

Chapter 2

Background

Australia's aid framework

2.1 On 18 June 2014, the Foreign Minister launched the government's new foreign aid policy and performance framework.¹ These documents establish the rationale, direction and performance framework which underpin Australia's aid program. The purpose of the aid program is to promote Australia's national interests by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. The program recognizes that economic growth is the most sustainable way to reduce poverty and lift living standards.²

2.2 Australia's aid focuses on two development outcomes: strengthening private sector development and enabling human development. The program centres on the Indo-Pacific region and invests in six priority areas which address regional barriers to growth and key poverty challenges.³ These six priority areas include:

- infrastructure, trade facilitation and international competitiveness;
- agriculture, fisheries and water;
- effective governance;
- education and health;
- building resilience: humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and social protection; and
- gender equality and empowering women and girls.

2.3 In 2013–14, total Australian official development assistance (ODA) was an estimated \$5 billion. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) was responsible for managing \$4.3 billion of that total with the balance delivered by other government agencies.⁴

Gender equality and international development

2.4 All submissions received by the committee agreed that promoting gender equality is integral to delivering effective ODA.

2.5 Women and girls face many challenges due to gender inequality, including reduced access to services such as education, health care and transport; unequal property rights and reduced access to financial services; and exposure to gender-based

1 *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability and Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid.*

2 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, p. 134.

3 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, p. 134.

4 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, p. 136.

violence and abuse.⁵ Gender inequality also carries a significant financial cost: women's limited access to employment has been estimated to cost governments in the Asia–Pacific region \$US42–47 billion in potential GDP annually, while the poor education of girls is said to be costing the region up to \$US30 billion annually.⁶

2.6 Women and girls disproportionately bear the burden of poverty.⁷ Ninety-nine per cent of deaths related to pregnancy or childbirth are preventable, but the needs of women remain a low priority in many countries.⁸ Disability is also more prevalent among women: 19.2 per cent of women aged 18 years or over live with a disability compared to 12 per cent of men worldwide.⁹ The Fred Hollows Foundation claimed that over 60 per cent of people living with avoidable blindness and severe vision impairment are women.¹⁰

2.7 Women also often bear the brunt of humanitarian disasters. The UN estimates that women and children account for more than 75 per cent of refugees and displaced people.¹¹ A study commissioned by Plan International in Africa estimated that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a natural disaster.¹²

2.8 The significance of the issue is reflected in the international aid architecture. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 is to 'Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women'.¹³ Once the MDGs expire, gender equality will likely be included in the post-2015 development framework known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The draft of SDG Goal 5 currently reads 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.¹⁴

2.9 The importance of promoting gender equality is certainly clear in the Asia–Pacific region, where Australia's aid investments are focused. Of the 42 countries with data in the Asia–Pacific region, only seven will meet the target of reducing maternal deaths by three-quarters.¹⁵ The Pacific has the highest rates of violence against women of any region in the world: in Kiribati, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, between 60–70 per cent of women report experiencing some form of domestic violence.¹⁶

5 Australian Council for International Development, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

6 International Women's Development Agency, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

7 CARE Australia, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

8 Marie Stopes International Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

9 CBM Australia, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

10 The Fred Hollows Foundation, *Submission 10*, p. 1.

11 Australian Council for International Development, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

12 Plan International Australia, *Submission 2*, p. 3.

13 United Nations, 'Millennium Development Goals', <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/>

14 United Nations, 'Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals', <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

15 Family Planning NSW, *Submission 7*, p. 3.

16 World Bank, 'Raising awareness of women in the Pacific', <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/11/25/raising-awareness-of-violence-against-women-in-the-pacific>

Gender equality improves other development goals

2.10 Gender equality is not only an important development goal in its own right, but it is also essential to achieving other development goals. Investing in women has been shown to improve other development outcomes, as women have been found to be more likely to invest in families and communities than men, leading to improvements in other development indicators (for example, improved child health and education).¹⁷

2.11 Ensuring women are educated and empowered to participate in the economy has clear economic benefits. Countries with high gender equality tend to have lower rates of poverty.¹⁸ Studies have demonstrated that increasing the number of girls benefiting from education has a positive effect on a country's per capita economic growth.¹⁹ Oxfam's submission stated that: 'Over the past 30 years no other indicator has demonstrated a greater impact on development outcomes than gender equality'.²⁰

2.12 CARE Australia's submission agreed:

We prioritise gender not only because too often, women and girls suffer disproportionate levels of poverty, violence and injustice; not only because this inequality and injustice has persisted for far too long; but also because the overwhelming evidence from our 70 years of experience in development work demonstrates that investing in women and girls is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and leaving lasting, sustainable and self-sustaining change.²¹

2.13 Family Planning NSW's submission further explained:

Gender equality is a pre-condition for advancing development and reducing poverty, as empowering women results in wider benefit for their families and communities through improved health and productivity.²²

Mainstreaming gender equality

2.14 Effective consideration of gender is crucial, not only in targeted programs specifically aimed at promoting gender equality, but in all aid programs—a practice known as 'mainstreaming' gender across the aid program. This is because, if gender is not taken into account, development interventions can actually have negative impacts on gender equality.

2.15 CARE Australia explained that it is important to consider, for example, whether an investment in training for women exposes them to any risk of intimate partner violence, and if so, to mitigate that. It is also important to consider, for example, how a natural disaster or crisis might prevent men from being the family

17 Marie Stopes International Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

18 International Women's Development Agency, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

19 Plan International Australia, *Submission 2*, p. 2.

20 Oxfam Australia, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

21 CARE Australia, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

22 Family Planning NSW, *Submission 7*, p. 3.

breadwinners, as might be expected of them by society or tradition, and how that might lead to depression, anxiety or violence.²³

2.16 Plan International agreed that:

...well intentioned programs designed to help women and girls can inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes which limit women's and girls' ability to participate within society. In Plan's experience, in order to be effective, even programs whose primary aims are unrelated to the promotion of gender equality (ie climate change adaptation, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) or youth economic empower projects etc) recognise the gender implications of their activities and build in a gender perspective from the beginning.²⁴

2.17 The IWDA explained the importance of mainstreaming gender:

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.²⁵

2.18 Marie Stopes International supported the approach of mainstreaming gender across all development initiatives regardless of objective, which 'would see much better outcomes for women and girls across the developing world.'²⁶

2.19 Gender is also being mainstreamed across the non-government aid sector. World Vision's submission stated:

We recognise that transformative changes to gender norms cannot occur through siloed approaches alone, and that efforts to achieve gender equality must be embedded in our full range of programming: from launching a 'gender and water' handbook through a WASH program in Sri Lanka to supporting the delivery of gender and Islam training for imams in Afghanistan in order to foster more inclusive political participation.²⁷

2.20 In its submission, DFAT agreed that, '...it is important to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment are effectively integrated into programming and clearly reported.'²⁸

The Australian government's approach

2.21 DFAT's submission indicated it has a number of practices in place to promote gender equality, including the appointment of an Ambassador for Women and Girls, a commitment to invest in programs targeted at promoting gender equality, establishment of a new Gender Equality Fund, and ensuring Australia's aid program and international diplomatic efforts are aligned.

23 CARE Australia, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

24 Plan International Australia, *Submission 2*, p. 4.

25 International Women's Development Agency, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

26 Marie Stopes International Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 3.

27 World Vision Australia, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

28 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

2.22 Clause 4 of the bill creates a duty for Commonwealth aid officials to have regard to gender considerations when providing ODA including humanitarian assistance. DFAT explained that its current target requires at least 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, to effectively address gender issues in their implementation. This essentially requires that gender be mainstreamed across DFAT's development initiatives.

2.23 In order to achieve this 80 per cent target, DFAT employs the following processes:

- *Aid Investment Plans (AIPs)*: AIPs set out the direction for a country or regional program and link objectives, aid programming and results. All country and regional programs will have AIPs in place by September 2015. AIPs must include consideration of the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- *Investment Design*: For all aid investments over \$3 million, staff must prepare an Investment Design document. As part of this process, staff must consider how the investment addresses gender equality and women's empowerment. All Investment Designs must meet DFAT's quality requirements before proceeding to implementation.
- *Aid Quality Checks (AQCs)*: An AQC is a report prepared annually for all investments over \$3 million which assesses the performance of aid investments over the preceding twelve months. One of the eight criteria on which every investment is judged is gender equality. Data from AQCs inform whether DFAT is meeting the 80 per cent gender target.
- *Aid Program Performance Reports (APPRs)*: APPRs are annual public reports that assess the performance of the aid program at the country or regional level. Each APPR includes comments on the program's progress toward promoting gender equality.²⁹

2.24 These processes ensure gender equality is incorporated into planning at both the country/regional level (through AIPs) and at the level of individual investments (through Investment Designs); and is assessed after implementation both at the country/regional level (through APPRs) and at the level of individual investments (through AQCs).

Promoting gender equality through humanitarian assistance

2.25 DFAT uses different processes for ensuring gender is considered in the provision of humanitarian assistance:

When a crisis hits, response decisions must be made quickly to enable our humanitarian assistance to reach those in need as quickly as possible, ensuring the most lives are saved... Rather than reassess the ability of our partners to deliver on gender equality outcomes at the onset of a crisis, we have standing arrangements with partners who we know will deliver well

29 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 5*, pp 4–5.

on gender equality outcomes that ensure we can get gender-sensitive relief to those in need quickly and effectively.³⁰

- 2.26 DFAT ensures gender is mainstreamed in humanitarian assistance by:
- including commitments to gender equality and protection through policy in its *Humanitarian Response Policy and Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework*;
 - assessing the ability of partners and investments to achieve gender equality outcomes and protection in humanitarian action through performance assessments; and
 - for humanitarian investments over \$3 million, a Humanitarian Response Aid Quality Check (HAQC) is conducted to assess the performance of humanitarian response investments. HAQCs include an assessment of the investment's ability to make a difference to gender equality and empowering women and girls. HAQCs also include a criterion on protection, which assesses the investment's performance in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.³¹

Reporting on promoting gender equality

2.27 While DFAT's submission indicated that a number of different types of reports are regularly produced which address the use of international aid to promote gender equality, the most relevant to this inquiry are DFAT's *Annual Report*, the *Performance of Australian Aid* report (PAA) and *Aid Program Performance Reports*.

2.28 The DFAT *Annual Report*, which is tabled in parliament at the end of every financial year, provides a high-level overview of the work of the department in a given financial year, including delivery of Australia's aid program. In the 2013–14 *Annual Report* the use of international aid to promote gender equality was addressed in the following places:

- (a) 'Gender equality and empowering women and girls' is a subheading under 'Aid overview and outlook'. The section takes up less than half a page. Aside from the claim that 'an estimated \$2.2 billion of the department's total aid investments contributed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment' the information under this section is generalised and lists examples of work being undertaken rather than creating a comprehensive picture of the department's assistance;³²
- (b) 'Protection in humanitarian action – responding to gender-based violence' (a sub-heading in the section of the report entitled 'ODA emergency, humanitarian and refugee program') provides an overview of the department's work on Sexual and gender-based violence;³³

30 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 5*, p. 6.

31 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 5*, p. 7.

32 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, p. 138.

33 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, p. 179.

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- (c) 'Gender equality' (a sub-section under 'Multilateral policy, legal and environment') outlines the department's work promoting gender equality. This section takes up around a page and, as with the section mentioned under (a), the information is generalised and lists specific examples of work rather than creating a comprehensive picture. At the end of this section is a text box featuring a profile of the work of the Ambassador for Women and Girls;³⁴ and
 - (d) references to work on gender equality in the aid program are found throughout the rest of the report.

2.29 The PAA report is produced annually by DFAT and provides an overview of how Australia's aid program has performed over the past year. The PAA 2013–14 report discusses the promotion of gender equality in the following places:

- (a) a section entitled 'Target 4: Empowering women and girls', which is a little over a page long, assesses the government's performance against the Gender Target;
- (b) a section entitled 'Gender equality and empowering women and girls' is two pages long, and provides additional information than that included in the *Annual Report*. This section includes tracking of the proportion of aid investments with a satisfactory rating for the gender criterion, and a break down as to what proportion of aid investments have gender as a principal objective or significant objective;
- (c) an additional page-long text box on an Office of Development Effectiveness report on support for women's economic empowerment;³⁵ and
- (d) references to work on gender equality in the aid program are found throughout the rest of the report.

2.30 As mentioned previously, APPRs are annual public reports which assess the performance of aid programs at the country or regional level and include comments on progress made toward promoting gender equality.

34 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2013–14*, pp 94–96.

35 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Performance of Australian Aid 2013-14*, pp 59–61.

