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Hon Kevin Andrews MP
Chair
Human Rights Sub-Committee
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17 July 2020

Dear Chair

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) commends the decision of the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) to conduct a parliamentary inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

This is an issue on which the Australian Government and its development partners across the region have a proud record, built over decades. But — as the COVID-19 pandemic is showing — far too many Pacific women and girls continue to face threats to their day-to-day safety and dignity, as well as significant political, economic and social barriers to realising their full potential. There is clearly much more work to be done in collaboration with our Pacific partners.

To assist the Committee’s deliberations, we direct your attention to ACFID’s February 2020 submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Development Policy Review, which remains paused in light of the ongoing COVID-19 response.¹ This submission highlights the importance of gender equality as foundational to fostering safety, prosperity and more democratic states as a core element of Australia’s development cooperation program.

In terms of the Pacific, our submission recommends that DFAT builds on the success of the \$320 million, 10-year *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* (“Pacific Women”) as the program draws to a close in 2022:

Pacific Women has been a significant and valuable investment by Australia towards gender equality in the Pacific region, however just 15% of Pacific Women funds went directly to Pacific NGOs and regional organisations.

¹ Available here: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID%20Main%20Submission.pdf

While this figure should be contextualised in the broader ecosystem of Pacific women's rights organisations (for example, some organisations do not have the capacity or desire to service the high levels of compliance required on DFAT grants), it is critical for Australia to prioritise funding modalities which aim to maximise the funding available for grassroots organisations.

Pacific Women continues to show success in local ownership, flexibility across cultures, playing to Australia's strengths, reaching those furthest behind, creating strong partnerships and links, using evidence-based decision-making, and coordination across government and society.

The Government should ensure that any new investments build on the successes and lessons learned through Pacific Women, as part of a commitment to long-term thinking, building on a program that continues to demonstrate success. In doing so, the government should:

- 1. Increase activity ownership by local NGOs and prioritise funding modalities which aim to maximise the funding available for grassroots organisations;*
- 2. Balance the activity portfolio; and*
- 3. Leverage the potential of the program by communicating the success story of the program, both within Australia and in partner countries.*

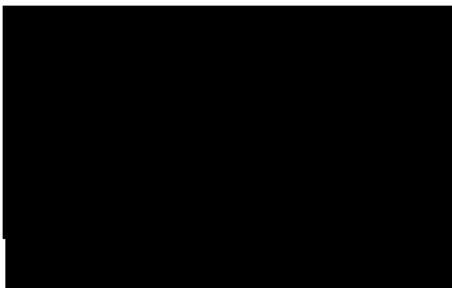
We also draw the Committee's attention to our submission to the current JSCFADT inquiry into Australia's relationships in the Pacific, which recommends (#13) that DFAT:

Raise the performance target of [development] investments effectively addressing gender equality issues in their implementation, to 85 per cent by 2023.²

Given that Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget has already decreased by around 30 per cent since 2013 and remains at historic lows as a proportion of Gross National Income, **ACFID and its members believe it is imperative that any future programs in this critical area do not come at the expense of other development investments or from cuts to existing ODA commitments.**

We would welcome the opportunity to brief the committee on both submissions, as well as the important work of our members and their local partners in advancing the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

Yours sincerely,



² Available here:

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b4cb8d84-4c52-430a-a2fc-471484ecd0c3&subId=685747>