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## **Submission on the new International Gender Equality Strategy**

Oxfam Australia strongly welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the government's new International Gender Equality Strategy.

Oxfam is an independent, not-for-profit development agency. Our vision is of a just and sustainable world without the inequalities that keep people in poverty. Oxfam Australia has more than 67,000 financial supporters and an additional 320,000 advocacy supporters who help advance our work. Oxfam Australia is a member of Oxfam International, a global confederation of 21 organisations that work together in 85 countries around the world.

Gender equality is one of the key pillars of our work. Oxfam has always put women and other marginalised communities at the heart of its mission to end poverty and inequality. Oxfam recognises that there is no economic, social or environmental justice without gender justice, hence defining it not as an "add on" but, rather, as the core of all we do.

We reinforce our identity as a feminist, rights and values-based organisation that applies an intersectional lens across all development, humanitarian and advocacy efforts. At Oxfam we believe that transforming gender and power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, is critical to ending poverty and challenging inequality. We believe that women taking control and taking collective action are the most important drivers of sustained improvements in women's rights, and are a powerful force to end poverty not only for women and girls, but for others too.

Oxfam Australia ensures that all our work, and the way we do it, contributes to gender equality. Our work towards gender justice falls into three primary areas:

- Feminist and transformative social movement building
- Women's economic empowerment
- Ending violence against women and girls.

In this submission we will provide Oxfam's perspective on the key questions the government has posed in relation to the development of the new International Gender Equality Strategy.

## What are the gender equality priorities you see over the next 5-10 years?

Oxfam recommends the government prioritise the following four areas in its new International Gender Equality Strategy:

### 1. Defining Gender Equality as a Minimum Standard

Oxfam strongly welcomes the government's new gender equality goals, embedded in the new International Development Policy, of 80% of investments address gender equality effectively, and all new investments over \$3 million include gender equality objectives. We look forward to working with the government on developing how these new goals might be implemented. We are seeking for these goals to be properly realised for all Official Development Assistance (ODA), including investments with multi-lateral agencies and contractors.

We welcome the government's new accountability mechanisms including gender equality measures detailed in the Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework. We particularly support the measures of 1. ODA funding channelled to Women's Equality Organisations and Institutions, 2. Number of services provided to victim/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. 3. Percentage of gender gap closed. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) already has many levers for ensuring accountability for both its staff and its partners, which it uses to address risks such as fraud, counterterrorism and child protection. We consider it very positive that DFAT continues its reputation as a world leader in relation to gender equality and disability inclusive development, by now taking a step further to include minimum standards.

### 2. Transform gender inequality by addressing structural barriers and social norms, and valuing care work

Oxfam wants to see Australia champion a holistic and intersectional approach to women's economic empowerment. Alongside economic inclusion and growth, we are calling for Australia to prioritise investment in shifting social norms and structural barriers that women face. We believe it's critical to reframe how society and powerholders define 'work' and 'economy'.

To progress this, Australia must:

- Invest in collecting data and building a national evidence base on unpaid care work and advocate governments incorporate this information into relevant national statistics.
- Invest in robust, context-specific evidence that will reveal disparities in time use, current norms and patterns of care, and identify influencing asks.
- Promote a cultural shift towards care, by, among others, recognising the value of care jobs to the wellbeing of society and economy. Promote care jobs as green jobs.
- Progress its world-leading agenda to reduce corporate tax avoidance and evasion. Oxfam research has shown that tax avoidance and evasion most impacts developing country's revenue base, undermining their ability to afford social protection policies and reforms such as paid childcare, parental leave, aged care and properly paid care jobs that advance women's equality. The most significant thing Australia can do to reduce tax avoidance is immediately pass the proposed legislation for Public Country by Country Reporting of corporate tax affairs. It can also take a strong leadership role in international fora by advocating for stronger and more equitable tax policies that will raise the revenue bases and reduce inequality and poverty.

### 3. Invest more in preventing gender-based violence

Oxfam believes the government must scale up funding for stand-alone, evidence-based, holistic and long-term approaches to ending violence against women. This includes continuing the significant emphasis on ending violence against women in programs like Pacific Women Lead. We welcome the government's new performance measure related to the provision of gender-based violence services as an important accountability measure to track progress. Also, given the over-representation of people in the LGBTQIA+ community as survivors of violence and their exclusion from economic opportunity, this should be an increasing area of focus for the aid program as well. Programs that tackle the relationship between homophobia and aggressive forms of masculinity that impact both women and LGBTQIA+ communities should particularly be considered.

### 4. Tackle climate change and gender inequality together

The climate crisis is an escalating threat in our region that can exacerbate gender inequalities through reinforcement of existing gender discriminatory power structures. As a result, women and girls in all their diversity are often disproportionately impacted by climate change while also being excluded from decision making and access to resources that can support them to become more resilient. To end the climate crisis, it is also essential to invest in strengthening gender equality as climate justice cannot be achieved without gender justice.

Oxfam encourages a stronger focus on supporting women and girls to build collective leadership on climate action and strengthen opportunities for them to be a part of decision making at all levels of governance. Accessing climate finance is also critical for supporting the most vulnerable women and girls to address challenges in their communities around adapting to climate change, including but not limited to disaster preparedness, climate-smart agriculture, water resource management, and ecosystem restoration. To address this Australia should:

- Establish a gender-responsive climate resilience and adaptation fund, which directs \$300 million in bilateral climate finance over four years towards integrated, women-led and localised responses that address climate change and intersecting crises, alongside progressing gender equality.
- Consider new channels of finance to reach impacted communities, particularly through flexible and core funding targeted at local and women's organisations to support locally led responses to climate change.

### **What do you see as the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality?**

There are a range of approaches which together Oxfam believe are most effective for achieving gender equality. We recommend the government:

- Have specific gender equality objectives and outcomes (and performance measurement systems) in projects and programs. Thus, we welcome the inclusion of these in the new International Development Policy.
- Take a holistic approach that addresses underlying structural barriers to gender equality, including social norms and care roles.

- Provide specific resources for civil society women’s rights organisations, their networks and approaches that link this support to the wider DFAT program investments (linking capacity and opportunity).
- Ensure that DFAT has sufficient technical expertise internally in GEDSI (Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion) to accurately assess all programs.
- Promote a cultural shift in ways of working within DFAT and partner organisations that:
  - values flexibility, adaptability, and a long-term perspective beyond short-term project cycles. Shift funding models from project-based to outcome-based approaches. Instead of funding projects with rigid timeframes, focus on supporting initiatives that demonstrate measurable and sustainable results, regardless of the time required
  - reimagines or redefines the concept of "success" in gender and inclusion efforts by acknowledging its non-linear and intricate nature. This includes acknowledging and documenting adverse effects, opposition, responses, maintaining progress, and unforeseen results. Sometimes strong resistance from a community or country can also mean that gender and inclusion efforts are effective.

### **How can Australia best support gender equality internationally?**

There are a range of ways Australia can best support gender equality internationally. These are just some of the areas Oxfam would like to recommend:

- Prioritise specific support to civil society women’s rights organisations and their networks, including support for core costs and their organisational development. To be effective this support must be multi-year, predictable and include technical support. Specifically, we recommend setting up a specific fund for civil society women’s rights organisations and their networks, managed by an experienced NGO in this space. To be effective this fund would need to be resourced over at least a 5-year period with sufficient funds to meet needs and make an impact.
- Undertake soft diplomacy on gender equality. Consistent government to government engagement that highlights leadership by women and is consistent across Australia’s all-of-government approach can be an effective means of making progress.
- Advocate for gender balance in leadership roles, including on internationally agreed governance, finance and representative bodies, and implement gender balance in leadership roles in DFAT programs and projects, where applicable. Cultural norms that prioritise men and boys in decision making and formal consultation processes on project designs further expose women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals to increased risks of vulnerability, exclusion and exploitation. Pro-active approaches are needed to address this.
- Advocate for policy changes and donor coordination at the international level to create an enabling GEDSI environment for longer-term development efforts. This may involve engaging with other donor agencies and international organisations to promote a shift away from short-term projectisation.
- Provide technical assistance and funding to developing countries to develop, test and implement social policies, such as childcare and parental leave policies, and government

investments that relieve women's care burden and shift that burden within the household as well as from family to government.

- Finance and champion independent and intersectional gender impact assessments across Australian publicly-funded investments outside of overseas development assistance, including trade agreements and export financing investments.
- Support survival and safety of women's rights organisations, including in a highly patriarchal or religious contexts where they continue to face resistance in domestic spaces. It's crucial for international donors to work in close collaboration with women's rights organisations to tailor their support to the specific challenges and opportunities in each context. Flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and a long-term commitment are key principles for effective donor support. DFAT needs to build on existing ambitions to support women's rights organisations in the following areas that support and reinforce each other:
  - Support national and international networking and collaboration that helps organisations leverage their collective strength and share best practices.
  - Invest in organisation's advocacy and awareness campaigns aimed at raising awareness about gender inequality, discriminatory laws, and practices – to mobilise public opinion and influence policy changes.
  - Fund and champion legal support for women's rights organisations to navigate legal challenges and provide resources for legal representation when they face backlash, threats, or harassment for their work. Legal support is essential in protecting the rights and safety of activists and members.
  - Support research initiatives that provide evidence of gender disparities, violence against women, and the impact of discriminatory laws and practices. Data-driven advocacy can be powerful in effecting change.
  - Assist organisations in developing long-term strategic plans that address their specific context and challenges. This includes identifying key objectives, priorities, and approaches to overcome resistance.
  - Establish emergency response mechanisms and safety measures for women's rights activists who may face threats or violence due to their work. This could include relocation support, legal protection, and communication security.
  - Encourage diplomatic efforts by governments and international organisations to exert pressure on countries with high patriarchal systems to improve women's rights. DFAT can support advocacy campaigns targeting international forums and bodies.

### **What else should we consider in drafting our new International Gender Equality Strategy?**

In drafting the new International Gender Equality Strategy, Oxfam recommends that:

- The strategy should be developed in close consultation with experienced women's rights and feminist organisations in Australia and within Australia's international development sphere (Indo-Pacific). It should complement the strategies of other like-minded agencies.
- DFAT consider trialling and scaling new programming approaches to gender equality in Pacific and Asia, including:
  - programs that target the specific development challenges facing LGBTQIA+ communities and address the intersecting issues of homophobia and aggressive masculinities; and

- programs that support Indigenous-designed and facilitated leadership and political engagement, and support collaborations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leaders and Pacific Island women leaders.
- DFAT champion a transformation in the existing economic framework by broadening our perception of 'work' and the 'economy' beyond solely paid, official employment and monetised markets. There is a lack of comprehensive data globally on how race, ethnicity, citizenship, sex, and gender intersect to exclude numerous women from decent work. Rethinking how we measure economic 'development' must place equity, rectifying power imbalances, and achieving gender and racial justice at its core.