

## UNFPA input to Australia's new international development strategy

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA welcomes this opportunity to **inform Australia's new international development strategy** and appreciates the close collaboration with Australia at many levels Globally and in particular in the Asia-Pacific region. UNFPA looks forward to working with the new Australian government and sees many areas to grow our collaboration on - climate change, engagement with IFIS, innovation, Gender Based Violence and in humanitarian response.

### What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years?

The COVID-19 pandemic still continues to exacerbate the existing inequalities due to the stretch it has caused to the global health systems including the Indo-Pacific region. **Climate change** is affecting the region, disproportionately the small island developing states. The **exacerbated inequalities** are not only geographical but affect the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups throughout the region. As the [Terms of References](#) of the new international development policy quote, women have absorbed a greater share of these negative trends, with an estimated 47 million additional women and girls being pushed into poverty, with significant increase in women experiencing violence and all forms of modern slavery, including forced marriage in 2021 compared to 2016.

Millions of women around the world continue to be denied the fundamental right to make decisions over their bodies and futures. Over two hundred million women lack access to modern methods of family planning; six of seven new HIV infections in adolescents occur in girls, and the emergence of pronatalist population policies and gender-biased sex selection is undermining women's bodily autonomy and creating challenging population dynamics. **The world is experiencing multiple crises that disproportionately affect women and girls and go in detriment of gender equality.** The multiple crises mostly affect groups and individuals at the intersection of factors including gender, age, disability, and ethnicity. These crises often evolve into humanitarian emergencies, including: (i) climate change and ecological breakdown; (ii) economic inequality; (iii) persistent civil and international conflicts; (iv) large-scale human rights abuses; (v) famines; and (vi) disease outbreaks, including COVID-19

**Climate change** is affecting the region, both through increase in frequency and severity of sudden onset natural disasters, and also through manifestations of slow-onset weather events such as drought and rising sea levels, that affect water and food security, access to health facilities and services including for family planning, ante natal, safe delivery and emergency obstetric and newborn care. The exacerbated inequalities are not only geographical, particularly affecting small island developing states, but through its impacts on social and environmental determinants of health, also disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups throughout the region, with women and girls bearing the brunt of the climate crisis.

In the context of accentuated vulnerabilities of many Member States against climate change and health pandemics as well as conflicts, especially women and young people, **resilience building**, through addressing the continuum/nexus between humanitarian and development assistance (plus peace-building) will be increasingly important.

**Stagnating/worsening SRHR indicators in many island countries in the Pacific** especially regarding unmet need for Family Planning, CPR and importantly, Adolescent Birth Rate, coupled with gender-inequitable social norms, continue to be a source of common concern to DFAT and UNFPA. Efforts at accelerating the pace towards achieving Three Zeros by 2030 are imminently needed, and in this regard, DFAT's intention of increasing its financial contribution to UNFPA's SRHR work in the Pacific (i.e. Transformative Agenda Phase 2, 2023-2027) is welcome.

**Digitalization** is another global megatrend that continues to shape the region. Recent study ([Ray et al. 2021](#)) showed how the Indo-Pacific remains one of the world's most digitally divided regions, with digital gender equity gap being an area in which the region is particularly lagging. With remote populations and locations, access to information, services, commodities requires more digital and innovative approaches.

**What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?**

There is a need to focus on interventions that address the **multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination**, the inequalities, and the exclusion experienced by vulnerable populations including women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ, and others. It is necessary to rethink all systems that have created power imbalances and undermine gender equality, to promote decision making and agency for all. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, plays a key role in creating opportunities for women and girls with disabilities to fulfill their full potential including for realization of SRHR and bodily autonomy, and ending GBV and HPs.

There is the opportunity to learn from and with partners, and to coordinate and collaborate with actors including women-led organizations (WLO) and organizations representing marginalized populations such as organizations of persons with disabilities or organizations of indigenous peoples. These collaborations should promote women's rights, bodily autonomy, and the transformation of discriminatory social and gender norms that perpetuate gender inequality and push marginalized groups behind.

Development in the AP region is uneven, unequal and diverse. The **impacts of climate change** will only exacerbate existing hardships, impacting on women, children, elderly, disabled and key populations the most. There is a need to understand the scale of impact on human populations in the next decades as we stand at the tipping point of ecological transition. An **accurate population count is needed** - using modern methods and/or conventional methods. This cannot be a "would be nice" scenario given the looming scale of human impact in the SIDs and LMIC and MICs. Australia may choose to engage with IFIs and other partners to support governments to map their population and dynamics driving rural-urban and national - international migration. Clearly there is an opportunity for greater investment in access to family planning including reducing barriers to accessing contraception and challenging gender stereotypes that hold back communities from actively engaging to improve their socioeconomic outcomes.

In regards to climate change, **Australia can play a leading role in advocacy for women's and girls' SRHR in climate action, including for states to prioritize SRHR and GBV within NDC's** which are legally binding national commitments toward the Paris Agreement; and to support work at country and regional levels on strengthening the evidence base on the linkages between climate change and its impacts on SRHR and GBV. For Australia these trends prove the importance of continuing comprehensive efforts on health security, stability and economic recovery, which all are intrinsic to one another, with a strong emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, and continuing to treat gender equality as a key objective of Australia's development program.

The **digital divide** is a major risk to further drive the exacerbated inequalities, investments into digital innovation and inclusion are some of the biggest opportunities and positive drivers for the nexus of health, stability, gender equality and economic recovery. For example, in [2018 McKinsey](#) estimated that advancing women's equality, the economies of Asia Pacific could boost their collective GDP by \$4.5 trillion a year by 2025, a 12 percent increase over business-as-usual GDP, much of which can be driven by the digital transformation of the region.

By supporting **innovation, digitalization and female-led social entrepreneurs**, Australia would increase the long lasting impact through supporting solutions created to respond to the needs of the women and girls. The partnership of UNFPA with the Australian E-Safety Commission is exemplary of the way in which we are working to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence across the Asia and Pacific regions, as well as

globally through the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (for which UNFPA is the co-convenor of the Advisory Group and member of the Steering Committee).

### What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

**Apply gender transformative approaches** in all programming for development, meaning conducting an analysis of root causes of gender inequality, and a commitment to (i) develop initiatives that sustainably change the conditions enabling those root causes and (ii) promote gender equality.

There is a need to use an **intersectional approach** in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes; advocacy; intergovernmental processes; and data collection to identify effective ways to empower furthest left behind populations including persons with disabilities in all their diversity, particularly within the context of the 2030 Agenda and its resolve to leave no one behind. Ensuring population data is leveraged for informing rights based and gender transformative policies and programmes.

There is a need to **encourage a twin track approach** to development particularly as it relates to promoting gender equality and addressing the rights of marginalized populations. For example ensuring that there is a certain percentage of funding that is allocated from programmes towards gender mainstreaming, and disability inclusion.

### How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

DFAT considers innovation to be central for its ability to deliver on Foreign Policy White Paper commitments, and to operate effectively in a competitive global environment and unprecedented times. The new development policy could also embrace innovation as a wider opportunity for all societal stakeholders within the development context.

The current development policy, [Partnerships for Recovery](#) demonstrated avenues for further strengthening of the internal dialogue and linkages to Australia's Global Innovation Strategy from 2016 and to the latest (publicly available) DFAT innovation strategy for 2018-2021.

Another area for exploring could be including small and medium-sized enterprises, corporations and investors. Embedding the innovation and ingenuity of private sector is vital for the achieving the gender equality by supporting the femal entrepreneurs, and for example assuring supply of commodities and service providers for maternal and sexual health.

It is critical to make an effort for **inclusive innovation ecosystems** to ensure the solutions are designed and tailored to meet the everyday life challenges of their users. DFAT's innovation portfolio includes several great programmes from Australia's contribution to the Global Innovation Fund to [scaling frontier innovation](#), that demonstrate innovation as co-creative programmes between public and private sectors and academia. Assessment of the [Innovation@DFAT portfolio](#) programmes would help make visible the innovative funding mechanisms and programmes that have delivered the expected outputs. It would be important to make use of the ecosystems of innovation that may have emerged, consider how to take these innovations to scale.

Australia can leverage its **convening power** to bring stakeholders together and strengthen existing donor/aid coordination structures along with the programme countries, UN, IFIs including the World Bank Group and its private sector arms (IFC and MIGA), IMF, ADB etc., and foster new partnerships, including CSO's and grassroots organizations that have capacity to advance work on inclusion of vulnerable populations (PLWD, SOGIESC), as well as private sector, and can benefit from partnerships with UNRC/UN aAgencies and iNGOs.

### 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?

By making clear that all stakeholders count and should be welcomed for inclusive and innovative ecosystems, where the private sector plays the key role but is not a sole actor.

Also, global megatrends like **low fertility and ageing** are another key areas for building stronger regional collaboration, especially at G20 level such as Japan, Korea, as well as China. Low fertility and ageing is a global trend that would have a major impact on a country's social and economic development including health and an area that many countries around the world will be facing in the coming two to three decades. Moreover it is one of the major global megatrends that could benefit from regional collaboration through sharing of lessons learned (from Japan, Korea, etc).

There is an opportunity to **leverage the idea of a networked strategy for the South Pacific region**, including PNG. A greater focus of shared destiny, ecology, history and opportunity may help individual nations look beyond internal differences to embrace a South Pacific platform for sustainable development. This strategy must be an integrated one, outside the siloed approach whereby environment and climate issues are separated from population dynamics and individual aspirations such as access to health, education and employment. A joined-up approach for the South Pacific would position Australia as a trusted partner for future generations, but given the colonial history, that engagement must also come with a lot of support for preserving existing cultural traditions before that is lost, and reflecting on what leadership lessons from the past could be applied as we head deeper into the challenges of the 21st century.

#### **What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?**

Australia has significantly supported UNFPA in the Asia Pacific region (via the UNFPA Regional Office) with **prepositioning of supplies and commodities for increasing resilience in poor communities**. Prepositioning of supplies led UNFPA country offices to engage effectively in anticipatory action planning for natural disasters, as well as to facilitate community level engagement on disaster preparedness. Especially in South Asian countries (e.g. Bangladesh) where annual natural disasters have devastating and long-term impacts on adolescent youth/girls and women, prepositioned supplies and commodities have saved lives, including prevention of child marriages for adolescent girls. By distributing menstrual hygiene kits to adolescent girls before natural disasters hit, girls and their families are able to secure necessary health kits, understand the importance of not marrying girls off, and access adequate help such as psychosocial support before the situation becomes dire.

Also **integrating prepositioned supplies with technology** through efforts like digital cash voucher assistance becomes an even more powerful way to increase resilience of vulnerable communities. Using technology (e.g. digital cash, blockchain) supply distribution, safety and accountability could be better managed, especially in some of the more vulnerable areas such as urban slums and therefore integration of technology in resilience programming could be further enhanced in development and resilience-related policies.

Australia has played an **important and influential convening role** to bring stakeholders to the table to discuss emerging topics and to find joint solutions- both in person and virtually (during the pandemic). Australia can continue to leverage this convening power to build regional communities of practice to foster new partnerships and ensure sustainable collective outcomes, as well as strengthen donor/aid coordination e.g. health sector, in its priority countries/sectors.

#### **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?**

**Introduce/use gender and LNOB/disability markers** and optimize **use of that data** in its capacity development and assessment of programme effectiveness.

UNFPA has in place its Social and Environmental Standards for Programming (SES), which is intended to ensure that there is no inadvertent harm on people and the environment caused by its programming, and to strengthen and mainstream sustainability and accountability in UNFPA programming in a systematic and comprehensive manner, going beyond a 'do no harm' approach. By applying the SES in programming, UNFPA aims to strengthen the quality of interventions and promote efficient programming by ensuring a principled approach in a systematic and comprehensive manner, and to maximize benefits to stakeholders involved. This will help promote transparency, accountability and effectiveness of programming.

### **How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?**

As highlighted in the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action on Financing for Development with its emphasis on moving from funding to financing, traditional mechanisms for financing the 2030 Agenda are important but not sufficient to cover the costs of realizing the SDGs. This has been further reinforced in a post-COVID-19 world coupled with multiple geopolitical and economic shocks; and the devastating impact of climate change, As such the financing landscape needs to rapidly evolve if it is to move from billions to trillions to realize the SDGs. This will require **stronger synergies and complementarity across different financing flows**, including supporting countries to expand their fiscal space against significant debt distress while at the same time building on strategic private-public partnerships and innovative financing approaches to finance the SDGs.

In addition, **strategically leveraging regional development banks** and public development banks to expand both the scope and magnitude of their financing while at the same time promoting stronger collaboration with other entities, including UN Agencies to finance high quality investments in human capital development, especially for women and girls; climate resilience and socioeconomic development in the region will be important.

In line with UNFPA's Strategic Plan (2022-25) with its emphasis on **a holistic approach to financing to realize the three transformative results** (zero unmet need for family planning; zero preventable maternal mortality; and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices) and the ICPD Programme of Action. UNFPA is increasingly engaged in the Asia and Pacific region in strategic dialogue, collaboration and interventions on the financing for development agenda, including strengthening the financing architecture, aligning financial flows with the SDGs, in-line with country priorities and needs; promoting innovative financing modalities and securing sustainable financing for SRHR to accelerate the ICPD agenda and SDGs. In line with the need to accelerate this process, UNFPA supported two priority action areas:

#### **I. Public finance: increasing domestic resource mobilisation**

Domestic resource mobilisation is crucial to achieve the three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action. Critical in this context are joint approaches aiming to scale up collaboration with governments and the private sector, including government-UN cooperation in financing and leveraging complementary resources for the ICPD Agenda. UNFPA APRO supports scaling up inclusive social and economic policy options based on evidence and analytics to increase domestic resource mobilisation. Examples include the development of The Small Island Developing States Investment Case for Family Planning and Maternal Health for five Pacific Islands

#### **II. Public and private partnerships and innovative financing**

While there is a pressing shortage of public funds for meeting the region's immediate COVID-19 recovery needs, large amounts of investable funds, primarily private, are held in emerging economies in Asia. Public and private resources can still be effectively allocated alongside innovative strategies that leverage resources to work more efficiently without increasing out-of-pocket costs for individuals and households. UNFPA is increasingly pursuing collaborations with governments, the private sector and regional and development banks to strengthen financing architecture, and promote innovative financing modalities, impact investments, including development impact bonds and results-based financing to secure sustainable financing for SRHR.