

UN Women Input to Inform Australia's New International Development Policy

30 November 2022

The Government of Australia is a valued partner in the global effort to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women is grateful for Australia's strong political and financial support and partnership and welcomes the opportunity to provide input to Australia's new international development policy, which has an intended purpose to integrate gender equality throughout its development programmes.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women and girls, and the continuous backlash against women's rights have resulted in dramatic setbacks for women and girls around the world. At current pace, it will take 286 years to reach gender equality. To protect the hard-won gains of the past 20 years, and to accelerate much needed progress going forward, Australia's strong leadership on gender equality will be more important than ever. A comprehensive, tailored and gender-transformative approach is required across key thematic development impact areas.

Against this backdrop, UN Women recommends that Australia's new international development policy reflects and augments focus in the following thematic and cross-cutting areas of work, aligned with the UN Women-Australia Partnership Framework Agreement 2022-2025, UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and Australia's strategic objectives:

A. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)

Background: The following factors will continue to pose challenges as Australian development programmes respond and address violence perpetuated against women and girls, both regionally and globally: Growing poverty, inequality and economic inequity, especially for women and girls; (worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic); climate change and related disasters; urbanization growth and migration; conflict and major displacement events - including social and political unrest that accompany economic crises; fiscal austerity and declining funding for GE and EVAWG; the current backlash against women's rights and shrinking space for civil society; and technological advances and digital innovations impact – and have the potential to contribute to – the prevalence of VAW/G.

Australia is a global leader in promoting EVAWG efforts across the world and in the Asia Pacific region in particular. Domestically, Australia has initiated a whole-of-government prevention and survivor-centered response at the national and state levels and has experience in addressing VAWG in indigenous communities and vulnerable population groups.

Overall recommendation: Building on this experience, Australia's new international development policy must ensure that efforts on promoting gender equality and ending violence against women and girls are connected with efforts to address poverty and economic recession, pandemics, security instability, the digital gender divide, and climate change and environmental degradation.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia's new policy include:

- Ensure that efforts on promoting gender equality and ending violence against women and girls are connected with efforts to address poverty and economic recession, pandemics, security instability, the digital gender divide, and climate change and environmental degradation.

- Deepen investment in ERAW/G to sustain the accumulated results achieved thus far, and to further progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda, through enhanced partnerships and collaboration including through increased ODA to support global, regional, and national level efforts to prevent and respond to VAWG.
- Document and share expertise and lessons learned on ERAW/G with the international community, including to influence other Member States, and showcase the value of cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration in ending VAWG.
- Advance innovative ways of working to address the impact and longer-term consequences of climate change on women and girls' safety from violence.
- Support existing efforts in partner countries and crisis contexts to operate across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to strengthen national level ERAWG systems that can bend and flex in situations of emergency.

B. Women, Peace and Security

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic posed multidimensional challenges, including in the area of WPS. The long-term post-pandemic recovery requires a strong focus on conflict prevention, not only as a part of sustainable recovery and development, but also as an effort to reduce risks and tensions caused by increased inequalities during the pandemic and security related responses by many national governments.

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced the full spectrum of conflict contexts, ranging from countries in which women in general and women human rights defenders in particular face severe security challenges, to contexts where security challenges are less visible, but where conflict risks are nevertheless prevalent. Australia is a champion and a leading WPS actor in the region, bringing world-recognized experience and expertise on UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans.

The region's natural resources are among the richest and most diverse in the world but are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which continues to exacerbate conditions that threaten peace and security, disproportionately affecting conflict-affected and fragile contexts, with the Indo-Pacific region among the highest risk areas in the world. Furthermore, climate change impacts on and interact with social, economic, political, and environmental pressures, which are expected to lead to the loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, new patterns of migration, and increased resource competition within communities in the near future.

Despite the visible impact of climate change, the action to tackle climate-related security risks has lagged. This work will require a better understanding of the reality of near-future security risks posed by climate change and the impact on development capabilities, which constitutes a critical strategic gap. A

growing body of evidence also points to the critical role of gender norms and power structures in responding to the impacts of climate change that are disproportionately impacting women and girls.

Overall recommendation: To address climate-related security risks in an inclusive and sustainable manner, Australia will need to concentrate its efforts in climate-vulnerable and fragile contexts where there are persistent challenges to achieving gender equality.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia’s new policy include:

- Maintain and expand partnerships that link Australia’s important WPS work in the region with the global WPS strategic dialogue and objectives.
- Advance innovative and long-term financing approaches for direct and targeted funding of WPS activities by women’s CSOs on the ground.
- Support women, in particular young women’s voices in regional platforms and forums in alignment with the approach and priorities defined in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, to promote a holistic and inter-linked understanding of gender equality, security and development issues.
- Support long-term, transformative approaches that enable local and global women peacebuilders to effectively carry out their work, through increased access to resources, education and employment; the presence of strong institutions; and a culture of peace, understood as mutual respect, harmony and inclusion.
- Draw from examples of successful women’s civil society initiatives on sustaining peace and conflict prevention such as initiatives facilitating dialogue and mediation at the local level; organizing neighbourhood watch to prevent electoral violence; providing skills training and income generation activities to women; to supporting the victims of violence and conflict.

C. Governance, Leadership and Political Participation

Background: From the local to the global level, women’s leadership and political participation are restricted. The analysis indicates that women’s representation in deliberative bodies of local government is higher than in parliament, but still not on equal terms with men. As of January 2020, only 36 per cent of elected members in deliberative bodies of local governments in 133 countries are women. This proportion is smaller in Eastern and South-eastern Asia with 25 per cent. Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance. Australia’s renewed commitment to gender-responsive budgeting and to achieving gender parity in the top levels of government are welcome and important steps towards addressing these issues. UN Women congratulates the current Government for a record number of female ministers in the Cabinet.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia’s new policy include:

- Support developing countries to institute gender-responsive public finance management systems to allocate and track resources to close gender gaps; national women’s machineries to conduct gender analysis of government plans and budgets, monitor gender budgets and advocate for public resources that promote gender equality; finance ministries to integrate gender analysis into fiscal policies at every stage of the budget process; and help build capacities

of women's groups to analyze budgets and advocate for gender-responsive revenue raising and spending.

- Prioritize development programmes that : (a) train women political candidates and develop their capacities; (b) support initiatives that address the root causes that prevent women from participating in public and political life on equal footing with men; (c) support voter and civic education and sensitization campaigns on GEEWG; (d) advocate with political parties, governments and others to do their part in empowering women; (e) encourage young men and women to engage in making gender equality measures central to public policymaking; and (f) promote legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to political spheres—as voters, candidates, elected officials and civil service members.

D. Women's Economic Empowerment

Background: As a result of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and rising food insecurity and cost of living, women and girls in all their diversity are more likely to experience fewer economic opportunities and harm to livelihoods, a greater burden of unpaid care work, and decreased educational and job training opportunities, as well as increased gender-based violence, less access to reproductive health care, less access to decision making forums, and threats to their bodily autonomy.

Gender-responsive climate and environmental policies, strategies and actions are severely constrained by the limited funding directed to gender equality and women's climate action globally and by the dearth of gender statistics including the lack of sex-disaggregation of most environmental data and the absence of gender analysis in its use. The concomitant cost-of-living crisis is widening gender gaps and increasing rates of food insecurity and malnutrition, especially for women and girls. Overall, gender equality considerations remain largely missing from discussions on the COVID-19, Ukraine and cost-of-living crises.

Overall recommendation: In its contributions to the advancement of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, Australia's new international development policy will need to consider and support adoption of gender-responsive, climate-resilient and sustainable food systems that have women and girls, in all their diversity, at their centre, and address livelihoods, women's economic empowerment and rights from a 'Leave No One Behind' approach.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia's new policy include:

- Identify development pathways to increase training, education, and leadership and decision-making for women and girls in a gender-just green transition and facilitate direct access to finance for women and girls leading gender-just climate solutions at the local, rural, and grassroots levels.
- Support land rights and tenure security to enable women and girls to lead transitions in areas such as sustainable agriculture.
- Ensure that infrastructure, including climate change focused infrastructure such as renewable energy, is inclusive of women and girls and apply a "do no harm" lens for potential biodiversity impacts.
- Integrate gender-responsive procurement into all development projects, whereby any outsourcing and procurement processes open to regional partners, local contractors, etc. take into account considerations for gender equality and women's empowerment (e.g. include women's working conditions and women's participation ownership among the criteria for preferential procurement).

- Advance gender-responsive climate finance and investments in green/blue economies.
- Contribute to regional platforms and collective commitments to strengthen the care economy in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Alliance for Care)

E. Gender Data

Background: There is a growing need for gender data to better understand and manage ongoing global crises and challenges (for example, addressing climate change, where the indicators currently used to measure progress globally are largely gender blind) and deliver on the SDG commitments of the 2030 Agenda to leave no-one behind.

Yet despite growing demand, funding levels remain far below what's needed. In 2020, funding for gender data dropped sharply, by 55%, over the average level of 2017-19. This sudden decrease in funding for gender data was three times larger than the drop in overall funding for data and statistics over the same period.

Overall recommendation: To realize the vision and objectives of its development programme, in alignment with the SDGs, Australia's new policy should include consideration of the importance of disaggregated data and evidence on gender equality and support initiatives to increase its availability and use.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia's new policy include:

- Scale up investments, including ODA, in gender data to support collection, dissemination and use of gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data.
- Facilitate and advance measurement of intersectionality through investment in and use of data disaggregated by sex, income, age, disability, race, ethnicity, migratory status, geographic location, and other characteristics.
- Underline how the Australian Government will advocate with partners in the region to increase the use gender data to promote more evidence-based gender-responsive policymaking across the region.
- Facilitate greater south-south, triangular, north-south collaboration of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and National Statistics Offices (NSOs), which could benefit from ABS's experiences on improving timely and finely disaggregated data, including in areas such as environment data, measuring multidimensional poverty etc.
- Signal the importance of forming new partnerships and deepening existing ones with Governments, civil society, UN Agencies, private sector as a critical lever for delivering on the ambitions of the new policy. It should also point to partnerships that have been successful under the previous policy, such as with UN Women's Women Count programme, that the new one can aim to leverage.
- Support efforts to involve policy makers, gender equality advocates and women's rights organizations as well as other civil society groups in decisions about what data are collected, when and how, and which indicators are prioritized.

F. Disability and Social Inclusion, including LGBTIQ+, Indigenous and Aging Populations

Background: The multi-faceted impacts of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have and will disproportionately affect disadvantaged and marginalised groups – including people with disabilities,

indigenous peoples, and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. Australia plays an influential role in the region and internationally in standing for human rights and equality of marginalised and diverse groups, and the government's commitments on indigenous issues, gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) are well-noted. Australia's focus on gender equality has been commendable historically, and prior efforts to enhance disability inclusion in development have been highly effective.

Overall recommendation: To ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to reaching a wide range of historically marginalized communities, Australia's new international development policy should support further expansion and investments in GEDSI efforts, with heightened consideration for various complex forms of compounding and intersecting vulnerability and disadvantage, including for LGBTIQ+ equality work, support for indigenous women and girls, and consideration of issues around aging.

Specific suggestions for consideration in Australia's new policy include:

- Support and build enhanced understanding of intersectionality, which provides a common analytical framework that looks at individual vulnerability, rather than the categorization of groups.
- Clearly communicate and streamline commitments to gender equality, disability and social inclusion in the planning and selection of implementing partners to guarantee Australia's unique commitment to address the challenges of intersectionality is properly included throughout the process.
- Prioritize training and skill development to ensure partners are well informed and equipped to implement Australia's holistic human-rights approach.
- Develop internal capacity to adopt and apply intersectional approaches to gender equality and disability and social inclusion.
- Support regional networks of different categories of persons to build solidarity and reduce operational redundancy.
- Make targeted investments in programmatic interventions for indigenous women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region, based on principles in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007.
- Ensure specific consideration of LGBTIQ+ issues in Australia's engagement on gender equality in development spaces, including addressing all forms of violence and discrimination directed towards LGBTIQ+ people, and creating opportunities across sectors through policies, programmes and resource allocation.
- Ensure specific consideration of aging and intergenerational equity.

G. Suggestions for the design of performance systems

Performance and delivery systems should be co-designed with those they are intended to serve and benefit in order to ensure inclusivity.

The continued use of financial tracking tools, such as the gender equality marker, to track and report to IATI and the OECD on investments in gender equality and the empowerment of women -- both for ODA through the OECD gender equality marker and through the UN gender equality marker from the point of view of UN investment and use of funds -- will be important. In this context, supporting the UN Coordination role of UN Women and the work of the HLTF on Financing for Gender Equality could

contribute to enhanced accountability and understanding of the impact of humanitarian and development (and nexus) funding on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In addition, setting ambitious targets – for example, at least 30% of Australia’s ODA to be allocated to programmes with gender equality as a principal objective and 50% to programmes with gender equality as a significant objective – would reinforce and send a clear message of gender equality as a development imperative.

H. Final considerations

It is critical that development efforts empower and build upon regionally and locally- initiated and led mechanisms to ensure the highest level of ownership and sustainability. This approach requires investment in localisation to build and strengthen capacity and institutions as well as building sustainability planning into programmes. Furthermore, investment in women’s participation in programme design and implementation is critical across all areas of development, and not limited to gender equality programming.

National Women’s Machineries are critical in advancing gender equality priorities across the Pacific region. They are also some of the most under resourced government ministries/departments. Australia’s contribution through embedded Gender Advisors has been extremely effective in supporting institutional strengthening and strategic visioning of the NWMs, helping to ensure a strong voice on gender equality in government.

Finally, in the context of prioritization of the Indo-Pacific region, Australia is encouraged to maintain a global focus, particularly in thematic areas where it has been a leader (i.e. EVAWG), and provide targeted support to other geographic areas, including through cross-learning and exchange of best practices. Australia is also urged to continue to work with key technical agencies, including UN Women, to sustain and expand the meaningful results that have been achieved for women and girls; and leverage UN reform and work closely across the UN system to mainstream GEEWG in development programming, in line with the Funding Compact, and specifically by supporting inter-agency pooled funding mechanisms.

Conclusion

Australia’s development assistance has been a substantial contributor to reduce poverty, increase prosperity and enhance stability, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region. UN Women’s strong and sustained partnership with the Government of Australia has advanced GEWE and directly contributed to enhancing capacities and commitments of governments, regional bodies, civil society (including women’s organizations), the private sector and communities to address the root causes of gender inequalities and improve conditions and opportunities for women.

UN Women urges Australia to continue to include GEWE in its new international development policy as a priority area in its own right, and by meaningfully integrating GEWE in other thematic priorities, including in climate change; peace and security; infrastructure; and disaster-risk reduction and humanitarian responses. Furthermore, UN Women strongly encourages Australia to include long-term sustainable financing within the new policy and performance framework.