



Response to Parliamentary Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative

DT Global partners with communities, governments, and the private sector to deliver innovative solutions that transform lives and tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges. As a leading implementer of international development programs, working with Australian governments, DT Global has a large and diverse portfolio of programs, spanning regions, countries, sectors and modalities. This response draws on our extensive experience and outlines DT Global's perspective that gender equality is not only a matter of human rights and fairness, but a strategic investment in Australia's economic resilience, regional stability, and long-term security.

Executive Summary

Gender equality is a critical driver of Australia's economic resilience, regional stability, and national security. Drawing on DT Global's extensive implementation experience across the Indo-Pacific, this submission demonstrates that integrating gender equality across foreign policy, economic systems, leadership structures, climate response, and security institutions delivers measurable security and prosperity outcomes for Australia and its partners. The evidence is so substantial and longstanding that the question of the relevance of Gender Equity as a National and Economic Security imperative should not be debated. This inquiry presents an opportunity to document and expand efforts to drive gender equality.

Evidence from Australian-funded programs such as PHAMA Plus and Pacific Women Lead shows that when women participate equally in labour markets, agriculture, and supply chains, productivity rises, food systems become more resilient, and households better withstand climate and economic shocks. These gains directly strengthen the stability of Australia's regional trading partners and the reliability of supply chains essential to national economic security. Conversely, gender-based violence, exclusion from markets, and discriminatory norms limit women's participation and erode economic resilience, increasing risks of instability, humanitarian crises, and conflict.

Inclusive leadership is equally vital. Programs such as Balance of Power and the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Justice (AIPJ3) demonstrate that women's representation in governance, justice institutions, and local decision-making improves institutional responsiveness, strengthens the rule of law, and reduces the likelihood of conflict. Countries with greater gender equality are consistently more peaceful, with stronger social cohesion and more durable peace agreements. Locally led leadership—particularly by women—is fundamental to shifting harmful norms, transforming power structures, and sustaining gender equality outcomes over time.

The inquiry presents an opportunity for Australia to reinforce gender equality as a central pillar of its national security and economic strategy. While Australia has made strong commitments, further leadership is needed in sectors where women remain largely excluded, including trade, infrastructure, and climate policy. Embedding gender equality systematically across foreign policy and expanding partnerships that support inclusive, locally led development will enhance Australia's regional influence, strengthen resilience, and contribute to a secure, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The economic security and national security benefits of realising gender equality for every person, and how the integration of gender equality across foreign policy supports this objective

Gender equality as an economic security and resilience multiplier. A strong global evidence base demonstrates that gender equality contributes directly to economic growth and resilience. The World Bank estimates that closing gender gaps in labour force participation and productivity could increase GDP by up to 20 per cent in some economies by unlocking women's potential, increasing innovation and creating jobs¹, while McKinsey Global Institute estimates that advancing gender equality could add USD 12 trillion, annually, to global GDP². DT Global's experience reinforces these findings, particularly in agriculture and food systems that underpin Indo-Pacific stability and Australia's economic security.

Secondary evidence shows that when women participate equally in the labour market and in leadership, regional economies grow faster and more sustainably, and these benefits are more likely to be shared by everyone. Indo-Pacific countries that perform better with regards to gender equality experience higher labour productivity, have more diversified and resilient economies, greater household income and increased consumer demand. For Australia, this means more stable and prosperous trading partners and reduced economic volatility in key export markets. Gender equality and women's participation build stronger regional supply chains, critical to Australia's economic resilience.

For example, Family Farm Teams³ implemented through the Pacific Horticulture and Agriculture Market Access Program Plus (PHAMA Plus) has demonstrated that addressing unequal gender norms within farming households delivers measurable productivity and food security gains. By promoting joint decision-making between women and men over production, income, and labour allocation, Family Farm Teams has increased farm efficiency, improved household nutrition outcomes, and strengthened resilience to climate and economic shocks. DT Global-supported evidence shows that when women are recognised as co-decision-makers rather than informal contributors, households invest more strategically in inputs, diversify production, and respond more effectively to risk, directly strengthening local food security and supply chain reliability.

For women to participate equally and safely in regional economies, entrenched gender and social norms and attitudes must be changed and safe and equitable workplaces and market systems created. Violence against women and girls is a barrier to women entering labour markets, particularly in male dominated sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure and international trade. International Labour Organisation Convention 190, the Prevention of Workplace Violence and Harassment, presents an opportunity to systemically eliminate this barrier across the Indo-Pacific region, however ratification has been slow. Supporting governments and businesses to identify, address and prevent these risks, builds safe and supportive environments where women can participate in paid employment. PHAMA Plus worked with partner organisations, such as Kaiming Agribusiness in Fiji to introduce and adopt inclusive workplace practices including policies and procedures and safe accommodation for women workers.

Kaiming Agribusiness, Fiji's largest ginger exporter, employs 180 staff, 75% of them women. High absenteeism—driven by transport barriers and gender-based violence—was reducing productivity. PHAMA Plus supported Kaiming to build on-site secure accommodation for eight women workers and introduce a Workplace Domestic Violence and PSEAH Policy. The accommodation allows women, many their families' main income earners, to stay free during the work week, saving significant costs and improving their wellbeing. These measures have reduced absenteeism, boosted staff retention, and improved productivity for the business.

The increased participation of women in local economies directly benefits Australia's economic and national security. Food insecurity and livelihood stress are well-established drivers of instability, displacement, and humanitarian need in the Indo-Pacific. Programs such as Family Farm Teams demonstrate that gender equality interventions at the household and market level are not peripheral social initiatives, but core economic security measures.

Partnerships and inclusion can address mutual challenges faced by bilateral partners such as skills shortages. Katalis, implemented by DT Global on behalf of the Australian International Development Program, aimed to

¹ The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, cited on World Economic Forum - <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024>

² McKinsey Global Institute: 'The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth' 2015

³ Family Farms Teams is an approach developed by the University of Canberra in partnership with ACIAR

maximise the benefits for Indonesia and Australia of the IA-CEPA through improved market access, increased two-way trade and investment and inclusive economic growth in Indonesia. Katalis recognised the potential for partnerships that build not only skills, but also trust and understanding, while also addressing critical challenges and skills shortages in both countries and providing inclusive economic empowerment opportunities for Indonesians. In one such example, Katalis established a commercial model between an Australian RTO (University of New England Partnerships; UNEP), an Australian-owned Indonesian Aged Care facility, Living Well Senior Communities, and an Indonesian University, Binawan, to deliver an Australian-accredited aged care qualifications to 19 accredited Indonesian nurses. LWC is now supporting graduates find employment in Australia at Aged Care Centres for two-year placements. Katalis subsidised course fees, financing course adaptation, and brokered trust between UNEP, LWC and Binawan University. This activity presents significant scaling opportunities for the participants, with LWC anticipating growing enrolments to 75 students by year two, generating substantial economic returns through placement fees and commercial training agreements, while providing economic empowerment opportunities for Indonesian women and supporting Australia's access to qualified expertise in areas of critical shortage.

Inclusive leadership strengthens national security outcomes. Gender equality in leadership and decision-making is equally central to national security. Evidence from the Balance of Power program under Pacific Women Lead (Australia's long-term AUD 170 million ODA investment in regional gender equality), which focuses on inclusive leadership and shifting power dynamics within institutions, demonstrates that women's participation in leadership improves governance quality, institutional responsiveness, and conflict prevention outcomes. DT Global-supported analysis shows that when there is greater gender equality and women are meaningfully included in leadership, particularly in local governance, market institutions, and community decision-making, policies and investments are more inclusive, risks are better managed, and community trust is strengthened.

As of 2026, while women have a growing role in private sector leadership, they remain marginalised from political leadership. Across the Indo-Pacific, women's representation in parliament and cabinet continues to lag global averages. In the Pacific, excluding Australia and New Zealand, women hold an average of only 8% of national parliamentary seats (compared to global average of 27.3%) and 10.2% of cabinet positions, much lower than global average of 22.9%⁴. Countries in Southeast Asia perform a little better, with women holding 23.2% of national parliamentary seats and 22.7% of cabinet positions. When women lack representation in parliament and decision-making, issues facing women and girls are less likely to be understood or addressed, further reinforcing marginalisation and exclusion. To support more inclusive and equitable decision-making, Balance of Power supported the Government of Fiji to establish targets for balanced leadership. Through the program's involvement in supporting the government to re-establish the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), a national body that serves as a key advisory body on i-Taukei (Indigenous) affairs to the government in 2023, the Balance of Power Program was able to support reforms to the GCC constitution. Specifically, introducing more balanced leadership, resulting in a requirement that one in three members nominated to the GCC must be women. A subsequent action from the Government of Fiji extended this target to parliament for the 2026 election, where they are aiming for at least 30% of seats to be held by women.

These findings align directly with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which recognises women's participation as essential to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-crisis recovery. Excluding women from leadership undermines institutional legitimacy and weakens crisis response, while inclusive leadership enhances social cohesion and stability key national security outcomes for Australia and the region.

Stability, Peace, and Resilience. Evidence consistently shows that societies with greater gender equality are less prone to violent conflict, including lower rates of Family and Sexual Violence (quantitative analysis found countries with women's representation in parliament and government institutions have a 4-16% lower probability of internal conflict). In these societies, disputes are more likely to be resolved peacefully, and they are less likely to experience extremism and social fragmentation. Women's participation and leadership in conflict prevention, resolution and governance processes significantly increase the legitimacy and durability of peace agreements and strengthen social cohesion. For example, the UN and World Bank estimate that a peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women have been involved in negotiations. Instability in the Indo-Pacific presents a direct risk to Australia's national security through displacement, transnational crime and humanitarian crises. Preventing conflict is far less costly than responding to it militarily or through emergency aid. Gender equality, therefore, acts as a stability and preventative security measure.

Gender equality in judiciaries improves justice outcomes by bringing diverse life experiences to decision-making, increasing public trust, enhancing access for vulnerable groups (especially women), and driving more effective, nuanced legal outcomes, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, by breaking down systemic

barriers and promoting fairer representation. For example, in Indonesia, while there has been progress, women's representation in the judiciary remains low, constituting 31% of all judges, and 27% of court leaders. Only nine of fifty High Court Justices are women. The Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Justice Phase 3 (AIPJ3) focuses on mutual policy priorities for Australia and Indonesia's national and economic security, as well as regional stability: transparency and accountability, criminal justice reform, preventing violent extremism, addressing transnational crime, commercial law, access to justice, and women in leadership. AIPJ3 facilitated a discussion between The Hon. Justice Suzanne Christie of Australia's Federal Circuit and Family Court with the Hon. Justice Nani Indrawati, Chair of the Indonesia Women Judges Association (BPHPI) to explore continued support for Indonesian women judges in leadership roles, including through a planned mentoring program for women judges. The initiative has been informed by a national survey of 690 women judges across different judiciary level and regions, covering themes of professional integrity, career development and resilience and aims to support and increase the number of women judges and their career progression to leadership. Increasing the involvement of women in the judiciary, particularly as court leaders will contribute to improved transparency, access to justice and ultimately strengthen justice outcomes contributing to improved rule of law and prevention of unrest and violence. Partnerships such as those between the courts are key to Australia's national security building trust, engagement and collaboration.

High-rates of gender-based violence, sorcery-accusation related violence (SARV) and associated incidents of payback impact on economic security, community cohesion and safety, local and national security. Socio-cultural acceptance normalises violence as a dispute resolution and retribution mechanism. SARV (which most commonly involves violence against women) undermines community cohesion, diverts valuable resources and undermines the rule of law. For victims it can lead to displacement from their villages or worse. The Building Community Engagement Platforms (BCEP) program in Papua New Guinea is working to shift socio-cultural attitudes and government policy towards SARV. BCEP is doing this by bringing together women leaders across key highland provinces to build a coalition of action. By equipping local leaders with the platform to present evidence rather than just grievances, the program successfully shifted the dynamic from community unrest to constructive negotiation, resulting in binding commitments from PNGs Members of Parliament to fund police protection and holding the state to account for enforcing the rule of law.

Climate change, humanitarian risk, and the costs of gender inequality. The security implications of undermining gender equality are particularly acute in the context of climate change and humanitarian crises. Climate shocks disproportionately affect women and girls due to existing inequalities in access to resources, mobility, and decision-making. DT Global-supported programs, including Family Farm Teams, demonstrate that when women have greater control over productive assets and income, households are better able to adapt to climate variability, manage food shortages, and avoid negative coping strategies that can exacerbate fragility.

Failure to address these gendered vulnerabilities increases the likelihood of food insecurity, displacement, and protracted humanitarian crises, placing sustained pressure on Australia's development, humanitarian, and security systems. Gender inequality therefore represents not only a social risk, but a compounding security risk in an increasingly climate-affected Indo-Pacific.

The role of locally led leadership and in advancing gender equality and as a security enabler. Enabling local leaders is critical to sustainable, meaningful change. Achieving gender equality requires deliberate action to shift harmful social norms and unequal power structures that limit women's and girls' agency, participation, and safety. Discriminatory norms shape who has access to resources, who makes decisions, and whose voices are valued, reinforcing economic exclusion and social inequality. Without addressing these underlying power dynamics, policy and programmatic efforts risk delivering only superficial change. Developmental leadership, through local actors, is essential to transforming norms and redistributing power—by supporting inclusive leadership, engaging men and communities, and strengthening local accountability—enables lasting gender equality that benefits families, economies, and societies. Reforms need to be anchored in local priorities and cultural contexts, with a deep understanding of the social fabric and political economy, not solely focus on technical solutions. DT Global's Locally-led Development Framework, published in September 2024, articulates our approach to locally-led development. The framework is based on two decades of evidence 'thinking and working politically' approaches, and navigating local context through local drivers of change, which are critical for development effectiveness and sustainability.⁵ Locally led development is a key component of all

⁵ See <https://twpcommunity.org>; Inside the black box of political will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program (Hudson et al, 2018).

international development Program implemented by DT-Global in the Asia Pacific Region, and is a core focus of the Australian Government's International Development Policy.

Australia's role

Australia has made strong commitments to advancing gender equality across foreign policy, development, defence, and national security, including through the International Gender Equality Strategy and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Evidence from our implementation of International Development Programs demonstrates that these commitments deliver tangible economic security and stability outcomes when they are systematically integrated into economic and security policy, but to realise the benefits of gender equality, more needs to be done.

This inquiry presents an opportunity for the Government of Australia to reinforce and extend gender equality as a core pillar of Australia's economic and national security architecture. Australia should support and further advance efforts in less progressed, but highly critical areas such as political and community leadership, trade, infrastructure and climate change where women continue to be marginalised from planning, decision-making, implementation and response. For example, trade negotiations should be inclusive of women and marginalised groups and should understand the impacts of agreements on those most vulnerable. This can be done by ensuring that policy settings reflect the evidence that inclusive economies, food systems, and leadership structures are more resilient, more stable, and better aligned with Australia's long-term national interest. It requires a long-term commitment, and recognition that gender equality may take time, but it has the potential to be transformational. By building upon Australia's position as a partner of choice for gender and inclusion, we should continue to advocate for gender equality as critical to national security and economic security. Australia must continue to expand our efforts on gender equality efforts across all elements of foreign policy and partnerships in the Asia Pacific region, contributing directly to the creation of a safe, prosperous and secure Indo-Pacific region, critical to Australia's national and economic security, prosperity and resilience.