

POLICY BRIEF
8 MARCH 2018

LEADING CHANGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

"We will support women's organisations, networks and coalitions wherever possible, particularly those giving a voice to marginalised groups such as women with disabilities, indigenous women or young women and girls."¹ DFAT, Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Strategy

IWDA knows that supporting and working in partnership with women's rights organisations and networks is crucial for achieving sustainable change for women and girls. Research shows clearly that strong, autonomous women's movements are essential to realising women's rights.² This is because women's movements and the organisations they are comprised of know their local context and communities and understand the politics and priorities of their nations. Women's rights organisations and movements are, therefore, ideally placed to work collectively to push for and support transformative change.

Yet, women's rights organisations continue to face financial unsustainability and current funding trends often constrain the ability of these organisations to access funding. In a context where women's rights organisations are increasingly facing backlash and hard won gains are under attack, it is more important than ever that these organisations are supported and resourced.

The Australian Government's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* recognises the work of women's rights organisations as critical to progressing gender equality. IWDA calls on the Australian Government to back women's rights organisations by setting a 10% target for investments that have gender equality as a principle target by 2025, and by improving transparency around aid amounts and allocation. Flexible, long-term, core funding for women's rights organisations is also vital for sustaining the long-term movement building work that underpins progress towards gender equality.

Why does supporting women's rights organisations and networks matter?

Women's rights organisations are led by and for women with the primary objective of working to advance gender equality and women's rights. At IWDA, we believe that supporting and working in partnership with women's rights organisations and networks is crucial for achieving progressive change and driving progress across the region.

Why does supporting women's rights organisations matter?

- Proven record of achieving change
- Knowledge of local context and communities
- Supporting women, including marginalised women, to be heard
- Providing a transformative alternative to mainstream projects and services
- Contributing to collective action and change through movements and networks

A proven record of achieving change

Some of the most important advances in women's rights have been secured through the efforts of women's movements. This includes international treaties and frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the gender-related targets across the Sustainable Development Goals. Women's rights organisations and movements have been central to building knowledge on gender discrimination through research, innovative concepts and gender-specific data collection; proving to be pioneers in designing effective and innovative approaches to advance gender equality.³

Women's rights organisations have experience and expertise across the issues prioritised within Australia's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy and other gender-related targets. This includes pioneering effective models for tackling violence against women and girls, supporting women to become leaders in their communities and advocating for legal reforms that introduce and expand women's rights including affirmative action. They are also playing a crucial role in mitigating conflict and building peace, and mobilising women to advocate for change at the local, national and international levels. Women's rights organisations and movements work to make a difference for women, whether or not it is the political priority of the moment. They help to sustain momentum for change and hold governments (and organisations) accountable for their commitments.

Knowledge of local context and communities

Women's rights organisations focus on women-led solutions that are firmly rooted in local communities, contexts and needs. They tackle the day to day issues that affect women's lives and are expert at providing programmes that are appropriate to women's multiple needs. By playing a unique role in service provision, social norm and behaviour change work and advocacy, women's organisations provide a way to reach marginalised women, including disabled, rural, indigenous, elderly, ethnic minority and widowed women. Local women's organisations also understand the challenges facing women at the household and community level, which shape their opportunities, including unpaid care and household work and community attitudes towards women's participation. Through well-established community-based networks, which can include the justice sector, service providers, and political power holders, women's groups are better able to affect change in areas where governments have little reach.

Supporting women to be heard

Women's rights organisations play a vital role in enabling those without power, status and rights to have a voice and to advocate for basic rights. Women's rights organisations help to strengthen the links between leaders and women at the community level. They also support women, particularly marginalised women, to be heard and to hold their governments to account at all levels. They provide crucial spaces for women to develop the skills, relationships and experience to become leaders themselves. Where women are able to take up positions of power, some women's rights organisations deliver long-term ongoing support through initiatives such as mentoring, capacity-building, and technical and legal advice. In short, *“strong women's organisations and movements play a critical role in creating spaces for women and girls to come together, analyse their situation and how it could be improved, and realise that the injustices they experience are also experienced by others, are structural, and can be challenged.”*⁴

Responding to women's needs

Women's rights organisations frequently fill gaps in service provision for women or provide an important transformative alternative to mainstream services. For example, holistic support for female survivors of violence in the security of a woman-only space which focuses on both immediate priorities and women's empowerment to support their own long term recovery.⁵

From the some to the many

Women's rights organisations often work as part of diverse and far-reaching networks and movements, linking knowledge and influence to advocate for change at local, national and international levels. A growing evidence base demonstrates the reach and transformation that is possible when long term and serious investment is made in women's organisations working to build women's collective power for change.⁶ Research in 70 countries across four decades found that the mobilisation of women's organisations and movements is more important for tackling violence against women and girls than a nation's income, progressive political parties, or the representation of women in politics.⁷

The Solomon Islands Women's Forum

In 2016, the first ever Solomon Islands Women's Forum was initiated by IWDA's partner, Women's Rights Action Movement (WRAM) together with five other co-convenors - Solomon Islands National Council of Women, YWCA Solomon Islands, Vois Blong Mere Solomon Islands, West Are 'Are Rokotanikeneni Association (WARA), and Young Women's Parliamentary Group. This was the first ever Solomon Islands Women's Forum organised by and for Solomon Islands women. The Forum brought together over 65 women of all ages from the nine Provinces of Solomon Islands for a five-day long event, with the aims of fostering solidarity amongst women, jointly identifying and prioritising the key issues faced by women in the country, and strengthening the women's movement in Solomon Islands. In 2017, this was followed by a second Women's Forum. Significantly, the idea for the Solomon Islands Women's Forum was seeded from connections across the Pacific women's movement and shared learning about the Fiji Women's Forum.

The discussions in the National Women's Forum focused on three key themes: women in leadership and decision making, eliminating violence against women and girls, and the economic empowerment of women and girls. Other national women's issues discussed included: sexual and reproductive health, rural development; and women and education as well as other emerging issues. The Forum released an outcome statement in 2016, with recommendations across these themes. In 2017, the Forum revisited these themes and made further recommendations. These are being taken forward through joint action planning by the co-convenors to ensure the needs of Solomon Islands women are prioritised both in policy and practice.

In this way, these forums have set a mandate for national advocacy and development initiatives based on lived experience from women across the country. They have also provided space for building momentum and political will around issues such as ending violence against women and girls and temporary special measures to increase women's political participation.

Is funding reaching women's rights organisations and networks?

There is growing interest in investing in women and girls as key agents for development. However, greater attention to the rights of women and girls has not improved the funding situation for women's rights organisations.⁸ While mechanisms and sources of development financing are becoming increasingly diversified, the focus is often on economic growth and return on investment, rather than on human rights.⁹ This often leads to increased investment in women and girls being promoted as 'smart economics' rather than promoting women's rights for their own sake.¹⁰ This can skew investment towards instrumentally focussed initiatives rather than innovative and transformative approaches that work to change power dynamics and challenge the root causes of gender inequality.

Despite their proven record of achieving change for women's rights and gender equality, women's rights organisations and networks remain under-resourced and are often marginalised from decision making processes. In 2011, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) completed a global survey of 1119 women's organisations worldwide. The median annual income in 2010 in AWID's sample was USD 20,000.¹¹ AWID's research has consistently demonstrated that the overall financial sustainability of women's rights organisations is precarious. Women's rights organisations and networks remain reliant on short-term project support rather than long term flexible funding. In AWID's research sample, 48% of

responding organisations had never received core funding, and 52% had never received multi-year funding.¹² Half-way through the 2011 fiscal year, only 13% of organisations that responded to the AWID survey had secured the funding they needed for the rest of the year.¹³

Women’s rights organisations in the Pacific face particular challenges accessing funding. As at September 2015, AWID’s Feminist Donor database, which identifies funders for women’s rights organisations, reported that 80% of donors were located in North America and Europe and only 6% gave to countries in the Pacific.¹⁴

Support for ‘women’s equality organisations and institutions’ within the Australian aid budget

The OECD tracks aid in support of women’s equality organisations and institutions through a ‘purpose code’ used in annual reporting on aid activities by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members. This code helps to track donors’ support to women’s organisations and ministries. In 2016, 0.56% (USD 453.559 million) of total allocable aid across DAC members (USD 80830.993 million) went to the women’s equality organisations and institutions purpose code. In Australia, as seen in the table below, support for women’s equality organisations and institutions is similarly low, representing 1.22% (22.379 USD million) of total sector-allocable aid in 2016.¹⁵



Support for gender equality and women’s empowerment

As part of their annual reporting to the OECD, DAC members are requested to indicate for each individual aid activity whether gender equality is one of its policy objectives. An activity can be classified as targeting gender equality as a *principal* objective, a *significant* objective or as not targeting gender equality as a policy objective.

Applying the Gender Equality Marker

Principal Objective: Gender equality is an explicit objective and is fundamental to the design and impact of the activity. The activity would not have been undertaken without this objective.

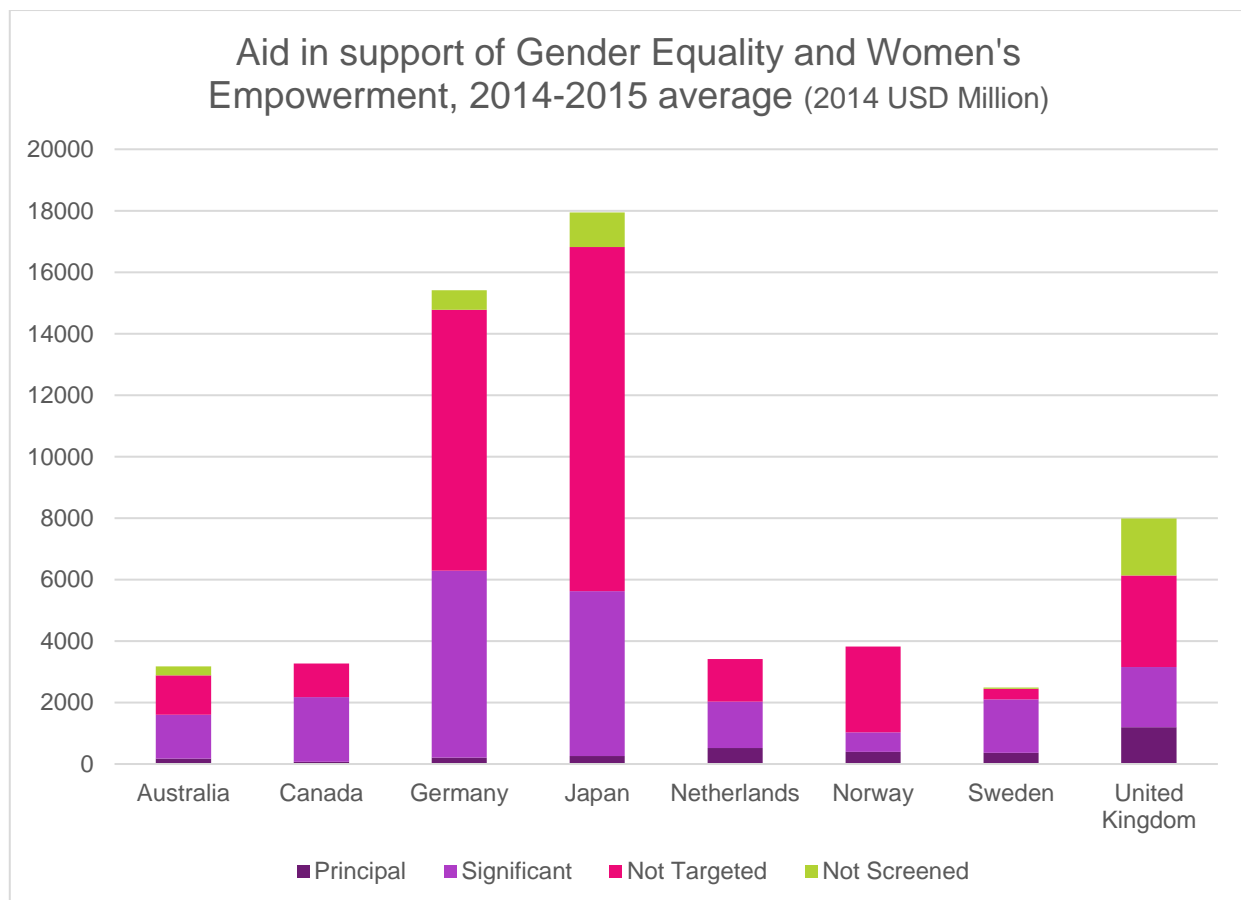
Significant Objective: Gender equality is an important but secondary objective of the activity. It is not the principal reason for undertaking the activity.

Not Targeted: An activity has been screened against the gender equality marker but was found not to target gender equality as one of its policy objectives.

Not Screened: Although coverage rates are improving not all aid is screened against the gender equality marker.

In 2015-16, according to the Performance of Australian Aid Report, Australia spend \$2.02 billion on investments that targeted gender equality as a principal or significant objective, equating to 55 percent of total aid expenditure screened against the marker. However, investments with a specific (principal) focus on gender equality made up only 6% of this 55%.¹⁶

How does this compare with other donors? Information from the OECD DAC for 2014-15¹⁷ shows that Australia identified USD 175 million as supporting gender equality as a *principal* objective and USD 1,423 million allocated to activities supporting gender equality as a *significant* objective. In comparison to other donors, Australia has a high proportion of aid focussed on gender equality as a significant objective but does not compare as well on activities supporting gender equality as a principal objective. Australia also has quite a high proportion of activities that have not been screened against the gender marker. This may artificially inflate the percentage of gender-equality focussed aid, which is calculated as a percentage of screened aid.



Importantly, for investments where gender equality is a *significant* objective, it is currently impossible to know how much is actually spent on specific action to promote gender equality and address barriers to women's economic empowerment. What the reported figures tell us is that projects worth USD 1,423 million had gender equality as an important but secondary objective. It does not provide any information about what was spent on specific activities to integrate gender equality. Improving the ability to track and report how much is spent, where, to promote gender equality is crucial to assessing effectiveness.

Plan for Action: Supporting and resourcing women's rights organisations

The Australian Government can take a lead in promoting the crucial role of women's rights organisations and networks in realising women's rights by:

- (a) Promoting the role of women's rights organisations and networks and encouraging partnership.
- (b) Supporting women's organising and movement-building
- (c) Tracking and increasing funding support for women's rights organisations and networks.
- (d) Adopting ways of funding which work for women's rights organisations, in particular, providing core, multi-year funding that enables women's rights organisations to be responsive and focus where they can have greatest impact.

(a) Promoting the role of women's rights organisations and networks and encouraging partnership

The Australian Government, and development actors it funds, have a role to play in promoting the importance of women's rights organisations as agents for change. Women's rights organisations frequently face the challenge of a general lack of gender awareness in society and limited understanding about why women's rights organisations are needed. Support for women's rights organisations may also be affected by the lack of women in positions responsible for making decisions about how funding is allocated, for example in senior positions in government departments, international financial institutions and the private sector. Additionally, the work of women's rights organisations at community level is often overlooked, particularly in fragile contexts, where risk of violence and limited resources can restrict the visibility of their work.

One way to promote partnership with women's rights organisations would be to make working with such organisations a condition of funding. For example, international NGOs and private contractors implementing DFAT-funded programs related to gender equality and women's empowerment should be working with local women's organisations as part of building sustainable change. This expectation could be included in contract conditions and the level of engagement with, and support for, local women's rights organisations included in selection and monitoring processes.

(b) Supporting women's organising and movement building

It is vital that resources to women's rights organisations and networks support leadership development and movement building, as well as programs with specific, quantifiable outcomes.¹⁸ The Pathways of Women's Empowerment programme research found that interventions aimed at supporting women's capacities to act together and creating supportive relationships among women are much more likely to have a transformative effect than interventions aimed at individual women.¹⁹ The World Bank's voice and agency research also concluded that women's movements are crucial to build the necessary consensus for progressive policy and legal reform.²⁰

(c) Tracking and increasing funding support for women's rights organisations and networks

Despite an increase in the demand for funding from women's rights organisations worldwide, the level of funding has not increased. Women's rights organisations continue to face financial unsustainability and current funding trends often constrain the ability of these organisations to access funding.

IWDA urges the Australian Government to set a 2025 deadline for 10% of Australia's aid investments to have gender equality as a principle objective.

Funding support for women's rights organisations and networks should also be increased, lifting aid coded as supporting 'women's equality organisations and institutions' above current levels (currently less than 2% of sector allocable aid). Improving the ability to track and report how much is spent on gender equality and women's empowerment, and where, particularly when gender is mainstreamed within activities, is also crucial.

(d) Funding which works for women's rights organisations

Core funding for women's organisations is vital for sustaining the long-term movement building work that underpins progress towards gender equality. Women's rights organisations need flexible funding which can cover core operating costs such as salaries, facilities, equipment and communications as well as specific project costs. The emphasis should also be on providing long term, multi-year funding; empowering women and changing attitudes, beliefs, norms and practices that underpin gender inequality is a slow process.

Long term sustainable funding makes a difference

The Australian Government has provided financial support to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) since 1989. For example, from 2009-2015 FWCC received \$8.42 million in DFAT funding. This continued, long term support has enabled FWCC to develop into an organisation which is working not just in Fiji, but across the region, to provide services for female survivors of domestic violence, mentoring programs for women and working to change attitudes towards violence at the village level. The training FWCC has undertaken over the years has created a pool of specialists and practitioners on ending violence against women in the Pacific and 'has made a significant contribution toward building human resource capacity for eliminating violence against women and has been instrumental in the development of rights-based, gender transformative services.'²²

Supporting and resourcing women's rights organisations and networks is particularly important in a context where women's rights organisations are facing increasing backlash. The space for civil society is also increasingly being restricted in some countries.²¹ The Australian Government can play a key role to amplify existing international agreements and agreed language on women's rights and to engage with, and support, the efforts of women's rights organisations and networks to create transformative change for women and girls everywhere.

¹ DFAT (2016), *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*, p.7, available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/documents/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.pdf>

² Htun, M. and Weldon, L. (2012) 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005', *American Political Science Review*, Cambridge University Press and the American Political Science Association

³ AWID (2008), *The State of Women's Organisations*, AWID, Fundher Fact Sheet No. 1, April 2008, available at: http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/witm_-_factsheet_1.pdf

⁴ Womankind Worldwide (2013), *Leaders for Change: Why Support Women's Rights Organisations?*, p.4, available at <https://www.womankind.org.uk/docs/default-source/resources/briefings/leadersforchange-final.pdf?sfvrsn=67>

⁵ Women's Resource Centre (2011), *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary and community organisations*, November 2011, available at:

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2011/h/hidden_value_wrc_sroi_report_2011_2.pdf.

⁶ See for example, AWID (2014), *Women Moving Mountains: The Collective Impact of the Dutch MDG3 Fund*, available at: <http://www.awid.org/Library/Women-Moving-Mountains3>; H. O'Connell (2012) *What added-value do organisations that are led and managed by women and girls bring to work addressing the rights, needs and priorities of women and girls?*, *Comic Relief Review*, available at: <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/Comic%20Relief%20Review%20of%20Value%20Add%20of%20Women-led%20Organisations.pdf>. Pathways of Empowerment Research Consortium (2012), *Empowerment a Journey not a Destination*, available at <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/PathwaysSynthesisReport.pdf>, World Bank (2014) *Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*, p.169.

⁷ Htun, M. and Weldon, L. (2012) 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005', *American Political Science Review*, Cambridge University Press and the American Political Science Association

⁸ Arutyunova, A. & Clark, C. (2013), *Watering the Leaves Starving the Roots: the status of financing for women's rights organising and gender equality*, AWID, Toronto, available at: http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/WTL_Starving_Roots.pdf

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chant, S. & Sweetman, C. (2012). "Fixing women or fixing the world? 'Smart economics', efficiency approaches, and gender equality in development". *Gender & Development* 20 (3): 517–529

¹¹ Arutyunova, A. & Clark, C. (2013), *Watering the Leaves Starving the Roots*, op cit.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Pittman, A. Arutyunova, A. Vidal Degiorgis, V. & Shaw A. (2011), *2011 AWID Global Survey: "Where is the Money for Women's Rights?" Preliminary Research Results*, AWID, Toronto, June 2012, available at:

<http://www.awid.org/content/download/146980/1623141/file/Where%20is%20the%20Money%20Preliminary%20Research%20ENG.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.awid.org/fund-me>

¹⁵ As reported to the Creditor Reporting System, purpose code 15170.

¹⁶ Expenditure targeting gender equality as a primary objective amounted to 6% of DFAT's aid investments by value across all sectors: *Performance of Australian Aid: 2015–16*, May 2017, p.92

¹⁷ OECD DAC (2017), *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, March 2017 Statistics based on DAC Members' reporting on the Gender Equality Policy Marker, 2014-2015 Creditor Reporting System database.

¹⁸ UN Women (2015), *Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the CSW 60 Priority Theme: Women's Empowerment and the link to Sustainable Development*, UN Women, Glen Cove, New York, 1 – 4 November 2015, available at:

<http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/60/csw60%20egm%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20160128T152130>

¹⁹ Pathways of Empowerment Research Consortium (2012), *Empowerment a Journey not a Destination*, p.10 available at <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/PathwaysSynthesisReport.pdf>

²⁰ World Bank (2014) *Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*, p.169

²¹ In July 2015, Cambodia's National Assembly passed the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) requiring all local and international non-government organisations (NGOs) to be registered and to remain 'politically neutral.' There is fear that this will result in crackdowns on women's rights organisations in Cambodia.

²² Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2015), *Empowering women and girls: The human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean–Asia Pacific region*, Inquiry report, p.87.