



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

## **International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill**

**Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee**

June 2015

## About ACFID

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) unites Australia's non-government aid and international development organisations to strengthen their collective impact against poverty. Our vision is of a world where gross inequality within societies and between nations is reversed and extreme poverty is eradicated.

Founded in 1965, ACFID currently has 135 members and 13 affiliates operating in more than 100 developing countries. The total revenue raised by ACFID's membership from all sources amounts to \$1.3 billion (2012/13), \$719 million of which is raised from over 1.9 million Australians (2012/13). ACFID's members range between large Australian multi-sectoral organisations that are linked to international federations of NGOs, to agencies with specialised thematic expertise, and smaller community based groups, with a mix of secular and faith based organisations.

ACFID has a Gender Equality Working Group which brings together over 30 of its member agencies working on gender equality and women's empowerment. A full list of ACFID's current members and affiliates can be found in Annex A.

It is important to note that this submission does not override any policy positions that may be outlined in any individual submissions from ACFID members.

## Executive Summary

ACFID welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee on the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* (“the **Gender Equality Bill**”). ACFID strongly supports the introduction of the Gender Equality Bill as an important tool to ensure gender considerations are embedded into every aspect of Australia’s aid program.

Women and girls disproportionately represent those living in poverty. Ensuring the economic, social and political empowerment of women and girls is critical to achieving sustainable and inclusive economic development in developing countries. The Gender Equality Bill seeks to ensure that gender issues are considered across Australia’s aid program, and to ensure consistent tracking of gender equality expenditure and program performance.

We note that the Gender Equality Bill in large part reflects the Australian Government’s existing and commendable policy commitments to promote the empowerment of women and girls as part of Australia’s international development assistance. We commend the Foreign Minister’s strong efforts to ensure gender equality is at the heart of Australia’s aid program.

We believe the Gender Equality Bill would serve to strengthen these policy commitments, and highlight the Government’s ongoing progress in this critical area. Moreover, we believe the Bill will raise awareness in the Australian Parliament of the importance of gender equality and the achievements of the Australian aid program in our region and beyond.

## 1. Empowering Women and Girls

Every woman and girl has the right to live in dignity and with freedom from want and from fear. Gender equality is a development goal in itself, and is also a necessary precondition for achieving other development goals. The importance of empowering women and girls to advance development and reduce poverty has been extensively documented. Empowered women typically invest more in their children and families than men, and contribute to the health and productivity of whole communities.

According to the World Bank, countries with greater gender equality tend to have lower poverty rates.<sup>1</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region alone, women's limited access to employment opportunities costs between \$US 42 to 47 billion annually, while the poor education of girls costs the region close to \$US 30 billion each year. Empowering women and girls to participate fully in social, political and economic life is essential to ensure inclusive economic growth and to achieve internally agreed goals for sustainable development.

## 2. Monitoring Program Performance on Gender Equality

Despite global consensus on the importance of empowering women, it is difficult to determine the progress made on achieving gender equality. Current approaches to measuring poverty tend to rely on household-level data which fails to identify the unique and diverse challenges faced by women and girls in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> Consistent and rigorous tracking of gender equality expenditure and program performance is vital to ensure policy is based on evidence and that impact is measured and improved.

ACFID strongly supports the provision of the Gender Equality Bill that requires annual reporting to Parliament on how Australian aid has been used to promote gender quality in developing countries, both with regards to development and humanitarian assistance. A report by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), *Smart economics: evaluation of Australian aid support for women's economic empowerment*, highlighted the need for Australia's aid program to improve its monitoring, evaluation and reporting of gender related outcomes. In particular, the evaluation found the 'evidence of gender-related results in the economic sectors is weak or non-existent.'<sup>3</sup>

We note that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade agreed to the recommendations of the ODE in its recent report, *Performance of Australian Aid 2013-14*.<sup>4</sup> The Gender Equality Bill ensures these recommendations are implemented by requiring the Department to build systems to track gender equality expenditure and measure program performance. Moreover, requiring Parliamentary oversight of the progress made on gender equality would serve to raise awareness in the Australian Parliament of the issues facing women and girls in our region, and highlight how Australia's aid program seeks to assist them. ACFID believes it is important to ensure the Australian Parliament, as well as the Australian public, are aware of the achievements of Australia's aid program and its contribution to the

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2007), Global Monitoring Project

<sup>2</sup> Further details can be found through the Individual Deprivation Measure research here:  
<https://www.iwda.org.au/introducing-the-individual-deprivation-measure/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/Documents/smart-economics-full-report.pdf> (**attached**)

<sup>4</sup> <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/performance-of-australian-aid-2013-14.aspx>

prosperity and stability of our region, and ultimately Australia.

### 3. Embedding Gender Equality across Australia's Aid Program

Women and girls in developing countries face particular barriers to overcoming poverty. For example, women typically have less access to basic services such as education, transport and health care. Unequal property rights can prevent women from accessing financial services, while ingrained social norms can expose women to gender-based violence and abuse.

Women and girls also disproportionately suffer during a humanitarian crisis, whether conflict, famine or natural disaster. Existing levels of poverty, inequality and exclusion faced by women - including poor access to productive resources, power and decision making processes - are often exacerbated during and after crises. Moreover, women experience humanitarian emergencies differently to men. According to the UN, women and children account for more than 75 per cent of the refugees and displaced persons at risk from war, famine, persecution and natural disaster.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, dedicated gender programming, tailored to the challenges faced by women and girls, is vital to ensure Australia's aid efforts effectively promote gender equality. At the same time, decades of experience has shown that gender equality outcomes are indivisible and that shifts in one area can affect a wide range of other areas. Aid investments that seek to promote women's leadership and participation in decision making, for example, should be accompanied by investments to increasing access to education and reproductive health.

For this reason, we support the provisions of the Gender Equality Bill that require Commonwealth aid officials to consider gender equality across all aid programming decisions within the Australian aid program. We believe this is an important mechanism to ensure that the aid program takes a holistic approach to ensuring gender equality across all of its aid investments. Similarly, the Bill's requirement that gender issues be considered across all humanitarian responses is critical to ensure that the differential needs and experiences of women and girls in emergencies are taken into account.

We note that the provisions of the Gender Equality Bill largely reflect existing government policy. In *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effective of Australia aid*, the Department commits to ensuring that more than 80 per cent of aid investments, regardless of their objectives, will address gender issues in their implementation. However, neither the aid policy nor subsequent federal budgets have provided for mechanisms to determine if and how the Department is reaching this important target. ACFID believes that provisions of the Gender Equality Bill would serve to strengthen existing commitments made by the Australian Government by enshrining them in legislation.

The Gender Equality Bill also aligns, and will support Australia's implementation of, the Sustainable Development Goals, to be agreed this September. The Sustainable Development Goals include a specific goal to 'achieve gender equality and empower women and girls' with a series of proposed targets sitting behind this focused on ending discrimination and violence and ensuring full and effective participation of women in political, economic and public life. There is also a specific target

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/protecting-women-emergency-situations>

committing governments to 'adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels.'<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. International Support for Gender Equality Legislation

There is growing international support for gender equality legislation. The United Kingdom in particular, has set an important precedent in this area. In 2014, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed its own gender equality bill with similar provisions to the Bill that is before the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee. A review of the first year of the legislation's implementation is expected in June this year.

It is worth noting that the UK Gender Equality Bill was passed with strong support from both major political parties and was introduced by Conservative MP, William Cash. Both Sweden and Norway are now considering passing similar legislation.

ACFID believes that promoting gender equality is, as it should be, a shared value across Australia's political spectrum. We commend again the commitment of the Foreign Minister and her Department to ensuring the empowerment of women and girls. We also note the position of the Australian Labor Party in its Draft National Platform which recognises that the 'empowerment of women should be a fundamental principle of Australia's aid program.'<sup>7</sup> Finally, we commend the work of the Australian Greens Party in introducing the Gender Equality Bill.

#### 5. Ensuring Civil Society Consultation

ACFID encourages the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee to ensure that there is sufficient consultation with civil society in the implementation of this Bill. Australian aid and development NGOs, academic institutions and think tanks have vast expertise in the empowerment of women and girls in developing countries, in administering programs that support gender equality and women's empowerment, and in the measurement of gender equality outcomes. As such we believe it is vital that civil society actors are consulted to determine how the aid program is designed and implemented to support gender equality, and how gender equality outcomes should be measured.

In particular, we believe that women's organisations from the region and beyond should be consulted throughout this process. We note that the Department has existing partnerships that could be leveraged to facilitate meaningful consultation, for example through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program.

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations, June 2015, zero draft of Sustainable Development Goals

<sup>7</sup> ALP Draft National Platform 2015

## Annex A: ACFID Members

### Full Members:

- 4OK Foundation Australia
- ACC International Relief
- Act for Peace - NCCA
- ActionAid Australia
- ADRA Australia
- Afghan Australian Development Organisation
- Anglican Aid
- Anglican Board of Mission - Australia Limited
- Anglican Overseas Aid
- Anglican Relief and Development Fund Australia
- Asia Pacific Journalism Centre
- Asian Aid Organisation
- Assisi Aid Projects
- Australasian Society for HIV Medicine
- Australia for UNHCR
- Australia Hope International Inc.
- Australian Business Volunteers
- Australian Cranio-Maxillo Facial Foundation
- Australian Doctors for Africa
- Australian Doctors International
- Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
- Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific
- Australian Himalayan Foundation
- Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League
- Australian Lutheran World Service
- Australian Marist Solidarity Ltd
- Australian Medical Aid Foundation
- Australian Mercy
- Australian Red Cross
- Australian Respiratory Council
- Australian Volunteers International
- Beyond the Orphanage
- Birthing Kit Foundation (Australia)
- Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation
- Bright Futures Child Aid and Development Fund (Australia)
- Burnet Institute
- Business for Millennium Development
- CARE Australia
- Caritas Australia
- CBM Australia
- ChildFund Australia
- CLAN (Caring and Living as Neighbours)
- Credit Union Foundation Australia
- Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Overseas Aid Fund
- Diaspora Action Australia
- Diplomacy Training Program
- Door of Hope Australia Inc.
- Edmund Rice Foundation (Australia)
- EDO NSW
- Engineers without Borders
- Every Home Global Concern
- Fairtrade Australia New Zealand\*
- Family Planning New South Wales
- Food Water Shelter
- Foresight (Overseas Aid and Prevention of Blindness)
- Fred Hollows Foundation, The
- Global Development Group
- Global Mission Partners
- Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
- GraceWorks Myanmar
- Grameen Foundation Australia
- Habitat for Humanity Australia
- Hagar Australia
- HealthServe Australia
- Hope Global
- Hunger Project Australia, The
- International Children's Care (Australia)
- International Christian Aid and Relief Enterprises
- International Detention Coalition
- International Needs Australia
- International Nepal Fellowship (Aust) Ltd
- International RiverFoundation
- International Women's Development Agency
- Interplast Australia & New Zealand
- Islamic Relief Australia
- Kokoda Track Foundation
- Kyeema Foundation
- Lasallian Foundation
- Leprosy Mission Australia, The
- Live & Learn Environmental Education
- Mahboba's Promise Australia
- Marie Stopes International Australia
- Marist Mission Centre\*
- Marsh Foundation
- Mary MacKillop International
- Mary Ward International Australia\*
- Mercy Works Ltd.
- Mission World Aid Inc.
- Motivation Australia
- MSC Mission Office
- Nusa Tenggara Association Inc.

- Oaktree Foundation
- Openaid 1000 Villages
- Opportunity International Australia
- Oro Community Development Project Inc.
- Oxfam Australia
- Palmera Projects
- Partners in Aid
- Partners Relief and Development Australia
- People with Disability Australia
- PLAN International Australia
- Project Vietnam
- Quaker Service Australia
- RedR Australia
- Reledev Australia
- RESULTS International (Australia)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
- Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children
- Salesian Missions
- Salvation Army (NSW Property Trust)
- Save the Children Australia
- Service Fellowship International Inc.
- Scarlet Alliance: Australian Sex Workers Association
- School for Life Foundation\*
- SeeBeyondBorders
- Sight For All
- SIMaid
- So They Can
- Sport Matters
- Surf Aid International
- Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation Australia\*
- TEAR Australia
- Transform Aid International
- Transparency International Australia
- UNICEF Australia
- Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA
- UnitingWorld
- University of Cape Town Australian Trust
- Volunteers in Community Engagement (VOICE)
- WaterAid Australia
- Women for Women in Africa
- World Education Australia
- World Vision Australia
- WWF-Australia

### **Affiliate Members:**

- Australian National University – School of Archaeology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Social Sciences
- Deakin University – Alfred Deakin Research Institute
- La Trobe University – Institute of Human Security and Social Change
- Murdoch University – School of Management and Governance
- Refugee Council of Australia
- RMIT – Global Cities Research Institute
- University of Melbourne – School of Social and Political Sciences
- University of Queensland – Institute for Social Science Research
- University of Sydney – Office of Global Engagement\*\*
- University of the Sunshine Coast – International Projects Group
- University of Technology, Sydney – Institute for Sustainable Futures\*\*
- Vision 2020
- University of Western Australia – School of Social Sciences\*\*

\* Denotes Interim Full Member

\*\* Denotes Interim Affiliate Member