



Water for Women submission for DFAT's Gender Equality strategy development

About Water for Women

The [Water for Women Fund](#) is funded by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Prime Minister of Australia announced the Fund in September 2016, in recognition of the critical role that improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) play in addressing poverty and contributing to economic and human development. Originally funded for a period of five years, from 2018 to 2022, and with a budget of AUD118.9 million, in November 2022 the Minister for International Development and the Pacific [announced](#) the Fund's extension for an additional two and a half years (2023 to 2025) and further funding bringing the total investment to AUD159.9 million for the seven year period (2018 to 2025).

The Water for Women Fund supports climate-resilient, socially inclusive and sustainable WASH services and systems, which contribute to safeguarding water security in our region. Equitable access to WASH is a building block for a climate-resilient future. The Fund's focus on inclusion is critical to equitably addressing climate risks as the Fund strengthens its focus on addressing climate change impacts and building resilience through inclusive WASH across the region. Building on its work in the initial phase (2018 – 2022), the Water for Women Fund responds to evidence that gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) can contribute to more effective and sustainable WASH outcomes. The Fund builds on the premise that WASH improvements are critical to women's and girls' well-being and offers an entry point to facilitate discussions in communities around gender inequality and harmful social norms. In addition to gender, the Fund has been exploring approaches to improve social inclusion more broadly to ensure other marginalised groups, such as those with a disability and from sexual and gender minority communities have improved access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services. The Fund covers the South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Pacific geographical regions and is based on Australian Aid priorities.

The Water for Women Fund is currently partnering with eight civil society organisations (CSOs) to implement 15 [WASH projects](#) in 15 Asia Pacific countries, with the aim of improving the delivery of climate-resilient, inclusive WASH. Simultaneously, four research organisations (ROs) are leading seven [research initiatives](#) across nine Asia Pacific countries to address knowledge and practice gaps for climate-resilient, inclusive WASH.

The goal of the Fund is 'Improved health, gender equality and well-being of Asian and Pacific communities through climate-resilient, inclusive and sustainable WASH'. Contribution to this aim falls into four end-of-program outcomes (EOPOs):

1. Strengthened national and subnational WASH sector systems with greater emphasis on climate resilience, gender equality, disability and social inclusion, safely managed WASH, and water security (EOPO1).
2. Increased equitable, universal access to and use of climate-resilient, sustainable WASH services, particularly for marginalised communities and community members (EOPO2).
3. Strengthened climate resilience, gender equality, disability and social inclusion in households, communities and institutions (EOPO3).
4. Strengthened use of new evidence, innovation and practice in climate-resilient, sustainable, gender-sensitive and inclusive WASH by other CSOs, national and international WASH sector actors (EOPO4).

In the lifetime of the Water for Women Fund (now close to six years), partners across the Asia-Pacific region have developed a wealth of evidence (breadth and depth) of what strong gender equality and social inclusion practice in and through WASH looks like. The following questions for the purpose of this submission will be answered through that lens.

What are international gender equality priorities?

Gender equality priorities should reflect targeted and sustained investments that support the following principles.

Gender and social equality must be central to global and regional initiatives aimed at climate-related decision-making and solutions. This means supporting the diverse voices and agency of women, Indigenous and marginalised people, who are disproportionately affected by climate-related impacts, and therefore, hold important knowledge for locally led solutions.

Multi-stakeholder recognition of SDG 6 – 'clean water and sanitation for all' – as foundational for the achievement of all other SDGs, and therefore its acceleration, is critical for creating climate-resilient communities and institutions, and advancing gender and social equality. Clean water and safe sanitation are significant contributors to the well-being, health and resilience of women and girls (including those with disabilities) and support their access to education and broader opportunities at all levels of public, social and economic life.

Collaboration with rights holder organisations that represent women and marginalised constituents (women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities) is paramount to find and support sustainable, locally led solutions.

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

Over the last six years, Water for Women has learnt that the following approaches are most effective in addressing systemic inequalities:

- A twin-track approach to investments - i.e. intentionally resourcing initiatives for mainstreaming [gender equality and social inclusion](#) into sectoral programming, and targeted initiatives that focus on empowerment, Do No Harm and systems strengthening
- Supporting investments with a focus on [shifting harmful social norms](#) that perpetuate gender inequality and the exclusion of social groups according to disability, ethnicity and gender and sexual identity.
- Working with rights holder organisations on empowerment initiatives with a [Do No Harm](#) lens and supporting their ongoing engagement with relevant government departments.
- Working with government duty bearers to support their commitment to gender equality and social inclusion in their policies and programs.
- Supporting and resourcing implementing organisations to have strong commitments to GEDSI capacity building of their own staff and GEDSI reflective practice in their programming.

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

Australia can best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally by:

Ensuring that investments support strong, intentional, twin-track approaches to gender equality, disability and social inclusion – mainstreaming in sector programming, alongside targeted interventions that support the empowerment of women and girls, in all their diversities.

By retaining a strong focus on inclusive WASH for climate-resilient and sustainable solutions, particularly in relation to sanitation and hygiene. Australia can help to ensure that women and girls are not further disadvantaged by the climate crisis and get SDG 6 back on course. Women and girls continue to bear the brunt of poor access to water, sanitation and hygiene, due to their reproductive and caregiving roles, menstrual health and hygiene needs, and restrictive gender norms.

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

Inclusive of the above, two other considerations for the development of the gender equality strategy are recommended:

1. Invest in multi-stakeholder approaches, partnerships and cross-sectoral collaborative efforts at different levels - government, private sector, civil society and rights holder organisations.

2. Invest in locally led, feminist-oriented organisations and networks to strengthen disaggregated data collection that helps to inform fit-for-purpose, climate-risk-informed and equitable policy decision-making.

Key Water for Women Resources:

[Towards Transformation in WASH: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool – Water for Women Fund](#)

[Towards Transformation: Shifting Social Norms for Transformative WASH - Water for Women Fund](#)

[Partnerships for Transformation: Guidance for WASH and Rights Holder Organisations - Water for Women Fund](#)

[Water-for-Women-Systems-Strengthening-LN1-web.pdf \(waterforwomenfund.org\)](#)