, DFAT should consider reassessing how different risks are weighed, and reviewing funding modalities accordingly.

Development cooperation comes with some inherent risks, and the Australian Government cannot hope to eliminate or transfer this risk entirely. It must instead balance different outcomes, and select which risks to tolerate and which to mitigate.⁴⁹ Multiple kinds of risk exist, such as institutional risk (fraud, corruption,

⁴³ Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p 32.

⁴⁴ OECD 2019. Calculated by the proportion of CRS sector code 15170: funding to women's equality organisations and institutions against bilateral allocable aid.

⁴⁵ Fiji Women's Fund and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia & Pacific 2020.

⁴⁶ Using OECD 2020, p 5. I established that approximately 0.95% of Australia's bilateral allocable ODA is currently directed towards women's equality organisations and institutions. I calculated the estimated amount of funding going to women's equality organisations and institutions in the Pacific assuming that the percentage holds across regions, based on current regional and bilateral aid directed to the Pacific using DFAT 2019b, p 7. However, noting that Fiji Women's Fund and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia & Pacific 2020 find that since 2012 14.5 per cent of *Pacific Women* (AUD 19.3 million) funds have gone directly to all Pacific NGOs and regional organisations (not just women-focused), it is possible that a greater percentage of Australia's ODA is directed to women's equality organisations and institutions in the Pacific region. Regional data reporting against this DAC code would be a valuable resource, and should be regularly released by DFAT.

⁴⁷ This refers to the OECD reporting code 15170, tracking support for women's equality organisations and institutions. Using OECD 2020, p 5. I established that approximately 0.95% of Australia's bilateral allocable ODA is currently directed towards women's equality organisations and institutions. Assuming that this percentage holds across regions, I then calculated the AUD amount associated with an increase of 4.05%, to reach 5% of current regional and bilateral aid directed to the Pacific, using DFAT 2019b, p 7.

⁴⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020c, p 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p 13.

mismanagement), contextual risk (political instability, economic conditions), protection risk (human rights abuses), and programmatic risk (failing to achieve outcomes).⁵⁰ The use of intermediaries is largely focused on mitigating the institutional risks created by working through smaller providers; however, the addition of a third party comes with its own risks to program effectiveness. This extra layer can dilute control, decrease responsibility, reduce access to information and networks for both donor and implementer, and increase contract uncertainty. A study by the Overseas Development Institute argues that non-localised aid increases the risk of program and strategic failure, and may, in many cases, produce greater risk overall.⁵¹ The relative importance of these risks is, of course, subjective, and will depend on the particular program and organisation in consideration. For this reason, tailored risk assessments are needed to better balance the different kinds of risk presented by working directly or indirectly with Pacific WROs, in order to ensure intermediaries are only engaged where sufficiently beneficial.

Recommendation 18: Rebalance and tailor DFAT's risk assessments, in order to support greater direct investment in Pacific WROs where appropriate.

Where such revised risk assessments identify the opportunity to provide greater direct funding to Pacific WROs, DFAT should support organisations to meet government standards, funding modalities and associated administrative requirements. While this can partly be achieved by investing in the fiduciary and compliance capacity of WROs, it also falls to the government to ensure such processes do not present unnecessary barriers to entry. DFAT's current contracting processes are often pre-disposed towards larger, well-established commercial entities at the expense of smaller organisations. While there is a place for facilities and larger aid programs that bundle activities, this should not be at the expense of fair competition and the benefits of a larger, more competitive and fit-for-purpose supplier base. Barriers to entry for smaller WROs include the cost of preparing applications, strict due diligence requirements, significant administrative burdens, and a funding model based on reimbursements for expenses. Tailored risk assessments present the opportunity to adapt government standards depending on organisations' risk profiles, as well as to streamline or reduce associated administrative requirements. Smaller WROs could be supported to meet remaining requirements by engaging third party contractors for administrative assistance, using a percentage of funding to maintain intermediary-like external surge support, but without adding an extra layer of control. DFAT could also introduce greater flexibility in funding-delivery processes. For example, the application of imprest accounts, which provide small reserves for disbursements, can mitigate fiduciary risks and pose less administrative burdens on DFAT while removing financial burdens on smaller commercial and not for profit organisations. Hybrid contractual financing models with a mix of pre-payments (as permitted in grant agreements) and reimbursements could also facilitate a more level playing field. An increase in staff numbers would bolster DFAT's capacity to manage multiple and tailored partnering arrangements, providing a more flexible and fit-for-purpose aid program.

Recommendation 19 Ensure fair competition and a fit-for-purpose supplier base by tailoring standards and payment modalities to organisational needs and risk profile, to reduce barriers to entry.

Recommendation 20: Reduce the burden of administrative requirements to create a more favourable balance between effective program delivery and compliance.

Recommendation 21: Invest in the capacity of DFAT to actively manage tailored partnership arrangements.

Nevertheless, adjusting Government funding conditions will not be sufficient alone to facilitate a substantial increase in direct funding to Pacific WROs. Even with revised requirements, many local WROs will continue to find the administrative burden difficult to carry without investments in increased financial and compliance capacity. For this reason, the ongoing use of intermediaries in the short to medium term remains necessary. To improve the success rate of local partners transitioning to become funding recipients, where this is their desired goal, the use of intermediaries should be accompanied by stricter conditions. Firstly, intermediaries should be

⁵⁰ Transparency International, 2013.

⁵¹ McKechnie & Davies 2013, p 8.

held accountable for demonstrating improvements in the capacity of local partners through clear benchmarks included in contracts. These benchmarks should be predicated on a broad assessment of existing capacity, accounting for the strengths that WROs bring to the table, and focused on the self-identified needs of WROs. Secondly, intermediaries should be aligned to the change that they are funded to create; in the case of gender programming, this means demonstrating organisational commitment to feminism, the human rights of women and girls and to lessening power imbalances inherent in funding relationships. This will not only improve intra-contract relationships, but also increase the likelihood of the intermediary striving to reduce the local partner's need for external assistance; without strongly aligned organisational values, intermediaries are unlikely to genuinely invest in processes where the end goal is their own redundancy.

Recommendation 22: Set performance benchmarks for intermediaries to strengthen the fiduciary and compliance capacity of local partners to receive direct funding in future.

Recommendation 23: Select intermediaries with values that are aligned to the change they are funded to create. For example, gender programming intermediaries should demonstrate organisational commitment to feminism and mitigating power imbalances inherent in funding relationships.

4.3 Invest in measurements of transformative change

In seeking to provide greater support to Pacific WROs to drive gender equality, the Australian Government should consider what measurements of success look like in the aid program. How program success is measured, and the related reporting obligations, have significant implications for where control sits in practice.⁵² At the same time, promoting gender equality requires a transformative approach that is long term and often non-linear, and is not easily measured through rigid quantitative measures. Andrew Natsios, former head of USAID, notes that “development programs that are most precisely and easily measured are the least transformational”.⁵³ While research by Dan Honig, Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, has found that donors’ reporting and control practices frequently lead to measurement indicators that are not linked to true success.⁵⁴ For this reason, transformative gender programs require implementers to have the flexibility to capture and adapt to unexpected impacts on-the-ground. This has been recognised and incorporated through *Pacific Women*, which allows local partners to identify the most significant change – a respected and evidenced based strategy in monitoring and evaluation practice. Going forward, the Australian Government can build on this work by further investing in transformative change measurement practices, such as the States of Change Cultural Change Impact Framework, that provide implementers the flexibility to measure change, including political, informal, and behavioural change, to record unexpected impacts, and to adapt programs in response.⁵⁵ In doing so, the Australian Government will be rewarded for placing trust in the judgement of the implementer, through an approach that is ultimately more likely to lead to transformative results.

Recommendation 24: Invest in transformative change measurement practices by providing implementers the flexibility to measure and adapt to unexpected impacts.

⁵²Aghion & Tirole, 1997

⁵³Natsios 2010, p 3.

⁵⁴Honig 2019.

⁵⁵States of Change, 2018.

Box 3: We Rise Coalition – long-term funding creates long-term change

The We Rise Coalition is an example of the advantages of investing in long-term change. We Rise is a partnership between the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), femLINKpacific and IWDA, which is in the process of expanding regionally. It works with the women's movement to influence regional and global instruments to reflect Pacific women's human rights. Coalition partners work collectively to mobilise women's rights activists, with each partner playing a unique and complementary role identified through collective decision-making and a fit for purpose partnership model. This model offers opportunity for direct, core support to local organisations at scale, while simultaneously taking a strengths based approach to partnership and enabling greater collective action.

We Rise has been funded in three phases, each building on the last. Phase 1 provided core funding for leading women's rights organisation in Fiji to support their instrumental role in movement building, policy advocacy and lobbying. Phase 2 built on this support, by bringing women's civil society organisations together through a feminist coalition framework, amplifying the impact and outreach of each organisation and strengthening their collective voice. The current program, Phase 3, focuses on movement strengthening to achieve a peaceful and gender-just Pacific. Consistency of core funds and organisational strengthening support have allowed We Rise to invest in robust relationships and long-term transformational change, in order to build a strong and effective movement.

We Rise has increased the access of diverse women to engage in existing spaces, but has also created new spaces to develop agency, such as the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) and Fiji Women's Forum (FWF). Policy language identifying women's human rights concerns has been reflected in regional and international outcome statements endorsed by participating governments, such as the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women (13th Triennial Conference) and 6th Meeting of the Ministers for Women and the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62). We Rise has been able to establish ongoing relationships with duty bearers and governance structures nationally, in Fiji, and regionally, across the Pacific.

The We Rise Coalition works through the We Rise Program, which is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and *Pacific Women*.

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