

# TAKING A GENDER SENSITIVE APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE PREVENTION, MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

## IWDA POLICY POSITION PAPER ON GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC AND ASIA

This policy position outlines IWDA's position on gender and climate change in the Pacific and Asia. Our vision of gender equality for all requires a gender responsive approach to climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation. This paper looks at climate change in the Pacific and Asia, the gendered impacts of climate change, and how Australia's policies and approaches influence these issues.

### ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN IMPERATIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The impacts of climate change are gendered—meaning that men and women, in all their diversity, face different vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change.<sup>1</sup> Traditional gender norms mean that men and women occupy different roles in society, which make their vulnerabilities to climate change and its impacts quite different: “high levels of sexual and gender based violence, low levels of decision-making, strong gendered social norms, high levels of gender discrimination and poverty all exacerbate climate change risks for women and girls of all ages.”<sup>2</sup>

Women and girls are often responsible for gathering and preparing household food, water and fuel. As water, fuel, fish and other food sources become scarcer, women and girls must spend more time on these aspects of unpaid domestic labour, increasingly risking exposure to environmental and interpersonal hazards. The time spent on these activities and the risks faced in undertaking them uniquely affect women's capacity for economic empowerment.<sup>3</sup> Further, the food shortages and financial hardship associated with climate change can increase violence against women, and increased violence against women in the aftermath of natural disasters is well documented.<sup>4</sup>

#### IWDA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As an intersectional feminist organisation, IWDA is concerned with all issues affecting women's rights and gender equality—especially issues that affect the countries in which our partners live and work. Climate change presents a global threat: while climate change is not restricted by borders of sovereign states, its effects are felt differently by individuals and it is experienced differently based on geography. Climate change prevention, adaptation and mitigation is part of a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equality.

IWDA is interested in the impact of Australia's domestic policies on global climate change outcomes, particularly as they relate to the lived experiences of women in the Pacific and Asia. Australia has a vibrant set of civil society actors working on issues related to climate change and we aim to build on and complement the ongoing work of these organisations and individuals.<sup>5</sup> IWDA's experience brings an international feminist perspective: action on climate change is a crucial part of the fight for gender equality.

**PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP & PARTICIPATION**

By enabling more women to take on leadership roles and participate in decision-making spaces, and recognising the valuable leadership roles that diverse women have played and continue to play in their communities.

**STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S SAFETY & SECURITY**

By advocating for the inclusion of human security—including mobility, food security, healthcare and prevention of gender based violence—into national security policies and considering the relationship between these issues and climate change.

**ACCELERATE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

By enabling women, in all their diversity, to actively participate in the just and equal transition to low carbon economies, and empowering diverse women to take advantage of decent employment emerging from this transition.

**ADVANCE SYSTEMIC CHANGE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY**

By advocating for a well-resourced, gender-responsive climate change mitigation strategy and by holding the Australian Government to account for its approach to climate change.

## CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC AND ASIA

Anthropogenic climate change, meaning climate change caused and/or accelerated by humans, is one of the most pressing issues of our time.<sup>6</sup> Climate change is rooted in an economic model that causes damage to people, societies and the planet, as well as compounding existing inequalities and violence within and between states.<sup>7</sup> The high levels of air pollution, rapid deforestation and urbanisation in Southeast Asia are not only contributing to global climate change, but are exacerbating the symptoms of climate change, such as unpredictable weather patterns and rising seas, that are threatening states throughout the Pacific and Asia region.

### 1

## THE PACIFIC AND ASIA IS ONE OF THE MOST CLIMATE-VULNERABLE REGIONS IN THE WORLD

Climate change in the Pacific and Asia is a particularly pressing issue. The University of Notre Dame's Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) conducts an annual survey to rank 181 of the world's countries on their vulnerability to climate change and readiness to adapt.<sup>8</sup> As the table to the right demonstrates, the countries in which IWDA's partners work are some of the world's most vulnerable to climate change. Issues such as increasing frequency, severity and unpredictability of storms, increasing salination of the groundwater, rising temperatures and severe air pollution affect the region as a whole, while the Pacific faces specific and immediate threats such as rising sea levels, reduced biodiversity and the loss of coral reefs due to heat-induced mass coral bleaching.<sup>9</sup>

Changes in weather patterns mean that the agricultural industries upon which the majority of people in this region depend are no longer reliable while severe weather events, such as Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, cause billions of dollars of damage and result in significant loss of life.<sup>10</sup> People living in the Pacific and Asia are five times more likely to be hit by a natural disaster than those living in

Readiness to Respond to Climate Change (1=Most Ready/Least Vulnerable, 181=Least Ready/Most Vulnerable)	
Country	Rank out of 181
Cambodia	136
Fiji	107
Myanmar	144
Papua New Guinea	163
Solomon Islands	179
Timor-Leste	157

other regions, and the region lost more than \$USD1.3 trillion in assets between 1970 and 2016 due to natural disasters.<sup>11</sup> As noted by Oxfam, extreme events have become the norm for farmers in this region.<sup>12</sup>

Pacific Islanders are responding to these challenges and demanding immediate, progressive action on climate change prevention. Through intergovernmental mechanisms such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and civil society mechanisms like the Pacific Feminist Forum, representatives from all over the Pacific come together to call out powerful western governments for their inaction on climate change.<sup>13</sup>

2

## PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS ARE THE LEAST RESPONSIBLE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND EXPERIENCE SOME OF THE MOST SEVERE CONSEQUENCES

Pacific Island nations bear a very small portion of the responsibility for climate change, yet are burdened with an enormous proportion of the consequences because of their geographic location and topography. Though the Pacific Islands have long endured cyclones, floods, droughts and heatwaves, many traditional coping strategies that were in place to mitigate these challenges were eroded through colonisation.

This erosion of coping strategies includes importation of food and crops to replace adaptable indigenous food sources, and individualisation that has led to a thinning of traditional community networks.<sup>14</sup>

The loss of these traditional practices and knowledge combined with the increasing frequency and severity of catastrophic events has made it harder for Pacific Islanders to prevent, mitigate and adapt to today's climate-related challenges.

**Rising tides, salination of the water table, and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events (cyclones, monsoons) are just a few of the society- and life-threatening consequences of climate change faced by people in the Pacific**

**“Climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific” – Boe Declaration, Pacific Islands Forum, 2018**

**“[It is time] for the polluters to take main responsibility [for climate change], according to common but differentiated historical responsibility for imperial, colonial and other inequalities” – Pacific Feminist Charter for Action 2019**

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Recommendation 1:** Engage with women from the Pacific and Asia to ensure the specific needs of frontline communities are given appropriate attention and are incorporated into Australian Government policy.

**Recommendation 2:** Support women, in all their diversity, to be at the forefront of preserving and integrating positive indigenous/traditional knowledge and strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

# UNEVEN IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

No one is exempt from the consequences of climate change: floods, fires, droughts and tropical storms can happen to anyone. The world's medical, food and economic systems are already strained by the impacts of climate change. We are seeing an increasing spread of vector-borne illnesses, more heat-related deaths, higher rates of lung disease and illnesses caused by air pollution, and increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events that cause billions of dollars of damage.<sup>15</sup> While we will all bear the cost of climate change, the impacts on women are exacerbated by their gender roles.

1

## THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ARE FELT DIFFERENTLY BY MEN AND WOMEN

Women are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, for example through their reliance on small-scale or subsistence farming. Women undertake the vast majority of unpaid domestic labour, including collecting food, fuel and water.<sup>16</sup> Climate change and associated climate variability affect all of these activities negatively.<sup>17</sup>

Further, LBTI+ women and women with disabilities are even more acutely impacted by extreme weather events: emerging research, such as the 'Down by the River' report, demonstrates that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and humanitarian response do not meet the most basic requirements of gender diverse peoples.<sup>18</sup> This means that women living in developing countries, and especially in rural areas of developing countries, are some of the most vulnerable people to the effects of climate change.

The impacts of climate change are gendered, meaning that women and men experience the impacts of climate change differently due to gender roles

Women may experience increased domestic violence as a result of climate-change related water and food shortages

LBTI+ women and women with disabilities are at greater risk of marginalisation, violence and 'falling through the cracks' during disasters and response

2

## WOMEN ARE LARGELY EXCLUDED FROM THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES THAT DEVELOP CLIMATE CHANGE RELATED POLICIES

Women, especially women from marginalised groups, are underrepresented in all formal decision-making bodies from the local to multi-national level—including within climate change policy development.<sup>19</sup> This is important, because women play particular roles in societies and therefore have both specific concerns and insights relating to climate change. Without women's participation in formal policy development, these unique concerns and solutions are invisible.

Despite these barriers, there are women who are leading climate change adaptation and mitigation (including DRR) in their communities and at the global level. For instance, femLINKpacific's 2017 regional radio campaign 'Women's Weather Watch' promotes gender inclusive DRR in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. DiVA for Equality

Women are underrepresented in formal decision-making bodies at the global, national and local level

Women's diverse knowledge and concerns are excluded from the development of climate change policy

Most DRR responders are men—who often only consult with male community leaders and members

organised the first International Women’s Day march on Taveuni Island, Fiji, to prioritise women’s roles within climate justice. Women in Labutta and Pakokku townships of Myanmar are leading adaptation committees to develop adaptation shelters and conduct vulnerability mapping.<sup>20</sup> Diverse women are deeply involved in the production of knowledge regarding climate change, and are using this knowledge to fortify their communities against the harmful effects of climate change on a grassroots basis.<sup>21</sup>

3

### **INCLUSION OF WOMEN, IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY, IN FORMAL DECISION-MAKING BODIES RESULTS IN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND BETTER CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY**

Globally, indigenous women have long played a central role in environmental knowledge management, including ways in which communities have traditionally responded to environmental challenges.<sup>22</sup> Despite the numerous challenges women face in accessing decision-making spaces, women can, and do, play critical roles in response to climate change. Women’s knowledge of, and leadership in, sustainable practices at the household, community and national levels, as well as their roles in unpaid care work and sustainable resource management are invaluable.

Women are capable change agents, and should be included in the development of all stages of climate policy. Promoting women’s leadership in traditional and formal arenas, giving due consideration to indigenous knowledge and explicitly including the concerns of women are the first steps in creating gender-responsive climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation.

**Women have important knowledge about resource management in their communities**

**“Women’s participation at the political level can result in far greater responsiveness to the needs of diverse individuals”  
(DiVA 2017)**

**More diverse women in government means climate change policy will make use of diverse women’s traditional knowledge—and include the concerns of diverse women**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Recommendation 3:** Resource women’s rights organisations working in frontline communities to participate in decision-making spaces and processes.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure that diverse women, especially from the Pacific and Asia, are a central part of Australia’s response to climate change, disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery.

**Recommendation 5:** Invest in country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent adaptation action-planning (including disaster risk reduction) with specific attention to the local knowledge systems of indigenous peoples.

**Recommendation 6:** Actively promote women’s leadership in climate change decision-making at local, regional and global levels by including quotas for diverse women in decision-making bodies.

**Recommendation 7:** Act on the technical recommendations of diverse women working on the frontlines of climate change as well as the recommendations in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 41/26.

# GENDER, CLIMATE CHANGE AND AUSTRALIAN POLICY

Climate change is not isolated within a state's borders: Australia's energy policies impact its own territory as well as the air, ocean, land and livelihoods of its neighbours, and beyond. Under the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), Australia is responsible for a reduction in greenhouse gases and emissions that is proportional to our historical and current levels of pollution. CBDR was first identified within the context of climate change in the 1990s, as research demonstrated that a significant part of our current climate and environment related challenges are directly linked to the manner in which the western world had industrialised and practiced resource extraction.<sup>23</sup> The countries that have suffered the most from these industrialisation practices are also among the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. Australia should therefore take responsibility for its role in climate change by adopting domestic and foreign climate change policies in line with our international commitments.

1

## AUSTRALIA'S DOMESTIC CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES INFLUENCE OUTCOMES FAR OUTSIDE OUR BORDERS

In accordance with the CBDR principle, signatories to the Paris Agreement developed Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) plans.<sup>24</sup> Australia's "emissions have been rising since the Coalition [Government] repealed the carbon price and replaced it with the Direct Action scheme" in 2013, and rose for the third consecutive year in 2017.<sup>25</sup> Curbing emissions will be critical for Australia if we are to meet our Paris targets.<sup>26</sup> A critical source of Australia's continued failure to bring down emissions is in the continuation of policies that prop up the coal industry, such as the provision of floor prices and loans. Multiple international studies have reiterated the immediate importance of reducing global reliance on coal and the need for a complete phase out of coal by 2050 and an ultimate transition to a carbon neutral economy.<sup>27</sup> Unless Australia reforms its energy sector, we will continue to harm our economy, our society, our neighbours, and our planet.

**Australia will not meet its 2030 emissions reduction targets under current policies**

**Under current policies, Australia's emissions will increase by an annual rate of ~0.3%**

**Pacific Island nations face an existential threat due to climate change and the continued burning of fossil fuels by developed countries**

2

## AUSTRALIA HAS YET TO MAKE GOOD ON ITS PROMISE TO INVEST IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE FINANCING

In the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) for the past four years, Australia committed to developing and adopting gender-responsive climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. In a 2018 evaluation of 26 of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) climate change investments, a mere 23% demonstrated evidence of gender-related outcomes.<sup>28</sup> According to the evaluation, a number of projects that did not demonstrate gender-related outcomes had explicitly included gender in the design of the project. The gender-specific features of the project, such as a gender impact assessment or gender action plans, were not implemented or were inadequate.<sup>29</sup> This was partially explained by the way in which DFAT engages with its investments: gender processes "are less likely to be considered when DFAT is not actively involved in the management of the investment."<sup>30</sup> It is clear that DFAT must closely monitor its climate change investments to meet gender targets and outcomes.

**Only 23% of 26 ODA-based climate change interventions demonstrated gender-related outcomes, even when projects had gender-specific targets**

**In the FY 2019/20 aid budget summary, one page is dedicated to climate change investments. Gender sensitivity is not mentioned as a component of current or future climate financing**

## 3

## AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO RESPOND TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A COMMITMENT TO TAKE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Climate change will continue to wreak havoc on the Australian economy unless the Australian Government takes the necessary steps to prevent or mitigate this environmental disaster. The increasing frequency and duration of droughts, bush fires, tropical storms and agricultural diseases are a few of the challenges we already face—and modelling shows it will only get worse. The FY 2019-20 Federal Budget established a \$3.9 billion Emergency Response fund to enable state and territory governments to 'deal with' the inevitable fiscal hits from future natural disasters. These investments are one step in the right direction but by no means comprehensive. While it is undeniably important that state and territory governments are better resourced to support their citizens, prudent management of taxpayer funds suggests that provisioning for response must be accompanied by implementation of preventative strategies.

Similarly, in the aid program DRR, preparedness, and response funding has increased from \$39 million in FY 2018-19 to \$51 million in 2019-20, which is a welcome recognition of the realities of the increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters. Unfortunately, this increase in reactive spending is not bolstered through an increase in preventative spending. Following the final \$19 million contribution in December 2018, the Government has announced it will not replenish Australia's contribution to the Green Climate Fund—which aims for a 50-50 split in adaptation and mitigation spending and is a global effort to achieve the Paris targets.<sup>31</sup> The Prime Minister has stated he no longer wishes to "tip money into that big climate fund," and instead plans to fund climate change resistant and resilient infrastructure.<sup>32</sup> Preventing a problem is always cheaper than reacting to it—and climate change is no exception.

The FY 2019/20 Federal Budget established a \$3.9 billion Emergency Response Fund to enable state and territory governments to 'deal with' the fiscal hits from future natural disasters

Australia is partially funding response, rather than prevention

There is no new or additional funding for climate change work in the FY 2019/20 aid budget outside of infrastructure development

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Recommendation 8:** Allocate new and additional ODA funding for gender-sensitive climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation projects and programs, and allocate funding for hands-on DFAT management of these investments.

**Recommendation 9:** Require gender analysis of all climate investments across design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

**Recommendation 10:** Ensure Australian emissions regulations for businesses are developed by climate and energy experts, not businesses themselves.

**Recommendation 11:** Commit to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050.

**Recommendation 12:** Fulfil our obligations under CBDR:

- a) replenish Australia's contributions to the Green Climate Fund to a minimum of \$389.15 million in new funding over four years, in line with recommendations from the World Resources Institute;
- b) draw upon Australia's considerable gender expertise to advise on climate investments made by multilateral institutions;
- c) support women's rights organisations in frontline communities by directing a greater portion of our future climate action funding (such as GCF funding) to adaptation measures;
- d) Encourage the GCF and other relevant facilities to establish resourcing components that directly support women's rights organisations working in frontline communities.

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> IWDA refers to 'women,' 'women in all their diversity,' and 'diverse women' throughout this paper. We mean these phrases to include women of all ages, races, ethnicities, locations, levels of ability, religions and of all sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> DIVA for Equality 2017a

<sup>3</sup> Women and Gender Constituency 2018

<sup>4</sup> Dwyer and Woolf 2018

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Climate Council, Climate Action Tracker, SEED, AYCC, CANA, Action on Climate, Climate for Change and more.

<sup>6</sup> Parker 2018; Pacific Islands Forum 2018

<sup>7</sup> We Rise Coalition 2017, 8

<sup>8</sup> University of Notre Dame 2019

<sup>9</sup> Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017, 1019

<sup>10</sup> Eckstein et al. 2018; Richards and Bradshaw 2017; Myanmar Climate Change Alliance 2019

<sup>11</sup> ReliefWeb 2017

<sup>12</sup> Richards and Bradshaw 2017

<sup>13</sup> Pacific Feminist Forum 2019; Amnesty International et al 2018; Pacific Islands Forum 2018

<sup>14</sup> Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017, 1021; Fletcher et al. 2013

<sup>15</sup> WHO and UNFCCC 2015; Pierre-Louis and Popovich 2019

<sup>16</sup> DIVA for Equality 2017b; 2017a

<sup>17</sup> Terry 2009, 3; DIVA for Equality 2017b

<sup>18</sup> Dwyer and Woolf 2018; CBM Australia 2019; CBM Germany 2019

<sup>19</sup> Eastin 2018; UNISDR, UNDP, and IUCN 2009

<sup>20</sup> FemLINK Pacific 2017; DIVA for Equality 2018; MCCA 2016

<sup>21</sup> Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017; Charan, Kaur, and Singh 2016

<sup>22</sup> Mcleod et al. 2018

<sup>23</sup> Williams and Montes 2016, 116

<sup>24</sup> Government of Australia 2015

<sup>25</sup> Murphy and Cox 2019; Climate Council 2018

<sup>26</sup> Climate Action Tracker 2018a; Climate Council 2018; Stock 2018; Kilvert 2018

<sup>27</sup> Climate Action Tracker 2018b

<sup>28</sup> Gayfer et al. 2018, 40

<sup>29</sup> Gayfer et al. 2018, 40

<sup>30</sup> Gayfer et al. 2018, 41

<sup>31</sup> World Resources Institute, Waslander, and Amerasinge 2019; World Resources Institute, Waslander, and Vallejos 2018

<sup>32</sup> Readfearn 2018

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