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WHEN WE MOVE TOGETHER, WE MOVE THE WORLD

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The Equality Fund appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Government of Australia's consultation on its new Gender Equality Strategy. We submit for consideration the following reflections on the four consultation questions:

What are international gender equality priorities?

As a global Women's Fund, we take our lead from the feminist organizations we partner with. We recently consulted with our partners on the challenges they face and three high-level, recurring themes emerged:

1. **Multiple and intersecting crises:** this was a consistent theme raised over the last year from partners from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Syria and El Salvador. Overlapping climate disasters, armed conflict, food insecurity, post-COVID impacts, economic pressures and more all combine to create political, social, and economic tensions. The women, girls, and trans people that our partners serve have often been amongst the worst affected in these compounded crises.

Women and girls are, at the same time, on the front lines of responding to them. Women's rights organizations (WROs) pivot rapidly to anticipate and address the intersectional impacts of threats. They take risks and act quickly when crises strike, however they are consistently sidelined when funding is allocated and decisions are taken. This is a systemic issue, within both the development and humanitarian sectors. Donor governments have committed to localizing their disaster response and recovery funding, and yet all too often those strategies leave out WROs and the Feminist Funds that support them.

2. **The growing impact of "anti-gender" movements:** transnational coalitions of conservative activists and civil society organizations are working effectively to reverse progressive political, social, and legislative gains made by both feminist and LGBTQI movements in the last two to three decades. Anti-gender and anti-rights movements have convened and resourced an international array of anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQI and anti-trans activist groups, among others, under a so-called "pro

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family values” platform. They are pushing back on a range of progressive issues including women’s rights, access to SRHR, comprehensive sexual education for adolescents, and LGBTQI rights in countries including the United States, South Korea, Poland, Uganda, Ghana, Brazil and Lebanon. The rise of anti-rights movements is both a tool for, and a product of, many nationalist and authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, government regulations and actions are shrinking civil society space; from Latin America, East Africa to Asia, organizations are being threatened and closed down if their programming does not align with conservative priorities.

3. Movement building efforts, to bring activists together to re-connect, heal, and co-strategize: amidst crisis and rising opposition, and coming out of two years of COVID-19 lockdowns, our partners also reported a deep need for collective solidarity and action. Feminists are organizing and leading on many issues, but this work is drastically under-funded. Ongoing support to strengthen networks and consortia of feminist activists is critically needed.

Across our partners, which include both constituency-led women’s rights organizations and women’s and feminist funds, the areas they prioritize in their work are:

- Violence against Women
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- Girls/ Young Women’s leadership and rights
- LGBTIQ Rights
- Feminist Leadership
- Women’s Political Participation
- Economic Justice
- Environmental Justice and Land Rights
- Labour Rights
- Migrant rights
- Disability Rights
- Racial Justice
- Women, Science and Technology

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What are the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality globally?

Effective approaches to achieve gender equality by international assistance entities include:

Getting the analysis right: A holistic approach that brings together political, economic, and social analysis along with an intersectional gender lens yields a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of ‘the problem’ and possible solutions.

Supporting women’s rights/LGBTQI organizations and movements: Strong, independent feminist movements are key to progress on gender equality. Women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights organizations should be recognized as key development actors, and provided core, flexible, multi-year funding to allow them to fully leverage their expertise and be nimble in responding to new needs and crises. These organizations are led by the populations they serve, know best what intersecting issues their communities face and how to solve them sustainably.

Re-assessing the concept of risk: All too often, funders view feminist actors as ‘too risky’ to support. However, feminist funds and others have developed ways to transform this traditional vision of risk. They are also asking different questions about what constitutes risk and whether we are also assessing the risks associated with failing to support feminist movements when they hold promising solutions to so many of the critical challenges we are facing.

Adopting and resourcing a feminist foreign policy / development policy: While there is no universal definition of feminist foreign policy, activists and a growing number of governments believe that adopting a feminist foreign policy can be a bold statement of intent. This is vitally important in today’s world where rights are under attack.

We believe that a feminist approach to international development is a powerful tool for working across multiple and intersecting issues including ending poverty, economic growth, racial justice and climate change. This approach recognizes that gender inequality, the failures of the current economic system, and the climate crisis share many root causes and are best addressed in tandem. It also allows for an intersectional approach which recognizes that poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and the climate crisis impact

diverse populations differently. Development interventions should target those who have been historically marginalized, for example Indigenous people, migrants, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and sex workers.

How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?

A key priority is strengthening the multilateral system's ability to support and deliver on gender equality. Given the attacks on the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people globally, shoring up capacities and political support on human rights generally, and these rights in particular, is critical.

There is also a need to look for and strengthen new feminist, multi-stakeholder initiatives outside the traditional multilateral system. These offer opportunities to build new partnerships, bring in voices that have been excluded from traditional conversations, and more flexibly, and creatively meet ongoing and emerging needs. The [Alliance for Feminist Movements](#) (AFM) is such a space, a multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to increase and improve the quality of resources and mobilize political support for diverse feminist movements, agendas, and policies. We understand that DFAT is considering membership in the AFM. We encourage Australia to join other donor governments there, and to take an active role through the AFM in support of feminist movements.

Finally, ensure that major bilateral (government to government) gender equality initiatives are accompanied by robust support to feminist civil society organizations, networks, and funds. Without strong women's movements to hold governments to account and build social change, investments in state capacities (education systems, women's political participation, health systems, etc.) will fail to deliver on their full potential.

What should the government/ DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?

It is important to look at both who DFAT partners with and how these partnerships are structured. For a credible and effective international development and multilateral system, the Equality Fund recommends establishing deep and trusting partnerships with diverse Global South actors, in particular Global South feminist funds and women's rights and LGBTIQ organizations (WROs).

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There is a growing body of research that documents how strong, independent feminist movements both advance numerous dimensions of gender equality and contribute to broader development aims, including the SDGs (see [Bridgespan 2022](#), [MamaCash 2020](#), [research led by Dr. Laurel Weldon](#)). Yet they are historically underfunded. In 2020-21, [WROs received USD \\$574M](#), or just 1% of total ODA dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Donor Governments aiming for constructive partnerships with Global South feminist funds and WROs should:

- Prioritize constituency-led groups that advance gender equality and women's, girls' and trans people's rights and reach diverse communities (e.g. Indigenous women, LGBTIQ individuals, migrant workers, sex workers). It is not enough to fund "the Global South," local governments, or community groups without interrogating who holds power and who is excluded from development efforts and results;
- Provide [direct funding](#), or funding that allows partners to determine their own priorities, recognizing them as agents of change;
- Provide core/flexible, predictable, long-term funding, which allows groups to meet their current and emerging needs sustainably;
- Reframe risk and minimize risk management processes. The greater risk is in *not* supporting agents of change in the feminist, human rights ecosystem. Their lived experience and political understanding are assets, not liabilities;
- Recognize that the development landscape is defined by multiple and intersecting crises. As such, establish partnerships that provide immediate support to vulnerable groups while not diverting support from those targeting long-term needs;
- Examine administrative and reporting processes and ensure they are in service to desired programming outcomes. Reducing the transaction and reporting burden on Global South partners should be prioritized;
- Co-establish monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes primarily for WROs' learning, rather than solely for accountability to the funder.

We strongly recommend that DFAT deepen its existing relationships with Women's Funds. This [2023 brief from the Government of Sweden](#) highlights the role and impact of feminist funds in the feminist funding ecosystem, "operating at national, regional and global levels,

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making funding accessible to grassroots activists. [They] have deep, trust-based partnerships with grassroots women's and feminist movements." We congratulate DFAT on its current partnership with women's funds based in Asia and the Pacific and encourage the expansion and deepening of these and additional relationships.

Finally, we encourage DFAT to build on previous consultations with global, regional and national feminist organizations. Other donors (Canada, UK, the Netherlands, etc.) have organized dialogues and discussions. As well, AWID, on behalf of the Equality Fund, carried out extensive consultations (report on the consultations is [here](#), and our response to the recommendations is [here](#)). Going forward, innovative ways to deepen and build these discussions would be welcome.