

Dissenting Report

Senator Lee Rhiannon for the Australian Greens

Introduction

1.1 The Greens' *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* seeks to incorporate into law requirements that the impact of aid or humanitarian assistance on gender equality should be considered; and that the Minister for Foreign Affairs should report annually on how Australia's aid expenditure promotes gender equality.

1.2 Women and girls are affected by many societal measures that inhibit or actively threaten their physical, emotional, societal or economic wellbeing. This is magnified and compounded for those women and girls in developing countries who disproportionately suffer the burdens of poverty.

1.3 It is well recognised that the removal of gender inequality is a prerequisite for achieving other development aims. It is a given that investment in the social and economic wellbeing and empowerment of a community's women and girls will also see better economic and productivity outcomes for that whole society.

1.4 Conversely, without specific consideration of how the provision of aid affects gender equality and power relations, international aid that only seeks to stimulate economic activity might in fact exacerbate the effects of inequality already embedded within a country's own historical and cultural framework.

1.5 The efficient and effective expenditure of aid funding to alleviate poverty is thus dependent on alleviation of gender inequality and facilitation of women's empowerment. In this, ensuring that gender equality is indeed an embedded consideration in government decisions, monitoring and reporting of overseas development and humanitarian assistance is not only an ethical but also an economic imperative.

1.6 These issues are comprehensively discussed in the submissions to this inquiry and in the majority report. It is not intended to reiterate the report's summary of these important issues, and its acknowledgement of the importance of promoting gender equality within Australia's aid program.

1.7 However, as noted by all 14 NGO submissions to the inquiry and succinctly summarised by Plan International, 'gender equality is so integral to effective development and responding to humanitarian disasters that this should be recognised and enshrined in law'.

1.8 The importance of gender equality is recognised in Millennium Development Goal 3, to 'promote gender equality and empower women', and in the proposed Sustainable Development Goal 5, to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

1.9 These considerations form the basis of the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015*.

1.10 The Greens recognise the need for consideration of outcomes for people suffering disabilities in the delivery of aid as described by CBM Australia, and undertake to address this important issue in its own forum.

1.11 We thank those who made submissions and who appeared as witnesses to this inquiry. We also thank participating Senators and the Committee for their work on this inquiry.

Ensuring ongoing commitment to gender equality

1.12 The Greens agree with the wide recognition of the current Minister for Foreign Affairs' commitment to promotion of gender equality in the government's aid program. As iterated in the Committee report, the importance of effective consideration of gender is 'crucial', not only in targeted programs but in the 'mainstreaming' of gender across all aid programs. The creation of a new gender fund and gender branch to coordinate DFAT's work in this area is a positive step providing it facilitates robust, effective and transparent work to progress gender equality in aid programs.

1.13 The government's requirement that a minimum of 80 per cent of all aid investments address gender equality in their implementation is commended. The Greens add that such a consideration should be applied to all aid program investments, which this bill seeks to do.

1.14 It was recognised that this bill is closely aligned with the stated priorities of the government, however the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the majority Committee report disagreed with the NGO submissions that enshrining in legislation gender equality priorities and reporting thereof is necessary.

1.15 The Australian Greens dissent from this view, and remind the Committee that all 14 NGO submissions were unequivocal that without any legislative basis, the consideration of gender equality in the delivery of aid programs by any future minister or government is not assured.

1.16 This bill would assure ongoing commitment to an effective and meaningful consideration of gender equality across all aid programs, and by all future ministers and governments. It promises to not only enshrine this commitment in law, but make a symbolic statement of the Australian government's commitment to gender equality.

Reporting

1.17 Submissions acknowledged that DFAT already collects data on gender, however it is clear that the level of transparency and publically available information needs to be improved.

1.18 A number of shortfalls were commonly identified in the current reporting regime.

1.19 DFAT reports provide brief and non-explicit reporting on the progress of advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls through Australia's aid expenditure. The lack of specifics to be reported against and lack of robust measurement reporting detail removes mechanisms to ensure gender equality outcomes across the aid program are meaningfully considered and improved. Indeed

current reporting measurements on gender resulting in 'satisfactory' scores for projects are not at all focused on addressing gender equality.

1.20 Aggregated data does not provide the detail required to track gender equality outcomes and signpost where greater effort or adjustment is needed or learnings applied. Aggregation of data at a household level also disguises issues of gender inequality within the household and where a woman's wellbeing may be suffering despite improved household level measures such as rising income.

1.21 With this in mind, the current omission of smaller projects under \$3 million in expenditure from consideration of gender equality and women's empowerment is a gap that requires addressing.

1.22 The collection and reporting of data only when gender equality and women's empowerment is a specific line item renders it impossible to determine expenditure and outcomes on gender equality initiatives.

Recommendations

1.23 The Greens recognise that Australia lacks an overall legislative basis for its expenditure and delivery of aid and development programs, and agree with submissions that such overarching legislation is preferable. We also agree that other development goals should also be covered by legislation.

1.24 However this is beyond the remit of this particular bill.

1.25 A number of improvements to the bill were identified and recommendations made to this end. As noted by Childfund, a key challenge of the Bill is to ensure that not only program design, but program delivery and implementation include a gender focus, and that proper monitoring and evaluation can be established.

1.26 The Greens thank submitters for this feedback and incorporate suggested improvements in the following recommendations:

- (a) That the bill be supported and passed with amendments that ensure the following:

Definitions

- (b) That gender equality be defined with greater clarity.
- (c) That the definition of Official Development Assistance refer to the OECD's Development Assistance Committee's definition for ODA that includes the DAC List of ODA recipient countries.
- (d) That the threshold of the bill's application be clarified to ensure that it applies to 'decisions in regards to the provision of aid assistance' rather than 'relating to the provision of assistance'.

Consultation

- (e) That in the implementation of the bill, civil society is consulted to ensure that gender considerations, including those of all children, are incorporated into the design and implementation of the aid program.¹
- (f) Consultation with organisations experienced with addressing gender equality, and in the delivery of aid and development programs to ensure gender equality outcomes are appropriately measured in the aid program.

Decision-makers & application

- (g) That the duty on decision-makers 'to have regard to' gender equality is clarified to ensure that consideration should be made with the intent of actively making decisions that promote or support gender equality.²
- (h) That a Commonwealth aid official who proposes to make a decision relating to the provision of humanitarian assistance must, in making the decision, recognise gender differences, inequalities and capacities of those affected by the disaster or emergency and respond to them.³
- (i) That the bill applies to all government departments and agencies involved in the delivery of aid programs, and includes those programs focused on infrastructure, trade and private sector-led growth initiatives.⁴
- (j) That the bill also similarly applies to non-government bodies including private enterprise, in the delivery of aid programs.

Measurements and reporting

- (k) That rigorous baseline and endline measurements are developed so that changes in gender equity resulting from any aid program can be transparently reported, including decisions that have been assessed as having a neutral or negative effect on gender equality.
- (l) That reporting on progress data is disaggregated to ensure that inequalities and inequities are not masked, particularly where household-level data is concerned, and that monitoring and evaluation of gender outcomes is designed to track actual changes in women's lives.
- (m) That disaggregation of data also includes identifiable line items such as family planning, addressing of disabilities and other outcomes as advised by the consultation phase of implementing this bill.
- (n) That measurement is applied consistently to all projects, regardless of organisational partners' own mechanisms and capacity.⁵

1 World Vision Australia, *Submission 6*.

2 The Fred Hollows Foundation, *Submission 10*.

3 Oxfam Australia, *Submission 11*.

4 Family Planning NSW, *Submission 7*.

- (o) That reporting measures include evidence that gender has been considered when making ODA planning or budgeting decisions.
- (p) That annual reporting includes how government has advanced Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Responsibility

- (q) That responsibility for ensuring the aims of the bill lie with the Minister.

Senator Lee Rhiannon

