

Submission: Australian International Gender Equality Strategy

Submitted by
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Advancing gender equality internationally by embracing participatory and co-design processes, and a commitment to digitally-enabled, inclusive development.

GENDER EQUALITY PRIORITIES

Gender equality priorities vary by context and region, but there are key themes considered top priorities for the Indo-Pacific region which is the focus of the 2023 Australian International Development Policy. These priorities are interconnected, and progress in one area often supports progress in others. Achieving gender equality on the international stage requires a holistic and multi-faceted approach that considers the unique needs and circumstances of women and girls worldwide. Priorities include:

Economic Empowerment: Closing the gender pay gap, promoting women's entrepreneurship, and ensuring equal access to economic opportunities are central to achieving gender equality.

Education: Ensuring equal access to quality education for girls and women, from primary to tertiary levels, is essential for the creation of a just society & economic empowerment.

Healthcare: Improving access to reproductive healthcare, reducing maternal and child mortality rates, and addressing gender-specific health issues.

Personal Safety and Violence Against Women: Combating gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking.

Political Participation: Increasing women's representation in political leadership roles and decision-making positions is crucial for shaping policies that advance gender equality. The Pacific region has the world's [lowest levels](#) of women's political representation.

Legal Reforms: Implementing and enforcing laws that protect women's rights, addresses gender discrimination, and promotes inclusion in land rights policies.

Unpaid Care Work: Recognizing and reducing the unequal burden of unpaid care work that often falls on women is essential for civic, economic, and community participation.

Technology and Digital Divide: Bridging the digital gender divide and promoting women's participation in technology and STEM fields are increasingly important in the digital age.

Climate Change and Environment: Recognizing the differential impact of climate change on women and ensuring their participation in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Intersectionality: Addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups of women, such as women with disabilities, LGBTQ+ women, women of all ages, and women from ethnic and indigenous communities.

PRIORITY APPROACHES FOR GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES

Priority approach 1: Co-design and participatory methodologies

Inclusive decision-making processes are critical for addressing systemic gender biases. They offer a framework for holistic approaches to gender equality that acknowledge entrenched gender stereotypes and biases within institutions and the inequity in power and opportunity that exists in the status quo.

Codesign involves the collaborative development of policies, programs, and projects with input from diverse community members, including women and gender-diverse individuals themselves. This methodology ensures that unique perspectives, needs, and experiences are integrated into the design, implementation, and knowledge sharing processes. This results in activities and approaches that are more relevant, effective and do no harm.

"Community-based approaches recognise that violence against women is the community's responsibility, not a problem of individual women."

- [**Do No Harm Research Papua New Guinea, Eves et al. 2018**](#)

Participatory methodologies encourage active engagement and transformation of women and gender-diverse people in various aspects of their lives. By involving these groups in data collection, analysis, and policy formulation, these methodologies provide a platform to voice concerns and aspirations. This process not only helps identify and address gender-specific challenges but also strengthens women's agency and leadership skills.

"Concentrating on men and women separately fails to address the need for community cohesiveness"

- [**Do No Harm Research Papua New Guinea, Eves et al. 2018**](#)

These approaches also address the need to design gender equality initiatives to break down gender inequality from all sides in order to identify potential roadblocks, opposition or opportunities to achieve positive change.

Beyond including women and gender-diverse people in participatory processes, it is also important to include their surrounding communities who play key roles in performing and reinforcing problematic gender-norms and cultural practices. Approaches that focus on [men's concepts of masculinity, gender and cultural norms](#) are important to advancing women's access and participation in many aspects of life, but importantly can be key to improving women's personal safety. Approaches that focus on behavioural influences to gender-based violence, such as alcohol consumption and gambling, require resourcing and support.

Priority approach 2: Supported digital transformation and digitally-enabled programs

The Indo-Pacific region is in the midst of rapid digital transformation. Already, digitisation is transforming partner government service delivery and the relationship between governments and its citizens, including marginalised groups. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased access to and acceptance of technology in all facets of life.

If used effectively, digital technologies hold immense potential to positively impact women and gender-diverse lives and contribute directly to more resilient, inclusive and self-reliant societies.

There are a myriad of ways digitally-enabled programs and systems can help to increase gender equality across all sectors, including, but not limited to:

- **Increasing visibility and qualification of issues**

Proactive inclusion of gender related data in programs and within national and subnational digital systems is critical to understanding the barriers and enablers to improvement in gender equality and equity. Gender disaggregated data can be used to measure progress, inform data-driven decisions, and shine a light on issues and achievements.

- **Increasing access to social protection and emergency responses**

Inefficient, unreliable, manual social protection systems often result in delays, errors, and fraud - depriving women and families of much-needed social protection benefits. Supporting digital transformation that moves from manual paper systems to robust, secure, centralised social protection systems and payment platforms can ensure support can be provided reliably and transparently, in a timely manner.

- **Providing access to education and skills training**

Online and blended learning offers flexibility for women to learn around their own schedule and provides access to high quality, relevant learning materials. Digitally-enabled learning can improve gender outcomes at every level from primary school through to job embedded professional development across critical, female dominated fields like health and education.

- **Access to technology and opportunities for digital skills**

Addressing practical challenges to access and uptake of digital tools is crucial for aid policies that support this approach. This includes provisions for reliable access to the internet and devices, investment in digital literacy skills, and solutions with cultural adaptability and relevance. Digital technology can overcome barriers to access - eg. girls who are unable to attend school in person can still access information and learning opportunities to develop the skills necessary to solve their own problems. Digital skills open up opportunities and access to global markets, which can lead to economic empowerment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in skills for co-design and participatory methodologies and build partnerships with organisations skilled in these approaches in a development context.

Invest in programs that use codesign and participatory methodologies. It is critical to empower and listen to local voices, codesign initiatives and establish local leadership. Allow people to be the creators of their own solutions by facilitating effective codesign processes and prioritising person-centred programs and organisations.

Support effective digital transformation of national and sub-national services and sectors in line with partner country priorities. Accurately measuring and reporting on outcomes across public services serves to highlight inequities and is an important step in enabling measurable improvement. This includes educating partner governments and organisations on the potential and impact of digitally-enabled programs on gender issues and inclusive engagement.

Commit to supporting approaches and initiatives that address gender equity with a holistic view. Gender inequity is driven by deep, complex, interconnected forces. Comprehensive strategies are required to address its interconnected nature with other forms of discrimination, promote long-term change, and avoid unintended consequences.

Prioritise personal safety as a prerequisite for all other advances in gender equality.

In particular, women's economic empowerment programs should avoid minimalist initiatives. It is not sufficient to simply give women access to economic opportunities without any focus on gender and gender relations, especially the role of gender norms and practices in the context of marital relationships. Without feeling safe, women are unable to participate in advancing their own economic, health, education outcomes. [Fostering](#) men's commitment to respecting women and girls is critical.

Prioritise work focused on shifting problematic gender-norms and cultural practices. In line with partner governments priorities, focus on work that can positively shift minds and actions related to gender equality.

Accelerate what's already working. Understand organisations who are already making a positive impact, fund and resource the scaling of these initiatives (such as [Equal Playing Field](#)).

Prioritise inclusivity and minimise jargon. At all levels, work to improve gender equality should be accessible and understandable by everyone. Avoid exclusive terms and jargon, and consider communication channels appropriately.

ABOUT CATALPA INTERNATIONAL

Catalpa is a not-for-profit development organisation creating change through design thinking, adaptive management and digital technology. Over the past 5 years, we've managed over A\$30 million of international development programming in 15 countries across health, education, skills training, governance, infrastructure and social protection.

A bridge between the development and tech sectors

We bring together highly experienced international development practitioners and sector specialists with technical specialists - including software engineers, interaction and service designers, communicators, and graphic artists. Centralising program and technology design, implementation, and development allows us to deliver programs that can be quickly iterated, and tools that are truly fit for purpose.

A growing local presence

We are committed to building local teams where our projects are based. Locally-led development increases the integrity of our work, informing projects with a local perspective and embedding programs (and their supporting tech tools) in communities and social structures from the outset.

As part of our strategic plan, we are increasing our support for software and technology training in-country. We employ 70+ staff, and have a legally registered presence in Timor Leste, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji.

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