

# Submission on the new International Development Policy

AUSTRALIAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY COALITION  
NOVEMBER 2022

## Introduction

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition (AFFPC) welcomes the Government's decision to develop a new policy framework for Australia's international development and humanitarian assistance program.

The AFFPC is a network of more than 150 individuals and organisations committed to advancing intersectional feminist foreign policy in Australia.<sup>i</sup> It is convened by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and includes supporters of feminist foreign policy working across diplomacy, defence, peacebuilding, women's rights, international development and other sectors.

This submission makes the case that Australia should adopt a feminist approach to all areas of foreign policy, including international development, adopting key lessons from the growing trend of countries embracing feminist foreign policy.

It outlines a transformative vision for an Australian international development policy informed by intersectional feminist analysis and grounded in First Nations values and worldviews. It then makes practical recommendations for how this vision can be translated into reality.

***"[M]ore needs to be done through our aid program to overcome the deep structural impediments to equality across all societies."***

***– Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2018<sup>i</sup>***

## A transformative approach to international development policy

*Key questions addressed:*

- *What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?*
- *How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?*

## What is feminist foreign policy?

Australia's existing international development and foreign policy frameworks acknowledge the importance of integrating a focus on gender equality across all areas of international engagement. This is borne out by the evidence: gender equality is more significant than wealth, democratic or religious status in predicting peaceful and flourishing societies.<sup>iii</sup>

While gender equality is central to a feminist approach, a focus on gender equality alone is not enough. A feminist approach understands that what underpins gender inequality is unequal power relationships based on gender, and extends this analysis to the systems of power which underpin inequality and injustice at a global scale – such as patriarchy, colonialism, and exploitative capitalism.<sup>iv</sup>

Feminist approaches to foreign policy and international development provide a framework for grappling with these systems of power – from those that govern interpersonal relations, like gender, to those that govern state interactions.

Understanding the way that these systems impact on international development – such as the way that global power structures based in historical and ongoing colonialism and extractive capitalism ensure that some countries are economically poor and others are rich<sup>v</sup> – is critical for Australia’s development efforts to foster equitable partnerships to achieve meaningful and lasting impact.

In practice, this involves constantly asking the question: what will support more equitable power relations in the community in which we are working? What will support more equitable power relations at a national, or even a global scale?

This may mean working with a partner government to introduce a more progressive taxation system, or supporting the introduction or reform of an anti-corruption commission as part of a broader focus on governance. It could involve bringing a power analysis to climate justice initiatives, to understand the ways in which extractivism mirrors other dominance-based power relationships, and through a climate justice lens rebalance this relationship to empower local communities.<sup>vi</sup>

For transformative impact such initiatives must, integrate a focus on women’s rights and gender equality, but they should not stop there – their aim must be to equalise systems of power and address marginalisation in all its forms.

### **Feminist foreign policy: a growing trend**

A growing cohort of diverse countries have embraced feminist foreign policy approaches, including France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, Libya, Chile, Germany, the Netherlands, Liberia, and Colombia.<sup>vii</sup>

While each country has defined its approach to feminist foreign policy in contextually relevant ways, there are some common core principles across these commitments that include:

- a focus on human rights and intersectionality;
- new and additional resources for gender equality work, especially funding for feminist movements; and
- a focus on strengthening intersectional representation and participation within foreign policy and international development systems.<sup>viii</sup>

Civil society groups have played a critical role in creating the enabling environment for these declarations, and in shaping the global understanding of feminist foreign policy to ensure it is ambitious, transparent and accountable.<sup>ix</sup>

Increasingly, these countries are embarking on public consultation processes to inform the development of feminist foreign and development policies, to incorporate lessons from other countries’ approaches and demonstrate accountability to feminist civil society. This is leading to increasingly intersectional and transformative approaches. For example, the recent Berlin International Conference on Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy – initiated by the Government of Germany and now establishing itself as an annual commitment with the

Netherlands’ Government set to host in 2023 – emphasised that feminist foreign policies “aim to address the structural causes of inequalities, which lead to the exclusion of women and other social groups.”<sup>x</sup>

### Why the trend matters – risks and opportunities

As more countries adopt feminist foreign policies, risks and opportunities arise for Australia. The growing number of countries committing to a feminist approach directly challenges Australia’s reputation as a leader in integrating gender equality into international development practice. Increasingly, countries which have made commitments to FFP are working together – sharing lessons and best practice, and aligning at regional and international forums to ‘push back against the pushback’ on gender equality. Without an explicitly feminist approach, Australia will not be able to claim a place amongst the most progressive international development actors on gender equality.

The growing trend also opens up significant opportunities for Australia to learn from other international development actors who take a power-redistributing approach to development, and to share lessons from Australia’s efforts in this space. Pacific Women Lead (and its predecessor, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development) includes many strong examples of best practice gender equality programming. For example evidence generated through programming in Papua New Guinea found that “gender transformative change is happening” through shifts in attitudes, beliefs and practices at the individual and community level, through to changes in laws, policies and norms at the national level.<sup>xi</sup>

Australia is uniquely placed to link global initiatives with the Indo-Pacific region. Most countries with feminist foreign policies do not have a significant international development presence in our region, particularly when it comes to the Pacific. As the leading international development partner in this region, Australia can facilitate learning, while also encouraging other donors to increase their presence in the Indo-Pacific.

### Link between Feminist & First Nations Foreign Policy

In 2022, the Australian Government committed to a First Nations foreign policy approach embedding Indigenous perspectives, experiences and interests into Australia’s foreign policy. The AFFPC strongly welcomes this commitment, which aligns with our call to integrate Indigenous worldviews and approaches across all areas of foreign policy. James Blackwell and Julie Ballangarry outline the interconnections between First Nations and feminist approaches in Issue 1 of the AFFPC Issues Paper Series:

“To fully realise the potential of a feminist foreign policy approach, First Nations peoples and approaches must be fully integrated. The diversity and value First Nations can bring to Australian foreign policy is extremely large and represents an untapped area for Australian foreign policymakers ... Drawing the connections between First Nations and feminist approaches to foreign policy can only

strengthen this agenda.” – James Blackwell and Julie Ballangarry<sup>xii</sup>

Understanding feminist foreign policy as a framework for transforming systems of power further emphasises these interconnections, for example, the link between the ongoing impacts of colonialism in Australia with the impact of colonialism on development outcomes for countries in our region.

It is also critical to ensure a truly intersectional approach that accounts not only for gender, but for race, coloniality, patriarchy and other systems of power. This enables us to benefit from the varied insights that diverse perspective bring to the table, ensuring we have a fuller understanding of the challenges and access to a wider range of solutions.<sup>xiii</sup>

This international development policy review is an opportunity to situate and embed First Nations culture and worldviews as a national strength upon which to build our approach.

#### Recommendation:

1. Adopt a feminist approach to all areas of foreign policy, including international development, which is informed by intersectional feminist analysis and grounded in First Nations values and worldviews, and draws on key lessons from other countries embracing feminist foreign policy

## Translating vision to reality

#### Key questions addressed:

- *What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?*
- *How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?*
- *What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?*
- *How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?*
- *How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?*

In this first part of this submission, we have laid out a bold vision of an Australian international development policy grounded in First Nations values and world views and integrating lessons of a feminist foreign policy approach. In this section, we make practical recommendations on the **capabilities, partnerships, resources and accountability systems** needed to translate this vision into reality.

#### Capability: prioritising intersectional feminist power analysis skills

DFAT has lost significant development expertise over the past decade, beginning with the AusAID integration but exacerbated by years of staff losses, outsourcing of key functions to managing contractors, and devaluing of development expertise.<sup>xiv</sup>

Power-based intersectional analysis is a critical capability that must be valued, resourced and rewarded if Australia is to embed a feminist approach to international development assistance. This requires political will from the highest levels to establish a culture across DFAT, which communicates that intersectional power analysis is part of everyone's job. It also requires investment in dedicated technical expertise. Increasingly, gender equality expertise is being grouped with disability and other forms of social inclusion via GEDSI (gender equality, disability and social inclusion) advisory roles. For these roles to be effective in their provision of intersectional analysis and advice, they must be sufficiently resourced across all areas of the Department, including at Post.<sup>xv</sup> They must also go beyond a focus on mere inclusion to understanding and ultimately seeking to transform the underlying structures of power, which perpetuate inequality and marginalisation.<sup>xvi</sup> Ensuring country and thematic strategies are informed by an intersectional power analysis as a critical input, with an identification of how development interventions will shift power relations would dramatically alter DFAT's transformative capability and enable better assessment of effectiveness.

DFAT also needs to invest in feminist intersectional-analysis in the context of new and emerging areas, such as access to technology. A 'digital gender divide' is exacerbating gender inequality, and women's access to this essential infrastructure for participation in modern life must be a critical development priority.<sup>xvii</sup> Digital development cooperation can also be a useful approach to managing disruptive technologies and major developments (such as climate disasters, conflict and major trade initiatives) that can affect the impact of development assistance outcomes.<sup>xviii</sup> This has been made even more urgent by the pandemic and the greater reliance on digital platforms worldwide for education, business and access to services.

However, there are gendered implications that DFAT must be equipped to understand and respond to. Women and other marginalised groups have been especially affected by online sexual and gender based violence.<sup>xix</sup> Given Australia's role in supporting internet infrastructure in the region, and our experience with domestic efforts to understand and address the gendered nature of online hate, this is a critical area for the aid program to expand its capabilities.

#### Recommendations:

2. Require all DFAT staff to upskill in intersectional power analysis, going beyond simple inclusion to

- include an understanding of the way that systems of power perpetuate inequality and marginalisation.
3. Expand funding for technical expertise in gender, disability and social inclusion across all areas of DFAT and Posts to support power-based intersectional analysis and implementation.
  4. Ensure all country and thematic strategies are underpinned by intersectional power analysis and monitoring and evaluation plans
  5. Ensure feminist capabilities with expertise in digital technologies and other emerging priorities

#### Partnership: decolonising development practice to create equal and respectful relationships

Too often, the concept of partnership is invoked to cover up power relationships, or to put a palatable spin on processes shaped by Western values and worldviews.<sup>xx</sup> A feminist approach to partnership would be grounded in deeper, more equal and respectful relationships. It would be based on an understanding of historical and current power dynamics between Global South and Global North actors. It would invest in different ways of working which value the strengths, knowledge and approaches of Global South partners – including indigenous knowledge systems, worldviews and approaches, and recognise that development is a political rather than a technical process.<sup>xxi</sup> This requires a rebalancing away from a top down focus on risk and compliance, towards a more nimble and adaptive approach to development.

This is the difference between localisation - which continues to operate the same system with different players - and decolonisation - which focuses on changing the system itself. This is critical to avoid localisation targets becoming a blunt instrument, whereby local actors are required to take on direct funding in order to meet donor objectives, regardless of their preference. Where local actors do want to receive funding directly this should be facilitated, alongside concerted efforts to transform risk and compliance in a way that opens up the potential for more direct funding between DFAT and Global South actors.

There are many examples of good practice to draw upon across DFAT's existing programming, including the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, and the recently launched Amplify. Invest. Reach (A-I-R) South-South feminist collaboration program.<sup>xxii</sup> We can also learn from other donors who are exploring ways to incentivise decolonisation of partnership models. For example, the Government of the Netherlands program *Power of Women* (EUR 73.5m over 5 years) funds feminist movements via consortium arrangements where at least one of the leading partners must be based in the Global South. This requires organisations to demonstrate their commitment to equal and respectful partnership in order to receive funding.<sup>xxiii</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

6. Explore new programming mechanisms which advance an approach to decolonise partnership,

- taking steps to minimise the inherent power dynamics and amplify the strengths of local partners.
7. Rebalance Australia's approach to risk and compliance, recognising that under investment in local actors, who are the most effective development partners, is a critical risk in itself.

#### Resourcing: investing in gender equality and feminist movements

There is a wealth of evidence – both globally and from Australia's own international development program – of what works to make progress on gender equality. Carefully targeted programs, implemented by local actors with lived experience of gender inequality and intersectional marginalisation, have been shown to make tangible impacts on defending and advancing rights. At the same time, there is no silver bullet for gender equality – change takes generations, as it requires deep shifts in the social norms which underpin and uphold inequality. Progress is not linear, and often accompanied by backlash.

Feminist movements including women's rights organisations (WROs) and other constituency-based organisations are firmly rooted in local communities, contexts and experiences, holding the deep contextual knowledge and relationships needed to affect systemic change on gender equality and other forms of marginalisation.<sup>xxiv</sup> This includes understanding the interplay between formal and informal structures, and knowing how power operates and how it can be influenced for change.

The effectiveness of feminist movements has been shown through evaluations of DFAT-funded programs, for example an evaluation of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development found it was "an effective strategy [that] ensures the program is responding to diverse and culturally specific needs of women."<sup>xxv</sup> The DFAT-supported Fiji Women's Fund is recognised by global feminist movements as an example of good donor practice due to DFAT's willingness to test a new funding modality, the inclusion of local feminist movement actors in governance, and the use of different funding tranches to suit different sized organisations.<sup>xxvi</sup>

This is backed up by global evidence that shows that the most transformative outcomes are achieved when women's rights organisations are provided with core, flexible, long term funding – when they are funded *to be*, not merely *to do*.<sup>xxvii</sup> Currently, less than 0.5% of Australia's aid budget goes to women's rights organisations.<sup>xxviii</sup> Raising this to just 5% of aid would make a significant contribution to shifting the dial on gender equality outcomes.

There is an increasing push for non-ODA development finance within Australia's approach. There are examples of donors effectively leveraging ODA to attract non-ODA

and private finance as part of a feminist approach. For example, Canada's Equality Fund, which used an investment of \$300m ODA to leverage \$1bn of private sector investment in gender equality programming and feminist movements.<sup>xxxix</sup> It is critical that non-ODA development finance is subject to the same questions and analysis as ODA – under a feminist approach, this means asking how non-ODA finance is working to perpetuate or transform global power structures.

For example, debt based finance (already provided by Australia for infrastructure projects under the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific) can contribute to increased financial pressure on national governments. 85% of the world's population is expected to be living under austerity measures by 2023 due to the ongoing fallout of the pandemic and compounding crises.<sup>xxx</sup> Austerity measures – which typically target social protection, public services and public sector wages, subsidies and health expenditure – exacerbate existing inequalities, including those based on gender.<sup>xxxi</sup> Any decisions by Australia to use non-ODA investments in international development must include a comprehensive, intersectional analysis of risks and benefits.

DFAT should also harness the power of procurement, and implement strategies across all goods/services to create gender equality across their supply chains (similar to the current Supply Nation mechanism and Indigenous Procurement Policy).<sup>xxxii</sup> Women-owned business (WOB) receive less than one percent of total global procurement.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This gap is an opportunity for Australia to duplicate the gendered impact of development funding – both benefiting WOBs through procurement opportunities, whilst also allowing WOBs to provide goods/services needed for gender responsive aid and assistance.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As a baseline, DFAT should collect gender data on businesses and organisations applying for tenders, responding to requests for quotes, or grants, as well as ensuring that at least one WOB is included in every procurement/request for quote. Leading practice would be ensuring that procurement is gender equal across business ownership, including ongoing assessment and analysis of the value of procurement opportunities (i.e. including whether there are any gender differences in percentage and value of procurement to WOBs). Attention should also be paid to gender diversity beyond the binary, including supporting non-binary, transgender and gender diverse enterprises.

#### **Recommendations:**

8. Commit at least 5% of ODA to be delivered through women's rights organisations (CRS Sector Code 15170), prioritising core, flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms.
9. Require feminist analysis of all development finance mechanisms including non-ODA finance to

understand the potential flow on impacts on those experiencing inequality and marginalisation.

10. Collect and analyse data on gender breakdown of procurement tendering/application processes and successful/awarded tenders.
11. Commit to ensuring at least 1 woman-owned business is considered in every tender opportunity, and work towards parity in procurement opportunities, including setting progressive/staged gender goals in procurement.

#### Accountability and performance: ensuring an effective and transformative approach

The re-introduction of the target requiring that 80% of aid investments will address gender issues, and the complementary commitment that all programs over \$3m will have a gender equality objective, have the potential to reposition Australia among the top donors on gender equality globally. Based on the most recent available data, Australia dedicates 44.8% of ODA towards programs with gender equality as an objective (37.9% significant, and 6.9% principal objective).<sup>xxxv</sup> While this represents an increase on recent years, it pales in comparison with countries taking a feminist approach to international development, such as Canada which dedicates close to 90% of its ODA to gender equality objectives.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Regular and transparent reporting on progress against commitments will be critical to drive accountability and improved performance over time.

Highly controlled reporting and performance markers for international development frequently lead to measurement indicators that are representative of what is easy to measure or count, rather than being linked to effectiveness.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Promoting gender equality requires a transformative approach that is long term and often non-linear, and is not easily measured through rigid quantitative measures. For this reason, transformative gender programs require implementers to have the flexibility to capture and adapt to unexpected impacts on-the-ground. Transformative change measurement practices, such as the States of Change Cultural Change Impact Framework, provide implementers the flexibility to measure change, including political, informal, and behavioural change, to record unexpected impacts, and to adapt programs in response.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

12. Report at least annually on progress towards gender targets, including on barriers to progress and lessons learned.
13. Commit 20% of ODA to initiatives with gender equality as the principal objective
14. Invest in transformative change measurement practices by providing implementers the flexibility to measure and adapt to unexpected impacts.

# Endnotes

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