



## Submission to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) - International Gender Equality Strategy September 2023

### *Women in Aid & Development (WiAD) – The Importance of Investing in the Professional Development of Women Working to Deliver International Gender Equality Programs*

Women in Aid & Development (WiAD) is a membership organisation for women who work in, or aspire to work in, the international aid, development, and humanitarian sectors. Our mission is to share the skills, knowledge, and experience of women in these sectors to inspire and support all women to pursue and succeed in leadership roles. Established in 2012, the organisation has grown to a level of holding regular events in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, and Brisbane, with over 2000 women from around the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide participating in activities including mentoring programs and workshops. WiAD is currently considering requests to expand our activities to support locally based professional women working on Australian funded programs in PNG and the Asia-Pacific.

WiAD wishes to express its strong support for gender equality being central to the broader International Development strategy. We strongly believe that the development and implementation of a new international gender equality strategy is a very positive and necessary step for Australia.

Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) member statistics show that 80% of roles in the NGO sector are filled by women, but only about 50% of leadership roles are filled by women. This gap is one that WiAD is working to close. One of the barriers to women's advancement in the sector is the limited funding available within the budgets of many NGOs to effectively provide professional development opportunities. This comes about because donors expect expenditure to be delivered overseas and do not always understand that training and capacity building is a wise investment, to ensure accountable and transparent delivery of programs and the support of gender equity in the sector.

In developing this strategy, WiAD believes that there must be a significant emphasis on investing in the professional development of women who play pivotal roles in delivering international programs and in particular gender equality programs. We believe that such an initiative holds immense potential to advance the cause of gender equality on a global scale and deliver sustainable, positive impacts for communities worldwide, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and we ask this is considered in developing the strategy.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and managing contractors are constrained by funding limitations to support the professional development of women working in the sector. WiAD believes it is vital that women who are responsible for delivering Gender Equality programs to communities overseas, supported by DFAT, must also be supported by this strategy.

1. **Empowering Women to Lead:** One of the key rationales behind prioritising the professional development of women in this context, is to empower them to take on leadership roles within international organisations and programs. By investing in their skills, knowledge, and capacity-

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building, we can create a pipeline of skilled women who can drive these programs forward effectively, ensuring that they are both designed and implemented with a deep understanding of gender dynamics and specific needs.

2. **Enhancing Program Effectiveness:** Research has consistently shown that programs and projects led by diverse teams, including women in leadership positions, tend to be more successful and impactful. By investing in the professional development of women, we are not only promoting gender equality within our organisations, but also improving the outcomes of the international programs themselves.
3. **Promoting Local Ownership and Sustainability:** Empowering women to lead international programs fosters a sense of local ownership and sustainability while also acknowledging a diversity which reflects the broader development community. Women often have a unique perspective and a deep understanding of local contexts, which can lead to more culturally sensitive and sustainable solutions. Investing in their professional development ensures that they can contribute meaningfully and impactfully to program design and execution.
4. **Role Modelling and Mentorship:** In our experience, when women are given opportunities for professional growth, they become role models for younger women, encouraging them to pursue careers in fields related to international development and gender equality. Additionally, women in leadership positions provide mentorship to junior staff, creating a supportive environment for career advancement.
5. **Aligning with Global Commitments:** This initiative aligns with international commitments, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), which emphasise the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as fundamental elements of sustainable development. By investing in the professional development of women in Australian NGOs, we contribute directly to the achievement of these global goals.

To ensure the optimum conditions for a successful International Gender Equality Strategy, WiAD proposes the following actions:

1. **Allocate specific funding in all DFAT grants to support the professional development of staff who deliver international programs for gender equality.** This funding would support more staff to access professional development opportunities and secure higher quality training, mentorship, leadership programs, and educational opportunities.
2. **Set Clear Targets and Metrics:** Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) to collect statistics from member agencies annually. Increased funding would enable them to increase and improve data gathering and enable the development of clear targets and metrics to measure the success of this initiative, including the percentage of women in leadership roles, program impact, and the number of women who have received professional development support.
3. **Support NGOs by Funding Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Implement policies that promote gender inclusivity, including flexible work arrangements, family-friendly policies.

**In conclusion**, investing in the professional development of women in Australian agencies, who deliver international programs for gender equality, underpins the strategic imperative that will lead to more



effective, sustainable and impactful initiatives. It aligns with global commitments, promotes women's leadership, and empowers them to drive positive change in the pursuit of gender equality.

WiAD urges DFAT to consider these points and include professional development funding into all DFAT funded programs as part of the new international gender equality strategy. This will enable Australian women to create a more equitable and just world for all.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to reading the strategy in due course.

Sincerely,

Chris Franks AM FAICD | Chair  
Women in Aid & Development

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*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, pay our respects to elders past, present and future and support the First Nations people's Uluru Statement from the Heart and voting YES in the Referendum for the Voice to Parliament.*



## Appendix 1 - Background on Women in Aid & Development

Women in Aid & Development (WiAD) is a membership organisation for women who work in, or aspire to work in, the international aid, development, and humanitarian sectors. Members come from Non-Government Organisations, Government, Managing Contractors, and Consulting roles. Its mission is to share the skills, knowledge and experience of women in these sectors to inspire and support all women to pursue and succeed in leadership roles.

It is the only Australian-based organisation delivering resources, guidance, workshops and networking events for women committed to self-improvement, where they exchange knowledge, insights and experiences at regular gatherings which are held in four major cities - Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, and Melbourne – as well as online. WiAD has also been asked to help establish groups for women working in civil society organisations delivering DFAT funded programs in PNG and Asia-Pacific.

The organisation's website and social media platforms deliver information on careers and leadership, while a well-established mentoring program connects mentors with mentees and aims to help women embrace challenges and opportunities in their professional life. We assist women in overcoming structural, cultural and societal barriers they may face in striving to achieve leadership roles and gender parity in the sector.

**MISSION** - Our mission is to share the skills, knowledge, and experience of women in the aid and development sector to incite, inspire and support all women to pursue and succeed in leadership roles.

**VISION** - Our vision is an aid and development sector in which women support women to be successful in their careers and to achieve gender parity across leadership roles.

**VALUES** – We are committed to support other women to succeed in their careers; we are perpetual learners committed to self-improvement; we embrace both challenges and opportunities, we will succeed alongside other women and have a greater positive impact globally.

- Women helping women to succeed
- Embracing challenges and opportunities in our lives and careers
- Perpetual learning and self-improvement

WiAD is an organisation that is welcoming for, and respectful of, all women inclusive of gender and sexual identity and non-binary people, from all disciplines to share knowledge, and experience and gain insight and inspiration from others.

Women in Aid & Development is a volunteer driven organisation, funded by membership fees, donations, and limited sponsorship. Its continued growth, however, is severely hampered by a lack of the funding needed to expand and enhance current programs and workshops and to meet demand from women in Australia and the Asia Pacific.