



## A Feminist Foreign Policy for Australia

### Joint submission to the 2020 Review of Australia's International Development Cooperation Policy

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This joint submission from five leading gender equality focused Australian NGOs makes the case that Australia should adopt a feminist approach to all areas of its foreign policy, including international development. While the current review is focused on Australia's international development cooperation policy, the recommendations below speak to the broader foreign policy landscape, and argue that a feminist approach would support the achievement of Australia's goal of a peaceful and flourishing region.

#### **Why Australia needs a feminist foreign policy**

Gender is a crucial factor in shaping the economies, governance and stability of nations around the world.<sup>1</sup> States with higher levels of gender equality also tend to have a lower likelihood of conflict and violence, lower levels of corruption and citizens who place a higher level of trust in their government.<sup>2</sup> Women are disproportionately represented among people living in poverty and exclusion and those most affected by conflict, disasters and climate change, due to widespread gender inequalities in access to resources and decision making. Putting women's empowerment at the forefront of our development and international relations agenda can position women to be active and profound agents of change in redressing the power dynamics which result in gender and other intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. This will not only drive better economic outcomes over the longer term but ensure the prosperity of all of the world's population.

Australia's interests in a peaceful and flourishing Asia Pacific region are inextricably linked to progress on gender equality. This is recognised by DFAT's existing *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*, which argues that gender equality "is a global issue, relevant to Australia and the economic, social, welfare and foreign policies of all countries."<sup>3</sup> However, high levels of gender inequality threaten the achievement of Australia's foreign policy objectives. For example, while no Pacific countries are currently experiencing conflict at the national level, the Asian Development Bank has identified poor performance on gender equality as a key commonality amongst the 9 of 14 Pacific nations it classifies as fragile, which has the potential to undermine regional stability.<sup>4</sup> In the Pacific, women face a higher chance than men of being killed by disasters, and are more susceptible to sexual and gender based violence.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, key development and foreign policy initiatives such as the Pacific Step Up are undermined by the high levels of gender inequality in our region, underscoring the need for a bold and ambitious approach.

Australia has been a global leader on gender equality in international development cooperation, however we are now being overtaken as countries including Sweden, Canada, France and Mexico adopt feminist foreign policy and development cooperation approaches. More importantly, initiatives which connect

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<sup>1</sup> Ki Moon 2014

<sup>2</sup> Our Secure Future 2018

<sup>3</sup> DFAT 2016, 3

<sup>4</sup> Asian Development Bank 2016, x–xi, 80

<sup>5</sup> UN Women 2016, 11

Australia's development cooperation efforts more closely with defence cooperation, trade and investment, (such as the Pacific Step Up) demonstrate the need for a holistic and interconnected approach to all areas of foreign policy. Going beyond gender equality as an outcome and prioritising a feminist approach to how Australia defines success and acts to achieve our interests offers a way to strengthen gender equality and human security, and bring coherence across all areas of foreign policy. The current aid policy review is an opportunity to set the groundwork for Australia to move towards a feminist foreign policy approach, and strengthen efforts to achieve gender equality for all.

### **What is feminist foreign policy?**

As more countries adopt feminist approaches to foreign policy, efforts have been made to come to a common definition and identify the principles, accountability mechanisms and performance targets required for a feminist approach. While there is no single definition of feminist foreign policy, there are common traits to the approaches adopted by those countries which have committed to feminist foreign policy and international development cooperation approaches. These efforts have been supported by feminist civil society groups, which continue to evolve the concept of feminist foreign policy and work to define the concept, develop principles and criteria, and propose measurable targets.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing from this growing body of work, feminist foreign policy can be defined as an approach which places advancing gender equality as the goal of a nation's foreign policy, and commits to conducting gendered analysis of all initiatives across all areas of foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> This analysis must be rights-based and intersectional, interrogating the ways in which policy decisions impact on people based on their gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and other factors. It must also seek to disrupt the gender norms and power dynamics that give rise to inequality. It must be comprehensive, covering all aspects of foreign policy including defence, trade, diplomacy and development, and ensure a cohesive approach with domestic efforts to reduce gender inequality.<sup>8</sup>

Across Australia's foreign policy agenda, this would mean incorporating a gendered analysis of our trade, defence and other areas of foreign policy. While the principles of free trade can play an important role in creating vital economic opportunities for women, trade policy as it is configured today is often failing to protect the rights of women, particularly in lower income countries. The Australian Government must do more to ensure that Australia's trade policies do not exacerbate gender inequalities and address the potential negative impacts on the lives and livelihoods of women in some of the poorest countries in the world. The Australian government should strengthen its approach to trade policy that supports principles of gender-just trade and includes practical recommendations to protect women in low income countries from the most damaging impacts of trade liberalisation. Incorporating gender considerations into trade policy before, during and after the negotiation of current and future free trade agreements will ensure that free trade will benefit women in practice.

In the defence sector, a feminist foreign policy approach would mean investing in peacebuilding, and prioritising the meaningful inclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts. As recognised by the Department of Defence women make an indispensable contribution to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace, and confidence building.<sup>9</sup> Hearing the voices of women at every step of decision making is vital to ensuring a robust development policy is delivered. Continued efforts would be required to ensure the international rules based order can survive in the face of increased nationalism and parochialism while also working to ensure that it evolves in ways that address the challenges of our time: addressing collective action problems, growing bellicosity of nations and increasing difficulties of multilateralism.

Improving coherence across all areas of foreign policy, including trade, diplomacy, humanitarian work, defence, security and aid, is key to strategies for women's empowerment. International assistance efforts can be contradicted and undermined if other foreign policy areas are not working towards shared objectives and upholding the same high standards for women's human rights and gender equality.

This review represents an opportunity for Australia to progressively move towards a more feminist approach to development cooperation and foreign policy. Adopting a feminist international development cooperation framework would build on the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, which names gender

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<sup>6</sup> Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2016; Thompson and Clement 2019; Ridge et al. 2019; W7 2019, 7

<sup>7</sup> Thompson and Clement 2019

<sup>8</sup> Ridge et al. 2019

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defence 2018

equality among Australia's values and argues that pursuit of gender equality internationally is in Australia's national interest,<sup>10</sup> as well as the previous aid policy framework and DFAT's Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy (which already applies to DFAT's non-aid functions), and set Australian on the path to becoming a world leader in advancing gender equality.<sup>11</sup>

**Recommendation:** Adopt a feminist framework for international development cooperation, in line with broader feminist foreign policy approach.

**Recommendation:** Adopt a coherent approach to all areas of foreign policy, including trade, diplomacy, humanitarian work, defence, security and development cooperation, to ensure actions in these areas support gender equality.

**Recommendation:** Embrace and showcase Australia's progress on gender equality in government communication strategies.

### **What a feminist foreign policy would mean for Australia's international development cooperation program**

International development cooperation is one of the critical levers of foreign policy, and adopting a framework that is consistent with a broader feminist foreign policy approach is critical if Australia wants to achieve its objectives of a peaceful and flourishing region.

In line with the definition of feminist foreign policy outlined above, a feminist development cooperation framework would need to identify progressing gender equality as a core goal of Australia's aid program, and commit to undertaking gender analysis across all policies and investments with development objectives. This includes investments under the development cooperation program, as well as blended finance initiatives such as the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific.<sup>12</sup>

**Recommendation:** Enshrine gender equality as a core goal of Australia's international development cooperation program

**Recommendation:** Commit to conducting human rights-based, intersectional gender analysis of all policies and investments within the international development cooperation program, including blended finance initiatives.

The 2014 aid performance framework, *Making Performance Count*, included gender equality as one of 10 performance targets for the aid program in the commitment that "[m]ore than 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, will effectively address gender issues in their implementation."<sup>13</sup> Though this target has not yet been met, there is evidence to show that it has been successful in supporting greater technical capacity for gender analysis within DFAT, and ensuring that new investments are designed with gender considerations in mind.<sup>14</sup> Maintaining this target, and making a commitment to raise the target to 85% in three years' time, would enable DFAT to build from and improve upon the progress made to date in mainstreaming gender considerations across the aid program.

Progress towards the 80% *performance* target would be further supported by complementary *investment* targets, ensuring that Australia's international development cooperation efforts are directed towards gender equality initiatives. This would not only support progress towards the gender target, but improve effectiveness overall, as DFAT performance data has shown that programs with a gender focus outperformed the average across all 6 performance criteria including effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.<sup>15</sup> In this space, Australia can take guidance from internationally recommended targets for investment in gender equality initiatives. The OECD DAC gender marker is the best available internationally comparable measurement for gender equality in Official Development Assistance (ODA). The gender marker measures the proportion of a nation's ODA that is directed toward programs which list

<sup>10</sup> DFAT 2017, 11

<sup>11</sup> DFAT 2016

<sup>12</sup> The need for a comprehensive approach to the AIFFP is outlined in IWDA's paper: Making Infrastructure Work for Gender Equality. IWDA 2019

<sup>13</sup> DFAT 2014, 8

<sup>14</sup> DFAT 2019, 12–13

<sup>15</sup> DFAT 2018, 14

gender equality as their primary or secondary objective. The W7 has recommended an internationally comparable standard for feminist aid, that by 2025 85% of ODA integrates gender equality as the primary or secondary objective, with 20% going to investments where gender equality is the primary objective.<sup>16</sup> On this measure, 60% of Australia’s aid is spent on initiatives with gender equality as the primary or secondary objective (based on the most recent and internationally comparable figures available).<sup>17</sup> This places us within the top 10 OECD donors, and makes a commitment to reaching the target by 2025 an achievable aim.

**Recommendation:** Maintain the performance target that more than 80% of investments effectively address gender equality issues in their implementation, and commit to raising the target to more than 85% in 2023.

**Recommendation:** Introduce complementary investment targets, measured against the OECD DAC gender marker, that 20% of Australia’s aid budget is dedicated to investments which list gender equality as their primary objective and 65% list gender equality as their secondary objective (85% overall).

Women’s rights organisations deliver outcomes by being firmly rooted in local communities, contexts, needs and experiences, reaching women in marginalised communities, and enabling those without power and status to have a voice and to advocate for basic rights.<sup>18</sup> In conflict-affected countries, engaging with local women’s organisations and networks and ensuring that women participate in democratisation, peacebuilding and development processes is key to the success of those processes and with them, to the whole of the women, peace and security agenda.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this, women’s rights organisations receive just 36 cents for every \$100 of ODA worldwide.<sup>20</sup> Australia is currently performing above the OECD average in this area—coming in at seventh for its funding to women’s equality institutions and organisations. This represents just 1.24% of our bilateral allocable ODA.<sup>21</sup> Australia has a significant opportunity to match its policy leadership on gender equality with financing leadership and unlock an additional \$130 million per year in funding for women’s rights organisations by increasing our contribution to just 5% of our bilateral allocable ODA.<sup>22</sup>

**Recommendation:** Commit to allocating 5% of bilateral allocable ODA towards women’s rights organisations.

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<sup>16</sup> W7 2019

<sup>17</sup> CARE Australia and IWDA 2019, 11

<sup>18</sup> Derbyshire et al. 2018, 7; IWDA 2018; Klugman et al. 2014

<sup>19</sup> UN Women 2015, 41–42

<sup>20</sup> Calculated by the proportion of CRS sector code 15170 against total bilateral allocable aid. OECD 2019

<sup>21</sup> OECD 2019

<sup>22</sup> Converted from the OECD reported figure of USD88 million, as per conversion rates at 6/2/2020. OECD 2019.

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