

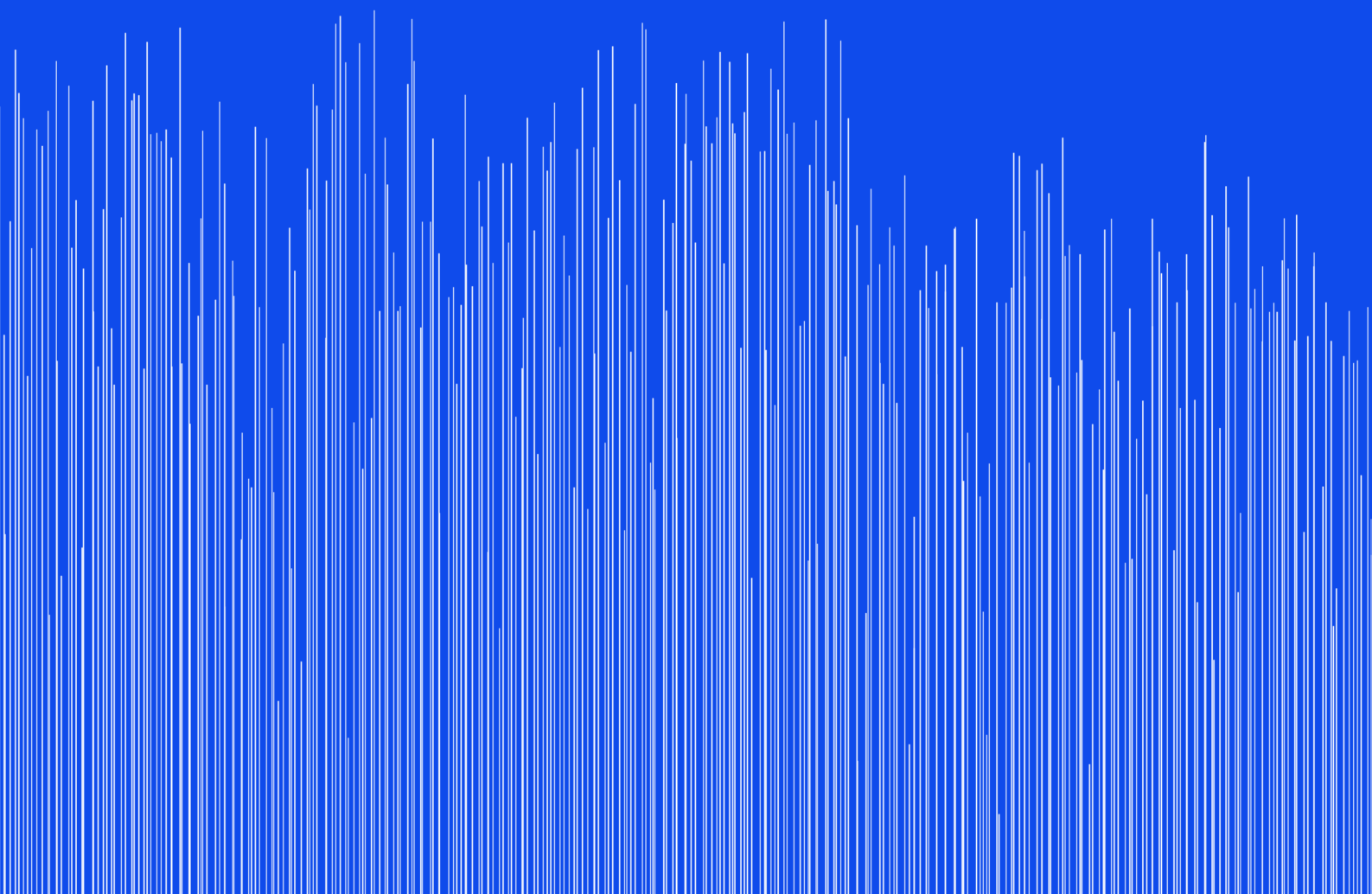
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# Institute for Sustainable Futures

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the  
Sustainable Development Goals

March 2018



## International Development Research

### Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS)

#### **Summary of the submission:**

- Understanding and awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community is currently low. There is a need for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to provide leadership to increase communication and motivate action to contribute to transformational change and the sustainable development goals in Asia and the Pacific region. DFAT could partner with and leverage the experience of aid and development practitioners and academics to achieve this change.
- Australia is well-positioned to make an increased contribution to the SDGs in our region, which will have associated benefits both for the region and Australia. The Australian Government should reinstate – and seek bipartisan support for – the goal of the Australian aid budget reaching 0.5% of GNI by a set date, at least before 2025.
- DFAT's ODA should be informed by a holistic perspective on SDGs, recognising synergies and trade-off as part of a transformational development agenda. With that in mind, there should be strengthened focus on key SDGs that have insufficient budget allocation and focus. For example, there have been reductions in the aid program concerning basic services (Goal 3 – health, Goal 4 - education, and Goal 6 - water and sanitation) and there is currently no strategic focus on Goals 11 (sustainable cities and communities) nor Goal 16 (peace justice and strong institutions). There is a need to strengthen interlinkages between different SDGs, and for the ODA to be better underpinned by available research and evidence to prioritise investments and enable progress against the goals.
- DFAT staff and other stakeholders within the development sector need to take action, to be equipped to manage and implement complex transformational development in order to contribute to the sustainable development agenda.

#### **About ISF-UTS:**

ISF-UTS is a university-based research institute that creates change towards sustainable futures through independent project-based research for Australian and international clients.

The Institute is recognised nationally and internationally for its research leadership in aid effectiveness and international development to address the global challenges of



sustainable and equitable development. Through research, innovation and partnership we work with government, donors, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to facilitate change. Our services include research and analysis; process design and facilitation; policy and technical advice; monitoring and evaluation; training and organisational development.

We contribute to development practice, policy and theory across five key areas in Asia and the Pacific:

- Development effectiveness
- Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
- Climate change adaptation and resilience
- Urban planning and city development
- Energy policy and planning

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) signed the University Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on 2 September 2016 demonstrating its support for the SDGs.

**Response to selected terms of reference:**

This submission responds to key aspects of the Inquiry Terms of Reference.

**a. the understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community;**

ISF-UTS considers that there is low Australian community awareness about the SDGs and the contribution that is being made, and could be made, through our ODA program.

Two forums were held in Sydney in June 2016 and November 2017 highlighted the need for stronger action towards transformation development and the need to engage communities in a response to sustainable development. These [events](#) were co-hosted by the Research for Development Impact Network (RDI Network) and ISF-UTS and attended by 120 representatives from Sydney's international development not-for-profit and academic communities. Similarly, at the recent [SDG Summit](#) in March 2018 in which ISF-UTS participated, a common theme to the discussion was the lack of appreciation of the SDGs by the wider Australian community.

**Recommendation:** DFAT should champion SDGs within its ODA program, recognising the significant contribution that ODA offers in the region to support peace, prosperity and increased equality. DFAT should partner with and leverage the experience of development sector practitioners and academics to communicate the importance of ODA to the wider Australian community, with reference to the



complexities, challenges and opportunities of regional sustainable development and poverty reduction.

**e. what SDG are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program;**

The ODA program addresses many of the SDGs. However, reductions in the aid budget jeopardise and limit potential gains, the aid policy framework is not always explicit in making links to SDGs, and there is not currently balanced attention across goals most in need of attention. Finally, there is insufficient effort to address the interlinkages between the goals in a systematic way, which limits the potential for the transformative aims put forward in Agenda 2030.

The ODA program addresses many of the SDGs. Overall aid volume has been greatly reduced—by around one-quarter in real terms from 2013-14 to 2016-17. These reductions significantly impact on the contribution that Australia is able to make to the region.

The ODA policy framework and programming does not yet explicitly systematically address interlinkages between the SDGs. This is significant, since there is opportunity to either build synergies in the way that different goals are addressed, or, to inadvertently undermine achievement of one goal by focusing on another. For instance, pursuing certain forms of economic development (e.g. infrastructure development under Goal 8 and 9) without due consideration of environmental implications, and without addressing gender and social inclusion aspects, maximum benefit will not be realised, and there may be potential to do harm. Without greater attention to synergies and trade-offs, it is not possible to maximise benefits and contribute to the transformational aims of the 2030 Agenda.

ISF-UTS's work demonstrates how synergies and trade-offs can be addressed conceptually and in practice. ISF-UTS has mapped its research and consultancy activities to 16 out of the 17 SDG goals, demonstrating commitment to, and support of Australia's efforts to contribute to achieving the targets within the SDG framework. Importantly our work cuts across and links multiple thematic areas relevant under the SDGs. Examples of our work that explicitly recognise the interlinkages of sustainable development and look to build synergies and minimise trade-offs are as follows.

**Building synergies between achieving access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (Goal 6) and achieving Gender Equality (Goal5)**

ISF-UTS is an international leader in WASH research and practice for over 15 years, and in that work explicitly aims to maximise benefits of WASH investments across multiple SDGs, particularly SDG 5- gender equality.



In 2016, ISF-UTS with WaterAid Australia undertook research and authored a [Framing Paper](#) identifying the critical connections between empowering women and girls and driving gender equality (SDG 5) and ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and water resources management (SDG 6). This [Framing Paper](#) has been referred to in the recently launched High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) Action Agenda (March 2018), and has contributed to Australia's contribution to the United Nations supported HLPW.

Women, girls and gender-discriminated peoples still endure the burden of inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in healthcare centers, in schools, in public spaces and in their own homes. Additionally, women are not equally represented in water resources management institutions, ministries, and local level organisations that control water resources. And yet, the economic benefits of providing safely managed and accessible WASH services to all those who currently do not have them would be three to six times greater than the costs (Hutton, 2015). Universal access to safely managed WASH and sustainable management of water resources will only be achieved if the rights of women and marginalized peoples are fulfilled. ISF-UTS has conducted a wide range of research projects which have contributed to the global evidence base, demonstrating the need for Goals 5 and 6 to be Interlinked and Implemented with reference to each other. Another high profile piece of research, ISF-UTS researched and authored in 2017, is the [Global Water Partnership Action Piece](#) on gender equality and water resources management. The HLPW have endorsed the four principles defined in this research output and called on all actors to adopt these principles in their water resources management initiatives.

### **Building synergies between achieving access climate change action (Goal 13) and achieving Gender Equality (Goal5)**

ISF-UTS is currently working with Plan International Australia to develop a framework for gender transformative climate change programming. The purpose of this research is to define what gender transformative climate action looks like, in order to inform future program design of Plan's climate resilience projects that aim to be gender transformative, in the Pacific and elsewhere.

ISF-UTS was research partner to the DFAT funded Plan International Australia and Save the Children's project 'Child-Centred Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation' project in the Philippines. In our role we developed a [framework](#) of local-level climate change adaptation indicators based on the perspective of local children and communities.

**Recommendation:** The ODA policy framework should be adjusted to more explicitly demonstrate links to the SDGs and should prioritise investments that offer interlinkages and synergies between multiple SDGs, as this will ensure potential to create transformative change that links economic prosperity with environmental concerns and social equity.



**f. which of the SDG is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDG;**

ISF-UTS considers that the 2030 Agenda is not about choosing one SDG over another, the intent of the SDGs is to recognise the value of the interlinkages between different goals as already described above. For example, our research highlights the need to consider gender in WASH programming and policy.

In line with principles of the ODA Program, the Australian government needs to recognise and work in line with national country government agendas and also local civil society organisations, rather than imposing Australian priorities in development assistance. Conversation, collaboration mutual understanding and shared objectives should inform focus of ODA in each unique country context.

In addition, greater use of available research and evidence to underpin aid investment plans and development policy more generally, as championed by [RDI Network](#) in which ISF-UTS plays a leading role, would lead to better informed decisions concerning relative focus on different SDGs within the aid program.

That said, there are key areas in the aid program that currently do not receive sufficient attention and budget allocation. This is true for health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4) and water and sanitation (Goal 6) which represent basic foundational needs for prosperous, peaceful societies, and yet have seen reduced budget allocations. In addition, key SDGs are not appropriately addressed or represented in the aid policy framework and accompanying institutional organisational structures within DFAT. As a result, attention to urban development (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13) and peace and justice (Goal 16) is insufficient. Given rapid urbanisation in our region, inevitable impacts of climate change and the importance of addressing security threats through promoting stability, these represent major gaps.

There is also value for Australia's ODA program to leverage and build from the existing experience and expertise that Australia has built through previous development initiatives. Future efforts need to be inclusive of multiple actors and sectors including academic researchers and development organisations such as Australian based NGOs who have strong links and relationships with the civil society sector and communities in our region. The continued work under the CS WASH Fund is an example of how future programming should build on practice and evidence, grounded in continual research and learning on effective policy and programming agendas.

Rather than taking a single SDG perspective, Australia's ODA Program should recognise the complex nature of development and prioritise design, implementation and measurement of interlinkages and trade-offs relevant to sustainable



development. An example of this is the recently designed Australia Pacific Climate Change Action Program which seeks to mainstream climate change considerations across other sector-based portfolios, such as health and education. DFAT staff and the international development sector more broadly should be equipped to manage complexity as part of sector practice to implement the SDG agenda. The development sector is already taking steps to build skills for the sustainable development agenda, for example [ACFID's SDG toolkit](#) and academic resources are also available, [such systems thinking resources by UTS](#) to put principles into practice, but more needs to be done to equip DFAT staff in

**Recommendation:**

Australia's ODA program should prioritise programs and policies that recognise and respond to interlinkages related to sustainable development and respond to needs in partner countries established through sound evidence. The aid program should ensure attention and budget allocation to key SDGs: those concerning basic services (health, education and water and sanitation- Goals 4,5 and 6) and those without explicit current focus in the structure aid program (urban development, climate action and peace and justice - Goals 11, 13 and 16).

DFAT staff and other development actors should be equipped to implement complex sustainable development agenda.

DFAT should champion and support the agenda of SDGs in our region with development partners and encourage national governments to prioritise policy and programming that address concerns for environmental protections, social equity, peace and economic prosperity. There is a need for leadership of the Australian government also national governments in our region, in order to ensure responsiveness and accountability to SDGs commitment.

