



## **ActionAid Australia Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

### **Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific**

**July 2020**

ActionAid Australia welcomes the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific. ActionAid Australia is a global women's rights organisation working to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication in 45 countries. This work is supported by the Australian Aid Program and the Australian public in 10 of these countries. ActionAid Australia works in partnership with Pacific women's organisations and other regional partners through the Shifting the Power Coalition, which supports Pacific women's leadership in humanitarian action. This includes FemLINKPacific and Transcend Oceania in Fiji, Nazareth Centre in Bougainville, Talitha Project in Tonga, Vanuatu Young Women for Change in Vanuatu, Vois Blong Mere in the Solomon Islands, and the YWCAs of PNG and Samoa, along with regional organisation Pacific Disability Forum. The Coalition reaches more than 40,000 women across six countries in the region. ActionAid also works directly in Vanuatu, supporting a network of over 4800 rural women, through the forum *Women I Tok Tok Toketa*.

The strong focus of Australia's aid and development programming on gender equality and women's empowerment within the Pacific is welcome. The region has some of the highest per capita rates of gender inequality in the world, including high rates of violence against women, continuing barriers to women's economic participation and empowerment<sup>1</sup> and women's marginalisation in political leadership and decision-making processes.<sup>2</sup> Pacific women are also on the frontline of the climate crisis, with rising temperatures increasing the number and severity of disasters, worsening food insecurity and compounding existing gender inequalities. The emergence of the COVID-19 means that Pacific women and girls are now facing the triple threat of the health and economic impacts of the pandemic, the worsening impacts of climate change, and the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Despite these challenges, Pacific women are powerful agents of change. ActionAid's experience working with women across the region shows that when women are supported to claim their rights and challenge the structures that affect them, they are a powerful force in transforming their communities and working towards the realisation of a just and equal society. It is crucial that Australia continues to foster this leadership through targeted interventions to address gender inequality and sustained funding for frontline women's rights organisations. Additional work is also needed to ensure policy coherence across the Pacific Step-Up so that gender equality objectives are mainstreamed into all Step-Up initiatives to ensure equitable benefits for women and men.

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<sup>1</sup> Asian Development Bank (2016) *Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste*, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/181270/gender-statistics-pacific-tim.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2020) *Percentage of women in national parliaments*, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=5&year=2020>

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Increase aid and prioritise women's rights</b>	<b>Recommendation 1:</b> Gender equality should remain central to the Government's ODA in the Pacific. The Government should adopt a twin-track approach to development policy that promotes standalone and integrated programming, with 30% of all new investments having gender equality as their primary objective and 85% having gender equality as their primary or secondary objective.
	<b>Recommendation 2:</b> The Government should increase the aid budget to 0.7% of GNI as a part of a mounting global response to the world's largest global humanitarian crisis. Additional resourcing is crucial to ensure that support for COVID-19 response efforts does not come at the expense of vital development programs that contribute to broader goals such as gender equality. The health and economic impacts of the pandemic are resulting in additional need across the Pacific and the government should respond to this need through additional resourcing to avert a deepening of poverty and gender inequality.
	<b>Recommendation 3:</b> In order to redress the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, the Government should ensure that 30% of all COVID-19 investments have gender equality as their primary objective and 85% have gender equality as their primary or secondary objective. This should include the prioritisation of funding for locally led violence against women services to address the significant increase in violence against women.
<b>Support Pacific-led women's rights organisations</b>	<b>Recommendation 4:</b> The Government should invest in strengthening civil society in the Pacific with targeted and direct support to local and national civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, through both its development and humanitarian programming.
	<b>Recommendation 5:</b> The Government should commit to directing 5% of COVID-19 aid investments to frontline women's rights organisations in order to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic and ensure that COVID-19 responses are gender responsive.
	<b>Recommendation 6:</b> The Government should develop a clear pathway over the next 12 months to meet its Grand Bargain commitment to ensure at least 25% of all humanitarian financing goes directly to local and national organisations to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.
<b>Expand action on climate change</b>	<b>Recommendation 7:</b> The Government should adopt an integrated framework that addresses climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised and climate affected populations, particularly women and girls.
	<b>Recommendation 8:</b> The Government should provide leadership on the international stage in responding to threat of climate change in our region by meeting its obligations under the Paris Agreement without using carryover credit. Emissions reduction targets should be increased to 45% by 2030 and zero by 2050.
	<b>Recommendation 9:</b> Australia should contribute its fair share of international climate finance, including by re-committing funding to the Green Climate Fund. ActionAid research has calculated Australia's fair contribution to be \$2.5 billion annually for 2020 (or 0.11% of GDP), rising to \$6.49 billion

	<i>annually (or 0.26% of GDP) in 2025.<sup>3</sup> Australia's climate finance contributions should be in addition to existing aid obligations.</i>
<b>Invest in gender-responsive and climate resilient infrastructure</b>	<b>Recommendation 10:</b> <i>The Government should implement a specific gender and women's empowerment strategy for infrastructure investments in the Pacific and Timor Leste including requirements for:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Gender impact assessment of all investments, including consideration of intersecting forms of discrimination such as disability, age and ethnicity and ongoing disaggregated data monitoring; and</i></li> <li><i>ii. participation and leadership of Pacific and Timor Leste women in design, implementation and evaluation of all investments.</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Recommendation 11:</b> <i>The Government should focus on targeted infrastructure investments that transform women's lives including, but not limited to: climate resilient and gender responsive transport systems; gender responsive public services such as schools, health centres; and gender responsive urban infrastructure to make cities safer for women.</i>
	<b>Recommendation 12:</b> <i>The Government should <u>exclude</u> all investments in fossil fuels and related infrastructure in the Pacific and Timor Leste due to the disproportionate environmental and social impact on women.</i>
	<b>Recommendation 13:</b> <i>At a minimum, the Government should ensure <u>all</u> infrastructure investments (including those administered by Export Finance Australia) are designed to respond to the projected impacts of climate change and meet DFAT's Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy for the Aid Program (2019).</i>
<b>Trade</b>	<b>Recommendation 14:</b> <i>The Government should not proceed with implementation of PACER Plus and seek to renegotiate trading partnerships in the region that promote gender equality and positive environmental outcomes, alongside trade and investment objectives.</i>
	<b>Recommendation 15:</b> <i>The Government should resource a full gender impact assessment in each of the Pacific Island countries that is party to an agreement, including formal consultation with national women's organisations to ensure trading arrangements equitably benefit women and manage potential barriers and impediments facing women. This assessment should be supported by the trade budget and not the existing ODA budget.</i>
	<b>Recommendation 16:</b> <i>The Government is encouraged to strengthen its formal consultation mechanisms with civil society groups, especially Pacific women's organisations throughout trade negotiations. This can be a mechanism for strengthening the role and effectiveness of the sector in capturing trade and investment opportunities as well as identifying barriers and impediments that need to be addressed. Australia should do this by introducing targeted strategies to ensure Pacific women's organisations and other constituencies are represented in all regional trade negotiations and decision-making.</i>

<sup>3</sup> ActionAid Australia (2015) *Mind the Adaptation Gap: Why rich countries must deliver their fair shares of adaptation finance in the new global climate deal*, [https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/mind\\_the\\_adaptation\\_gap\\_final\\_v2.pdf](https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/mind_the_adaptation_gap_final_v2.pdf)

## **1. Gender equality should remain a central objective of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the Pacific**

Australia has a strong record of supporting women's rights across the Pacific region. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* has committed to advancing equality and economic empowerment for women across all aspects of Australia's foreign policy, including its trade and aid programs.<sup>4</sup> Supporting the empowerment of women and girls is a cornerstone of Australia's engagement in our region, and DFAT has committed to a target of 80 percent of all investment in the aid program to "effectively address gender issues in their implementation."<sup>5</sup> Australia is also part of several international agreements that promote women's rights and gender equality, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

It is critical that the Government retain gender equality as central goal of Australia's aid and development programming in the Pacific, given the region lags behind global progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Sustainable development and poverty eradication cannot be achieved without gender equality. To be most effective the Government should adopt a twin track approach that invests in both standalone programming that has gender equality as its central objective, alongside mainstreaming gender equality outcomes across all other investments. Gender equality should not be assumed under a broad category of social inclusion and targeted efforts to address harmful gender norms and discrimination are essential for progress in the region. Women make up 50% of the Pacific population and are subjected to systemic discrimination across all spheres of life, including denial of access to decision-making and resources, and devaluing of their labour, both paid and unpaid. Harmful gender norms continue to pose a barrier to progress, as do the high rates of violence against women across the region

ActionAid encourages the Government to build on recent progress in mainstreaming gender equality into aid investments by ensuring that 85% of all new investments integrate gender equality as the primary or secondary objective, with 30% specifically going to investments where gender equality is the primary objective. We also urge the Government to incorporate these gender equality targets into its international COVID-19 response. The Government recognised the disproportionate impacts that COVID-19 will have on women across the region in its international response plan, *Partnership's for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*. To redress these impacts, gender equality must be centred across all COVID-19 initiatives in ways that respond to differential impacts and prevent a further deepening of gender equality.

***Recommendation 1:*** *Gender equality should remain central to the Government's ODA in the Pacific. The Government should adopt a twin-track approach to development policy that promotes standalone and integrated programming, with 30% of all new investments having gender equality as their primary objective and 85% having gender equality as their primary or secondary objective.*

## **2. The threat of the COVID-19 to women's rights**

The emergence of the COVID-19 means that Pacific women and girls are now facing the triple threat of the health and economic impacts of the pandemic, the worsening impacts of climate change, and the perpetuation of gender inequality. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, which is exacerbating existing inequalities and undermining their human rights.

- **Women and girls face an Increased risk of infection** - many communities do not have access to running water or basic hygiene and sanitation products, which means they are unable to take

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<sup>4</sup> DFAT (2016), *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/documents/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

prevention measures such as regular hand washing. Gender discrimination means that women's specific hygiene and sanitation needs are often overlooked or under-prioritised. Women also take care of sick family and community members and make up the majority of workers in health and social sectors across the region, which increases their exposure to the virus.<sup>6</sup>

- **Women and girls lack access to gender-responsive healthcare** - gender discrimination means that women across the region have less access to healthcare, with the lack of availability of gender-responsive health services worsening the situation for women. An outbreak of COVID-19 would increase the 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 COVID-19 response also means that women's specific sexual and reproductive healthcare needs may be deprioritised.
- **Increase in women's unpaid work** - Pacific women perform 80% of unpaid care work<sup>7</sup> and this work is increasing due to the closure of education and child-care facilities as part of COVID-response measures. Women's domestic responsibilities are also increasing due to increased food insecurity and hygiene needs as women are spending more time sourcing food and collecting additional water.
- **Worsening violence against women** - the Pacific already has some of the highest rates of violence against women and girls in the world and there is emerging evidence that violence has increased since social distancing measures have been implemented.<sup>8</sup> The closure of social support services has also meant that women and girls who are facing violence are less able to access vital healthcare and support services.
- **Increase in women's economic insecurity and poverty** - women and girls are amongst the most impacted by the economic effects of lockdowns across the Pacific due to their concentration in low-wage and insecure work, particularly in the agriculture and tourism sector, and their exclusion from government response programs. Women who work as carers, vendors, farmers, fishers and daily wage earners are facing income losses. Without access to paid leave or government social protection programs, their livelihoods are under threat and they are experiencing increased food and income insecurity. Young women and female-headed households are particularly at risk of negative coping mechanisms for survival.

**Recommendation 2:** *The Government should increase the aid budget to 0.7% of GNI as a part of a mounting global response to the world's largest global humanitarian crisis. Additional resourcing is crucial to ensure that support for COVID-19 response efforts does not come at the expense of vital development programs that contribute to broader goals such as gender equality. The health and economic impacts of the pandemic are resulting in additional need across the Pacific and the government should respond to this need through additional resourcing to avert a deepening of poverty and gender inequality.*

**Recommendation 3:** *In order to redress the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, the Government should ensure that 30% of all COVID-19 investments have gender equality as their primary objective and 85% have gender equality as their primary or secondary objective. This*

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<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation (2020) *Global Health Observatory data repository: Sex distribution of health workers*, [https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.HWFGRP\\_BYSEX?lang=en](https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.HWFGRP_BYSEX?lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Office (2018) *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_633135.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Radio National New Zealand (2020) *Fiji records increase in domestic violence cases during Covid-19 lockdowns*, 5 May, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/415881/fiji-records-increase-in-domestic-violence-cases-during-covid-19-lockdowns>



*should include the prioritisation of funding for locally led violence against women services to address the significant increase in violence against women.*

### **3. Localisation - supporting women's rights organisations in the Pacific**

A healthy and vibrant civil society is important in achieving democracy, good governance and progress in vital areas such as gender equality. In fact, it is widely recognised that the sustained advocacy of feminist organisations has been the most important contributor to new laws, policies and programs to tackle violence against women globally. Despite this, women's rights organisations receive just 36 cents for every \$100 of ODA worldwide.<sup>9</sup> In the Pacific, less than 1% of grant funding is directed to Pacific Women's Organisations.<sup>10</sup> Further, funding for gender equality has stagnated across the region, despite evidence that it is growing at a global level.<sup>11</sup>

Australia is currently performing above the OECD average in this area - coming in at seventh for its funding to women's equality institutions and organisations. However, this represents just 1.24% of our bilateral allocable ODA.<sup>12</sup> The Government has a significant opportunity to match its policy leadership on gender equality with financial leadership by increasing our contribution to 5% of our bilateral allocable ODA. This would unlock an additional \$130 million per year in funding for women's rights organisations.

There is a growing call by local and national actors for a greater localization of aid and humanitarian response and the Government is encouraged to consider this in its humanitarian financing, including by developing a clear pathway to meet the Grand Bargain commitment of ensuring at least 25% of all humanitarian financing goes directly to local and national organisations. This should include targeted funding windows for local and national organisations to respond to COVID-19, as well as recognition of the important role of women's organisations.

**Recommendation 4:** *The Government should invest in strengthening civil society in the Pacific with targeted and direct support to local and national civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, through both its development and humanitarian programming.*

**Recommendation 5:** *The Government should commit to directing 5% of COVID-19 aid investments to frontline women's rights organisations in order to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic and ensure that COVID-19 responses are gender responsive.*

**Recommendation 6:** *The Government should develop a clear pathway over the next 12 months to meet its Grand Bargain commitment to ensure at least 25% of all humanitarian financing goes directly to local and national organisations to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.*

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<sup>9</sup> ActionAid Australia et al (2020) *A Feminist Foreign Policy for Australia: Joint submission to the 2020 Review of Australia's International Development Cooperation Policy*, <https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/20200214%20joint%20submission%20feminist%20foreign%20principles%20to%20aid%20development%20policy%20review.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The report refers to funding allocations from OECD Development Assistance Committee members.

<sup>11</sup> Fiji Women's Fund and the Urgent Action Fund, Asia and Pacific (2020) *Where is the money for women and girls in the Pacific: Mapping funding gaps, opportunities and trends*, <https://fijiwomensfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Full-report-UAF-FWF-14Feb2020.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> ActionAid Australia et al (2020) *A Feminist Foreign Policy for Australia: Joint submission to the 2020 Review of Australia's International Development Cooperation Policy*, <https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/20200214%20joint%20submission%20feminist%20foreign%20principles%20to%20aid%20development%20policy%20review.pdf>

### **3.1. Shifting the Power Coalition: an effective model of localisation in the Pacific**

The Shifting the Power Coalition (the Coalition), funded through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Programme, provides an effective partnership model for DFAT's ongoing development and humanitarian programming in the Pacific. The Coalition was formed in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam (2015) in Vanuatu and Cyclone Winston (2016) in Fiji. It is the only regional alliance focused on strengthening the collective power, influence and leadership of Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change. It is designed to strengthen the influence of diverse women-led local organisations in the humanitarian space, which is dominated by international NGOs and UN agencies with much larger human and financial resources.

The Coalition is made up of 13 women-led civil society organisations and the Pacific Disability Forum, bringing together the diversity of Pacific women, including women with disabilities, young women, rural women and LGBTIQ communities. The Coalition is a unique women-led mechanism that draws on the existing capacity of coalition members and collectively aims to enhance engagement in the climate change movement and humanitarian sector from a women's rights and feminist approach.

ActionAid Australia, as a women's rights focused humanitarian organisation, supports Coalition members to engage in the humanitarian system. This is extremely important for the members to be collaborating with a feminist partner to remove barriers to the participation of national, community-based and women's rights organisations in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. This has meant there is a key opportunity to continue to strengthen the capacity of partners for meaningful engagement in humanitarian coordination and transform international actors' attitudes towards working with local and national actors.

The Coalition has proven successful in elevating the voice and agency of diverse Pacific women in decision-making processes. By supporting women leaders to share experiences, collaborate and amplify recommendations the Coalition has enabled women to inform disaster preparedness, response and recovery processes at national and community level. The Shifting the Power Coalition Emergency Grant mechanism has also provided a much-needed avenue for Coalition members to quickly access humanitarian funding in times of crisis. Small grants of up to AUD \$5,000 are available for members to mobilise at local and national levels to ensure that the needs and priorities of diverse women and girls are addressed in response and recovery efforts.

#### **Mobilizing women's leadership and solutions in response to the measles epidemic in Samoa**

The emergency grant mechanism was used by the Shifting the Power Coalition to strengthen women's leadership in the responses to the measles epidemic in Samoa. The Coalition tracked the measles epidemic in collaboration with the YWCA of Samoa and Le Teine Crisis Centre, monitoring the gendered impacts of the response to inform the Samoan Government, UN agencies and donor partners.

The Coalition identified gaps in information that were critical in ensuring a comprehensive response. Specifically, they noted the lack of gender analysis on the impact of the epidemic, including how it was increasing the burden of women's unpaid care, particularly for young women and single mothers, as well as the effects on people with disabilities and the LGBTIQ community.

The Coalition also recognised the critical need for a strong protection focus to support mothers with infected children in their communities. They undertook research that drew lessons from the crisis on how best to communicate to young women, as well as pregnant women and young mothers – an important target group – about the importance of vaccinating babies and children in preventing further outbreaks of the disease. This work is important in ensuring that long-term responses to the crisis are gender-responsive and effective in reaching critical target groups.

As a result of the funding support from the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Programme, since 2018, a total of AUD \$36,500 has been disbursed to Coalition partners to support women's leadership in responding to the Samoa measles epidemic, COVID-19 and the Tropical Cyclone Harold emergency. The grants have directly benefited 162 women including women with disabilities, rural women, young women, and LGBTQI community representatives. As many of the emergency response initiatives are supporting women and their families, it is estimated that an additional 1,620 family members including children are benefitting from emergency assistance.

#### **Supporting women-led COVID-19 emergency responses**

In response to COVID-19, emergency grant funding enabled Transcend Oceania to provide leadership in Fiji's crisis response. Transcend Oceania distributed relief supplies to 10 women leaders with diverse constituencies and used communication mechanisms to track the impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable groups of women, to be able to inform the national response. By working with women leaders, relief supplies were distributed to communities across the three provinces of Vanua Levu.

Transcend Oceania was also able to assess the key challenges that women and their communities are facing as a result of this crisis. For example, the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector was highlighted by women across affected communities, with unemployment soaring as border closures have decimated the tourism industry. In Fiji the national airline laid off 775 employees and souvenir business, Jack's of Fiji, laid off 500. Women leaders reported that the loss of employment within the tourism sector has worsened financial and food insecurity in their communities. With many people returning home without an income there is a growing reliance on food gardens, but without cash families cannot afford grocery items from supermarkets including soap and sugar. Transcend Oceania's direct connection to broad and diverse women's networks has enabled them to identify these concerns; and this information is being used to inform government response efforts.

DFAT is encouraged to look at resourcing of coalitions as a key mechanism for strengthening women's collective power in the region and driving gender equality; as well as the use of innovative funding mechanisms to facilitate their role in humanitarian action.

#### **4. Integration of climate change, gender equality & interlinked crises**

The Pacific has been identified as the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with the region experiencing the impact on rising temperatures on food security, the devastation of more frequent and severe disasters, and the existential threat of rising sea levels. Pacific governments and communities have consistently identified climate change as one of the biggest threats to the region, including in the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security which affirms "*...that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement.*"<sup>13</sup> ActionAid welcomes the DFAT's Climate Change Action Strategy and the Pacific Step-Up's focus on climate resilience within the Pacific region.<sup>14</sup> However, It is crucial that the Government recognises the interlinkages between climate change and gender equality and the need for genuine integration of thinking on climate, security, development and humanitarian responses. Given Australia's leadership in establishing the Green Climate Fund, the Government is also urged to renew its funding to this vital source of funding for climate change responses in Pacific Island countries.

<sup>13</sup> Pacific Islands Forum (2018) *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

<sup>14</sup> Government of Australia (2019) *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Climate Change Action Strategy*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/climate-change-action-strategy.pdf>





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*<sup>15</sup>, which proposes an integrated framework aimed at systematically addressing climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises. It is designed to drive more effective responses for the most marginalised and climate-affected populations, particularly women and girls, and builds on research with women in Cambodia, Kenya and Vanuatu.

The *Framework for gender responsive alternatives to climate change and related crises* identifies four core approaches: 1) value women's localised knowledge alongside scientific evidence; 2) support women's participation in decision-making at all levels; 3) resource women's collective action through women's networks and organisations; and, underpinning the first three approaches, 4) address unequal gender norms. The *Framework* is designed to foster a shift from crisis responses to sustainable, long-term development outcomes, promote integrated approaches and drive transformative change in gender relations. The Government is encouraged to consider this framework in its development and humanitarian programming in the Pacific.

The integration of climate change action into Australia's aid initiatives must be matched by domestic climate action in line with Australia's obligations under the Paris Agreement, including urgent efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Australia is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses in the region and has faced criticism from Pacific Island countries for lagging behind on climate action. Australia contributes 1.4 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. However, this rises to 5 percent when fossil fuels exports are also accounted for.<sup>16</sup> It also significantly increases when the operations of Australian owned companies in developing countries are taken into consideration; research by ActionAid Australia found that these operational fossil fuel projects in 2017 have reserves equivalent to 2.4 billion tonnes of carbon emissions. This is close to 5 times Australia's current annual greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>17</sup> ActionAid research also found that these projects have negative outcomes for women's rights. Bougainvillean academic, Dr. Ruth Saovana Spriggs detailed these impacts in July 2018, stating that:

*"The Australian Government finances large-scale Extractive Industry Projects in PNG, which systematically exclude women and entrench male monopoly over decision-making and benefit flows. Women lose access to economic resources and status, increasing their vulnerability to violence."*<sup>18</sup>

**Recommendation 7:** *The Government should adopt an integrated framework that addresses climate change, gender equality and interlinked crises, which would drive more effective responses for the most marginalised and climate affected populations, particularly women and girls.*

**Recommendation 8:** *The Government should provide leadership on the international stage in responding to threat of climate change in our region by meeting its obligations under the Paris Agreement without using carryover credit. Emissions reduction targets should be increased to 45% by 2030 and zero by 2050.*

**Recommendation 9:** *Australia should contribute its fair share of international climate finance, including by re-committing funding to the Green Climate Fund. ActionAid research has calculated Australia's fair contribution to be \$2.5 billion annually for 2020 (or 0.11% of GDP), rising to \$6.49*

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<sup>15</sup> Monash University-ActionAid, *Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change: A Global Research Report*, <https://actionaid.org.au/programs/gender-responsive-alternatives-for-climate-change/>

<sup>16</sup> Climate Analytics (2019), *Evaluating the significance of Australia's global fossil fuel carbon footprint*, Available at: [https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16166/attachments/original/1562469729/FINAL\\_Carbon\\_footprint\\_report\\_Formatted.pdf?1562469729](https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16166/attachments/original/1562469729/FINAL_Carbon_footprint_report_Formatted.pdf?1562469729)

<sup>17</sup> ActionAid Australia (2018), *Undermining Women's Rights: Australia's Global Fossil Fuel Footprint*, Available at: <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Undermining-Womens-Rights-Australias-global-fossil-fuel-footprint.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

*billion annually (or 0.26% of GDP) in 2025.<sup>19</sup> Australia's climate finance contributions should be in addition to existing aid obligations.*

## **5. Gender equality must be central to all Pacific Step-Up initiatives**

ActionAid encourages the Government to consider the impacts that its Pacific Step-Up initiatives will have on women's rights, particularly in relation to trade policy and the rolling out of the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific. There is a strong need for policy coherence across all Pacific Step-Up initiatives to ensure that gender equality gains from targeted aid investments are not undermined by initiatives that pave the way for liberalisation and privatisation<sup>20</sup> at the expense of women's rights; and that have the potential to worsen climate change with devastating consequences for women and girls across the region.

### **5.1. Increased consultation with Pacific stakeholders, including women and girls**

Recent research by the Whitlam Institute in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu found that communities see the Pacific Step-Up as a unilateral initiative rather than a partnership, demonstrating the need for Australia to increase consultation with diverse stakeholders to ensure that Step-Up initiatives reflect the priorities and needs of local communities.<sup>21</sup> To do this the Government must listen to Pacific voices and take on board Pacific perspectives and priorities. Consultation with Pacific Governments and communities, including women's organisations, is essential to ensure the Step-Up is underpinned by local knowledge and expertise. Supporting women's participation in the design and implementation of the Pacific Step-Up will enable the development of gender-responsive initiatives that address the needs and priorities of half the region's population and do no harm in terms of entrenching gender inequality. The Government can support this objective by consulting widely with women and their communities, as well as the engaging women's organisations in its Pacific Step-Up planning.

### **5.2. The Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific should prioritise gender responsive and climate resilient infrastructure**

DFAT has committed to ensuring that at least 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, should effectively address gender equality issues in their implementation under its *Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Strategy* (2016). It is critical that the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) considers how its proposed infrastructure investments can impact on and transform women's lives, beyond simple metrics of women's consultation and participation. Gender responsive infrastructure investment that reflects that priorities and needs of women and their communities across the Pacific must be prioritised.<sup>22</sup> Such investments can support women to reduce the unpaid care burden they experience; improve their access to health care; and increase their access to markets through a reliable transport system that upholds women's safety and dignity. Infrastructure investments must also be accompanied by

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<sup>19</sup> ActionAid Australia (2015) *Mind the Adaptation Gap: Why rich countries must deliver their fair shares of adaptation finance in the new global climate deal*, [https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/mind\\_the\\_adaptation\\_gap\\_final\\_v2.pdf](https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/mind_the_adaptation_gap_final_v2.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> 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/>

<sup>21</sup> The Whitlam Institute (2020) *Pacific Perspectives on the World: Listening to Australia's island neighbours in order to build strong, respectful and sustainable relationships*, <https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2020/2/13/pacific-perspectives-on-the-world>

<sup>22</sup> ActionAid, 2019, *The Power Project. Women's Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach*, <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Power-flyer-internal-printing.pdf>

sufficient investment in shifting the social norms and supporting women's voices to achieve the desired women's empowerment outcomes.<sup>23</sup>

Given the Pacific's strong focus on climate change and recent affirmation of the 'Blue Pacific'<sup>24</sup> narrative, all infrastructure investments should be required to pass a rigorous design process that considers the projected impacts on climate change and safeguarding of the environment. This assessment should stretch beyond the technical aspects of climate resilient infrastructure to also incorporate the traditional and gender-specific aspects of the environment and how this infrastructure may have direct and indirect impacts on the way communities interact with their environment.

**Recommendation 10:** *The Government should implement a specific gender and women's empowerment strategy for infrastructure investments in the Pacific and Timor Leste including requirements for:*

- iii. *Gender impact assessment of all investments, including consideration of intersecting forms of discrimination such as disability, age and ethnicity and ongoing disaggregated data monitoring; and*
- iv. *participation and leadership of Pacific and Timor Leste women in design, implementation and evaluation of all investments.*

**Recommendation 11:** *The Government should focus on targeted infrastructure investments that transform women's lives including, but not limited to: climate resilient and gender responsive transport systems; gender responsive public services such as schools, health centres; and gender responsive urban infrastructure to make cities safer for women.*

**Recommendation 12:** *The Government should exclude all investments in fossil fuels and related infrastructure in the Pacific and Timor Leste due to the disproportionate environmental and social impact on women.*

**Recommendation 13:** *At a minimum, the Government should ensure all infrastructure investments (including those administered by Export Finance Australia) are designed to respond to the projected impacts of climate change and meet DFAT's Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy for the Aid Program (2019).*

### **5.3. Trade rules should be designed to support women's rights**

ActionAid is concerned about the lack of policy coherence across DFAT's aid and trade policy, particularly in relation to the renewed push for the ratification of the PACER Plus trade agreement, which has the potential to undermine women's rights gains and development outcomes across the region in its current form. Only 9 out of 14 Pacific Island Countries are signatories to the agreement. Fiji and Papua New Guinea, which produce over 80% of Pacific Island output, did not sign-on, arguing that it did not meet their development needs. To date, Australia, New Zealand, Samoa and Kiribati are the only countries that have ratified the agreement, with an additional four countries required to ratify before it comes into effect.

The PACER Plus agreement could negatively impact on women's rights and gender equality across a range of spheres. The reduction in trade tariffs, which are a significant source of revenue for Pacific Island countries, could reduce available resources for public services that support gender equality,

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<sup>23</sup> Mohun and Biswas, 2016, *Infrastructure: A Game Changer for Women's Economic Empowerment: Background Paper for the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment*, <http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1332/icedinfrastructurefull-paper-20161130173941.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, Dame Meg, 2019, Key note Address by Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General "The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands", Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, <https://www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-dame-meg-taylor-secretary-general-the-china-alternative-changing-regional-order-in-the-pacific-islands/>



such as healthcare, education, transport, and justice services. A 2007 report found that eliminating tariffs could reduce total revenue for the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu by more than 10%.<sup>25</sup> Trade in services provisions could also facilitate the privatisation and deregulation of public services, which could reduce the accessibility and affordability of services that women disproportionately rely on and lead to increases in women's unpaid work.<sup>26</sup> The agreement could also threaten women's livelihoods by increasing competition in sectors with the highest rate of women's participation, such as small holder farming and industries in their infancy such as garment manufacturing and food processing. The 2018 Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Report on the PACER Plus agreement acknowledged these concerns, noting the potential negative impacts on small and vulnerable Pacific Island economies and questioning the benefits of development assistance included within the agreement.<sup>27</sup>

**Recommendation 14:** *The Government should not proceed with implementation of PACER Plus and seek to renegotiate trading partnerships in the region that promote gender equality and positive environmental outcomes, alongside trade and investment objectives.*

**Recommendation 15:** *The Government should resource a full gender impact assessment in each of the Pacific Island countries that is party to an agreement, including formal consultation with national women's organisations to ensure trading arrangements equitably benefit women and manage potential barriers and impediments facing women. This assessment should be supported by the trade budget and not the existing ODA budget.*

**Recommendation 16:** *The Government is encouraged to strengthen its formal consultation mechanisms with civil society groups, especially Pacific women's organisations throughout trade negotiations. This can be a mechanism for strengthening the role and effectiveness of the sector in capturing trade and investment opportunities as well as identifying barriers and impediments that need to be addressed. Australia should do this by introducing targeted strategies to ensure Pacific women's organisations and other constituencies are represented in all regional trade negotiations and decision-making.*

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<sup>25</sup> Pacific Network on Globalisation (2016), *Defending Pacific Ways of Life: A Peoples Social Impact Assessment of PACER-Plus*, [http://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/defending\\_pacific\\_ways\\_of\\_life\\_full\\_report\\_final\\_2.pdf](http://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/defending_pacific_ways_of_life_full_report_final_2.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Parliament of Australia, (2018) *PACER Plus Agreement*, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Report 179, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Treaties/PACERPlus-Agreement/Report\\_179](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Treaties/PACERPlus-Agreement/Report_179)