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# **INQUIRY INTO *INTERNATIONAL AID (PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY) BILL 2015: SUBMISSION***

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

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## INTRODUCTION

IWDA is the leading Australian agency entirely focussed on women's rights and gender equality in the Asia Pacific region. We are international, feminist and independent. IWDA's vision is for a world where every woman and man, girl and boy has equal rights and opportunities. IWDA partners with others in the Asia Pacific region to advance women's human rights. We stand up for women and girls by tackling issues of power, money and security.

IWDA welcomes the introduction of the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* and commends the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for initiating this inquiry. We encourage parliamentarians from across the political spectrum to give their full support to a mechanism that directly supports the strong policy commitments to gender equality made by all three major parties, by providing a direct link to action.

We expect the inquiry will receive many submissions supporting this bill. Our submission focuses on three elements we believe make this legislation imperative: providing a mechanism to ensure gender considerations are embedded in programming; supporting the consistent implementation of existing policy commitments on gender; and building on an important international legislative precedent.

## WHY EMBEDDING GENDER IN THE AID PROGRAM MATTERS

Women and girls in developing countries are disadvantaged relative to men and boys, often bearing the burden of poverty. Nonetheless, claims that they represent a disproportionate percentage of the world's poor cannot currently be substantiated, because global poverty data is collected in relation to households not individuals. This makes accurate sex disaggregation of data impossible. This highlights a core problem that the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* will help address. The factors that contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality are often invisible - acts of omission, of failing to make visible or count, or give specific consideration to how circumstances, interests, needs and priorities vary by gender. One way to surface and address such factors is to specifically consider how gender equality will be impacted by particular policies and programs as a routine matter. Such a consistent, systematic approach supports a primary ethical obligation for states: to not reinforce discrimination and disadvantage, and to support the realisation of human rights by all individuals, within their borders and in partner countries.

Progressing gender equality also has direct practical development benefits. Countries with greater gender equality tend to have lower poverty rates.<sup>i</sup> Gender inequality cost governments in our region an estimated \$US 42 to \$47 billion in potential GDP annually due to women's limited access to employment opportunities, while the poor education of girls is costing the region up to US\$30 billion each year.<sup>ii</sup> Addressing the barriers that prevent women from participating fully in social and economic life across all sectors of society is essential to enabling inclusive economic growth and achieving internationally agreed goals for sustainable development, something UN Member States including Australia will likely commit to in September at the UN summit on the post-2015 sustainable development goals.

The Australian Government recognises gender equality as essential to sustainable development, and as such has made promoting gender equality a core priority of the aid program.

## The Australian Government on gender equality and advancing the human rights of women and girls

Australian National Statement: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls; Senator The Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Fifty-eighth session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 11 March 2014

*Gender inequality persists in every country around the world. Every day, women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work, economic assets and participation in government. Only two out of 130 countries surveyed by the UN have achieved gender parity across all levels of education. Women farmers produce more than half the world's food, but have far less access to land and resources than male farmers. Violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all development goals. We need to press ahead to reach MDG3. And we must make sure that gender equality is a cornerstone of the post-2015 agenda, and advances the human rights of women and girls in all countries...*

*'Gender equality and the promotion and protection of women and girls' human rights must be a priority in the new development agenda, both as a standalone goal and mainstreamed across other goals. Achieving a strong, progressive outcome that prioritises gender equality and women's empowerment is critical. Australia's commitment to this vision is unwavering.'*

While governments around the world have made clear, repeated formal commitments to gender equality, implementation has lagged well behind. This is an issue globally, and for governments and non-government organisations alike. And it is not a minor issue. In practical terms, it means governments and other development actors are failing to take action to address discrimination, violence, marginalisation and unequal access to citizenship rights and the benefits of development. This failure to act has persisted in the face of evidence of that failure, knowledge of how to address it, and the resources to do so. From both a rights and a public policy perspective, this is a significant problem, with negative consequences for human lives and national budgets.

To consistently fail to act at the pace and level that policy commitments suggest is required, in the face of clear evidence of the benefits and feasibility of such action, is to effectively contribute to the denial of rights and opportunities and the perpetuation of inequality. The consistency of 'policy evaporation' across countries, organisational forms and political orientation points to the deep systemic factors that reproduce gender inequality, and which require a consistent, systematic approach if policy commitments are to be realised.<sup>iii</sup>

## REALISING EXISTING POLICY COMMITMENTS

Gender is still not present in the everyday work of Australia's aid program. The issue is *not* (mostly) that individuals and organisations responsible for implementing the aid program don't think it matters. Rather, engendering development work and advancing gender equality requires knowledge, skill opportunities for/processes that require consideration of gender, consistency, time and persistence. In the context of a dynamic aid program, busy policy agenda and political cycles, unless there is clear leadership, process requirements, resourcing and accountability for performance on gender equality as a goal, in the same way as there is for prudent budget management, action on gender equality will continue to lag behind commitments.

Connecting policy commitments to implementation and resourcing is essential to translating intention into action and change. Without clear arrangements to implement and resource commitments, the persistent gap between rhetoric and action on gender equality and women's rights will remain, with progress remaining partial and in many areas, slow. To

date, the management and performance architecture to systematically connect gender equality policy commitments to programming and resourcing has been under-developed.

This problem was recognised in the new performance framework introduced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in November 2014. *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid* calls for more than 80 per cent of all investments made in the Australian aid program to effectively address gender issues in their implementation. In order to meet this target, the gender impacts of aid investments will be assessed on an annual basis.<sup>iv</sup>

The Bill that has been introduced supports the establishment of systems and processes to realise this commitment, providing an opportunity to confirm cross-party support for gender equality as a policy priority and for the institutional processes required to bring it into effect. Passage of the Bill will require consideration of how aid investments will promote gender equality, to track expenditure related to gender equality, and to report on how funds were spent to advance gender equality.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs has stated that currently, “over 50 per cent of Australia’s aid budget is spent on initiatives that promote gender equality.”<sup>v</sup> Previous ministers have made a similar claim. Currently, however, this claim cannot be substantiated. This also means that performance on the 80 per cent goal cannot be accurately assessed. This is because the Australian Government only tracks a small proportion of its expenditure on gender equality and women’s rights. The extent and significance of the information gap this creates can be seen in the 2013-14 Papua New Guinea Aid Program Performance Report (APPR). The Report states that 52 per cent of Australia’s aid expenditure in Papua New Guinea is on programs that identified gender equality as a significant principal target.<sup>vi</sup> This identifies the percentage of the overall PNG aid program by value that has gender equality as a significant principal target, not how much of that program is *actually spent* on specific activities to progress gender equality.

Currently, Australia’s aid program only tracks and reports actual expenditure where gender equality and women’s empowerment is a specific line item - where it is a ‘principal objective’. The 2013-14 APPR for Papua New Guinea shows \$2.9 million of a nearly \$500 million budget, or some 1 per cent of expenditure, as spent on the specific line item ‘gender equality and women’s empowerment’.<sup>vii</sup> No financial information is available about expenditure on activities to mainstream gender equality and women’s empowerment elsewhere in the program, the bulk of the aid program’s investment in gender equality and women’s rights. This makes it impossible for the government to know and highlight the extent of its investment. This invisibility has also enabled programs to claim they are progressing gender equality without allocating resources commensurate with the task.

IWDA considers that the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* offers a genuine opportunity to develop the systems and processes that will support achievement of the 80 per cent target, in a cost-effective manner. Improving the tracking of expenditure associated with practical steps to integrate gender across Australia’s aid program is at the heart of tracking progress towards the 80 per cent target. Making consideration of gender equality impacts routine will accelerate progress by making this policy priority a relevant objective for the whole of the aid program. Annual publication of the resulting information will help government and other stakeholders assess how policy commitments are being implemented and adjust efforts accordingly. Increased transparency about budget allocations will provide decision makers, development partners and communities with improved information, enabling more informed dialogue and planning, and improved accountability.

The requirement to report to Parliament will contribute to broader accountability and transparency goals, enabling the Parliament as a whole, and thus constituents across the country, to engage annually with how Australian aid is promoting gender equality in partner

countries. This will elevate the importance of gender equality and highlight the gender equality achievements made possible by the Australia's aid program. Annual parliamentary consideration may also contribute to strengthening the gender-responsiveness of the parliament, by strengthening understanding of what this requires and the benefits it delivers.

## BUILDING ON THE UK'S LEADERSHIP

Unanimous passage of a bill that would achieve the stated policy aims of all three major political parties in Australia is possible. Conservative British MP William Cash introduced a bill with similar provisions that was passed by the UK Parliament with cross-party support in March 2014. IWDA understands that Sweden and Norway may follow suit with similar legislation. The UK case demonstrates the importance of support from all parties in ensuring that a Private Member's Bill is given adequate priority in the parliamentary calendar.

IWDA will work collaboratively with others to encourage the broad parliamentary support needed to enshrine gender equality commitments in Australia's aid program. We encourage all parties to engage in creating a clear and simple legislative requirement to achieve what we all agree is important. Governments of all political persuasions will benefit from the establishment of a framework that supports effective aid policies, programming and implementation by making consideration of gender equality impacts part of standard process.

IWDA hopes that debate and passage of this Bill will also provide a platform for considering the re-establishment of a standard process for reviewing the gender impacts of government policy, programming and expenditure beyond the foreign affairs and trade portfolio. Australia was once a world leader for its bureaucratic and executive processes to consider and report on the impacts of current and proposed expenditure and savings measures on women. Years of practical experience within portfolios, Cabinet and the Expenditure Review Committee in the 1990s demonstrates that such a system is entirely feasible and brings important effectiveness, visibility and assurance benefits, for governments and citizens alike.

Gender equality is not just a human right that governments around the world, including Australia, have committed to. It is a pre-requisite for sustainable global development. This Bill is an opportunity for Australian politicians to take real, practical action on policy commitments that will have global impact. The Bill will drive a virtuous circle - better integration of gender analysis and gender equality priorities in planning, better targeting, better information about how the aid program takes account of and progresses gender equality and greater impact. There is no downside to requiring the aid program to do what it has been policy to do for many years.

<sup>i</sup> World Bank (2007), *Global Monitoring Report*, p 107

<sup>ii</sup> Women and labour markets in Asia : rebalancing towards gender equality / ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific ; Asian Development Bank. - Bangkok: ILO, 2011

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Mirijam van Reisen with Maxi Ussar (2005), *Accountability Upside Down: Gender equality in a partnership for poverty eradication*, Eurostep and Social Watch.

<sup>iv</sup> DFAT (2014), *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*, p 8

<sup>v</sup> DFAT (2014), *Improving economic outcomes for women*, p i

<sup>vi</sup> DFAT (2014), *Aid Program Performance Report 2013-14: Papua New Guinea*, p.19

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, p.12