

## Considerations for International Gender Equality (GE) Strategy Submission

### Executive Summary


The new International Gender Equality Strategy comes at a time when we are halfway to the end point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We know the world is failing to achieve gender equality, making it an increasingly distant goal. As Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 identifies

*“Only 47 per cent of data required to track progress on SDG 5 are currently available, rendering women and girls effectively invisible. Nearly halfway to the 2030 endpoint for the SDGs, the time to act and invest in women and girls is now.”<sup>1</sup>*

An emphasis on women’s empowerment and advancement is critical and must be improved through addressing unequal power relations in all the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT’s) investments.

Tetra Tech International Development (Tetra Tech) are pleased to contribute our Submission on the Australian Government’s International Gender Equality Strategy to guide Australia’s thinking and approach going forward. Our submission is underpinned by a nuanced context analysis based on our lived experience and work across the Indo-Pacific region. It is also informed by feedback and observations from our partners and communities with whom we serve.

Gender Equality is central to Australian Government policy and programs, rooted in human rights that is centred on the indisputable fact that all human lives are of equal value, and that human rights must be upheld at all times. Tetra Tech’s position is that unequal power relations between women and men often increases women’s vulnerability to oppression, suffering and poverty. Whether it is decision-making within families, communities, organisations or national and international machineries, access to safe, and inclusive education past primary school, decisions about bodily integrity or risks to online and offline gender-based violence, more women and girls, than men and boys are marginalised, oppressed, and abused.



Commitments to gender equality made in the region by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) reflect global commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including on gender equality, climate change and human rights.

The latest available SDG 5 data shows that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.<sup>2</sup> The impact of COVID-19 and the backlash against women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights are further diminishing the outlook for gender equality. Violence against women remains high; global health, climate, and humanitarian crises have further increased risks of violence, especially for the most vulnerable women and girls; and women feel more unsafe than they did before the pandemic. Women’s representation in positions of power and decision-making remains below parity. Key tenets of the Australian Government policy such as the Green Energy Transition both domestically and internationally are best served though Gender Equality and Inclusivity noting the much stronger gender balance<sup>3</sup> in the renewables sector compared to traditional fossil fuels.<sup>4</sup> This reinforces the imperative nature of the new International Strategy on Gender Equality.

Against this backdrop, this Submission identifies and highlights the opportunities for Australia, our region and our world for greater stability, security, prosperity, and safety through targeted efforts seeking gender equality and the full and equal participation of all in our societies.

### Key Recommendations: the critical path forward for gender equality under the new strategy

**Recommendation 1: A decolonial and localised approach to gender equality across the development sector by all actors in the ecosystem subject to and influenced by Australian policy and programming is essential.**

We recommend that the International Gender Equality Strategy is firmly anchored within a decolonial understanding of gender equality, one that takes a firm intersectional approach, recognizing the multiple ways

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the gender snapshot 2022*, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022>

<sup>2</sup> *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2022* presents the latest evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals. UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022>

<sup>3</sup> Women account for 39% of the Australian clean energy workforce in Australia. While making up 50% of the Australian labour force, this is far more than the 16% employed by the Australian coal industry and the 23% employed by Oil and Gas in Australia. <https://clean-energy-australia-report-2022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Australia has formalised its commitment to gender equality in the clean energy transition by signing up to the equal pay, equal leadership and equal opportunity objectives of the global Equal by 30 campaign. <https://www.dcccew.gov.au/about/news/australia-pledges-gender-equality-for-clean-energy-sector>

women, men and non-binary people can be subject to discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes and bias. This allows a closer analysis of how gender intersects with and is impacted by other systems of power and their relation to characteristics such as ethnicity, age, social class, location, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and any other variable that purposefully oppresses.

For intersectional analysis to happen, and actions to be rooted in such nuanced analysis, all DFAT investments must purposefully break the binary in team structures that continues to provide opportunities for people from Australia and other 'Western' countries to be program/project team leaders. Research by the Diversity Council of Australia has found that diverse and inclusive organisations are three times more likely to be effective, five times more likely to be innovative and three times more likely to provide excellent customer service.

Diverse women and other marginalized populations must be provided with equitable opportunities to be seen as leaders, evaluators and coaches. With an increased focus on localisation, it is imperative that the International Gender Equality Strategy is hinged on a nuanced understanding of power and privileges, which also recognises that the local is also not homogenous. Investing in developing and strengthening a diverse cohort of local leaders is an imperative. This will enable not just richer and diverse perspectives to shape innovation, but also DFAT's demonstration to diversity, racial and gender equity and transformative inclusion.

**Recommendation 2: Sufficient resources, buy-in, gender expertise, and staff incentives must be expected, available and held to accountability at all levels.**

In line with the new International Development Policy, and Australia's forthcoming First Nations Foreign Policy, the International Gender Equality Strategy needs to underline the necessity of investing in institutional mechanisms, structures, rules, and norms that are driven by senior-level management in DFAT and implementing partners, with financial and human resources committed to implementing gender equality policies that are based on clear analysis of power and privileges and accounts for diversity, equity and inclusion.

All DFAT investments must have adequate technical experts across roles capable of identifying and addressing exclusion and intersectional issues (gender expertise does not just equal female staff but technical expertise, like health, digital inclusion, etc). "Non-gender" staff need to have the demonstrable capability and commitment (skill and will) to ensure that gender issues are included in all activities. "Gender" roles cannot be only for lower-level staff, but also for high-level staff with more influence and power. Incentives should be used to encourage staff to incorporate gender equality in an accountable and effective way into project design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

It is important that accountability measures by DFAT must be in place for non-compliance by DFAT staff and implementing partners. Supporting innovative pilots and scaling up successful projects such as the Australia Awards is another key strategy. DFAT can draw from the lessons, opportunities, and challenges of successful programs in Australia, such as the National Disability

Insurance Scheme (NDIS), to inform promising and good practices internationally.

**Recommendation 3: Long term funding is required to end all forms of online and offline gender-based violence and integrate peacebuilding in all DFAT investments.**

The International Gender Equality Strategy must provide scope for long term funding to diverse organisations to end all forms of gender-based violence, including in the digital space. It is necessary to shift the language from preventing to ending in line with Australia's National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, 2022-20233. Our efforts must highlight how all parts of society, including governments, businesses and workplaces, media, schools and educational institutions, the family, domestic and sexual violence sector, communities, and all individuals, must work together to achieve the shared vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation.

Adequate resources are needed to be routed through localised actions by national and regional organisations, including women's rights organisations, human rights defenders, organisations for people with disability, organisation of and for gender diverse and non-binary people, to implement gender equality. Infrastructure is another key area to consider, such as building centres like the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre in other Pacific countries. Tetra Tech can assist through its own facility in Suva.

**Recommendation 4: Focus on Economic security, people-centered trade agreements, with funding for access to decent, safe work and skills programs that enables marginalised women, gender diverse and non-binary people, people with disability and other cohorts that continue to remain in the margins, with capability to be financially secure and independent.**

Trade has the potential to deliver for everyone, enabling all participants to access their rights, achieve fair returns for their labour, and influence the system to be more equitable and sustainable. Conventional trade is nowhere near this ideal. Not only does it exclude many communities, it also exploits and abuses both people and the fragile planet we all depend on.

The International Gender Equality Strategy needs to take cognisance of the fact that market-driven approaches trim gender equality agendas to align with corporate and private interests, losing the transformative elements that might endanger the financial returns of the particular investment in question, and the interests of the private sector overall. It is imperative to take a decolonial lens, examining "niche" products and strategies such as gender lens investing where interventions and investments from the Global North continue to profit from the extraction of labour and resources in the Global South. The analytical report from the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), *'Gender Impact Investing and The Rise of False Solutions'* is a critical read. This report provides a succinct analysis for feminist movements within broader gender-lens investments' aiming to empower women economically.

The Australian Government has established the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to provide independent

advice to Government. This advice ensures women are at the centre of policy and decision-making. DFAT can invest in co-creating similar bodies in the Region through key agencies such as ASEAN, PIF and the Pacific Community (SPC) to ensure women are central to decision-making. In a similar vein, the Australian Government's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040 with its core objective of addressing the underweight trade and investment linkages between Australia and this dynamic, fast-growing region provides 75 far-sighted recommendations across four broad themes. Tetra Tech recommends that the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy and the International Gender Equality Strategy should be mutually reinforcing and that the suite of recommendations in the former strategy should be subject to a Gender and Inclusivity lens noting gender is accurately described as a cross-cutting issue in the Strategy currently.

### Recommendation 5: Step up in investing in digital inclusion.

Research reveals that despite unprecedented advances in digital technologies, women across the world continue to face unique barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from digital inclusion. 2.6 billion people are still offline, most of them women, girls, people with disability, those in remote rural locations. Digital inclusion, when coupled with gender justice, has the potential to accelerate every SDG. Gender and power analysis in digital technology is missing. This is cause for major concern since digital platforms, mobile phones and digital financial services are widely used and provide unique opportunities for women's economic empowerment and political participation. Digital technologies have the potential to contribute to achieving gender equality provided everyone has safe and equal access to use and benefit from them.

### Recommendation 6: Build authentic narratives by measuring changes in the status-quo.

The large scale of entrenched gender inequalities in the regions we work in, make it clear there is a need for all DFAT investments to focus clearly on high-quality gender equality outcomes. Currently, it is unknown how well the needs, challenges, insights, and power dynamics of all genders are actually taken into account in development and humanitarian assistance projects in the DFAT ecosystems, making it challenging to understand how gender-specific barriers, needs, challenges, insights, and power dynamics, in every DFAT investment, is happening; and *if* it is happening, which oppressive status-quo has changed.

Development investments often underserve themselves by limiting gender discussions to specific sections in reports. The International Gender Equality Strategy must commit to ensuring that intersectional approaches to data centre the voices of individuals at greatest risk of marginalization or discrimination. More nuanced, power informed gender analysis and comprehensive disaggregated data collection and use are needed. Integrating equity across the data value chain is an imperative, right from **data collection** (who has been included in identifying what data to collect and ways of collecting; to **data publication** (who is doing the analysis and what do they know about intersecting inequities); to **data uptake** (ways data can be combined and used to tell

stories of intersecting inequities and influence policy); to finally **data impact** (ways in which inequality, marginalisation and vulnerability has been reduced and ways we measure this).

By integrating equity in data value chain, DFAT can ensure decoloniality in narrative building, that shows the capabilities, strengths, efforts by local people leading the development of their communities, alongside state and non-state actors.

## Conclusions for consideration

Tetra Tech's work in Asia and the Pacific show that transformative change is only possible when complex issues are understood from a systems frame, and investments made to enable work to happen, across multiple levels, in partnerships with multiple organisations, using a clear Do No Harm analytical framework.

The new International Gender Equality Strategy must reflect the Government's commitment to achieve gender equality in Australia's forthcoming first National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-31, the Government's response to the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020), the National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030 and the Australian Government response to the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices). There is an exciting opportunity for Australia to lead by example, taking into account, the unique circumstances of each country and understanding of the cultural nuances.

## Tetra Tech Capability and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Services

Tetra Tech is an Australian organisation, headquartered in Adelaide. We currently deliver over AUD1 billion in aid investments across the Indo-Pacific on behalf of the Australian Government. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is the anchor embedded in our business strategy which drives value creation. Our Inclusion, Justice and Transformation Practice includes our diversity, equity and inclusion consulting team, which helps clients to build social justice focused accessible, equitable and inclusive businesses that enable people, communities and the planet to thrive. Through our Inclusion, Justice and Transformation Practice (the Inclusion Practice), we offer tailored services and resources designed to help organisations build a respectful, accessible and inclusive work environment. You can learn more about our work here: [Equality Inclusion and Diversity - Tetra Tech Asia Pacific](#)