



Equality Rights Alliance
Women's Voices for Gender Equality



National Plan on Gender Equality

Feminist Foreign Policy and Official Development Assistance

Key Information

Traditional assumptions that foreign policy is gender neutral are flawed (Enloe, 1990). A feminist foreign policy would require Australia to pursue the goal of gender equality through all spheres of foreign policy and undertake intersectional analysis of the gendered impacts of its foreign policy decisions and approaches.

Climate induced disasters pose an increasing threat to the stability of Australia and our region, and gender is a compounding factor in vulnerability. More women than men die from natural hazards, and gender inequality in access to decision making, control over financial resources, technology and information are compounded by environmental disasters (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007).

Climate change will flatten global GDP by between 1.5 and 6 per cent (in South and South-East Asia) before 2060 (OECD, 2014).

Governments around the world are seeking to close the space for civil society (CIVICUS, 2018). and targeting women human rights defenders (Shameen, 2017).

Global trade liberalisation has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and, in many cases, has worsened women's economic and social status (Kabeer, 2018).

Australia's ODA has been cut by over a quarter since 2014 to just 0.23% of Gross National Income (ACFID, 2018).

By 2021, for every dollar spent on ODA, Australia will spend \$11 on defence. It will also divert an additional \$3.8 billion (the equivalent of the annual aid budget) towards arms manufacturers (ACFID, IWDA & CARE, 2018).

Reduced ODA spending results in fewer programs working to change the laws, norms and policies that will help to end women's human rights violations such as violence against women, child marriage and FGM (ACFID, IWDA & CARE, 2018).

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 (Htun and Weldon, 2012). Despite this, support for women's equality organisations makes up just 1.22% of Australia's aid (OECD, 2018).

Lack of attention to gender inequality over many years has created significant gender data gaps, meaning that policy makers do not have correct information on poverty at the individual level. This hides the experience of women who may have less access to resources within the family (Commonwealth of Australia, ANU & IWDA, 2018).

Inequality Intersects

- Less than 13% of agricultural landholders are women (UN Women, 2018). This leaves women, especially rural women, vulnerable to food insecurity, housing insecurity, income insecurity and lessens their access to decision-making, both within their households and communities.
- Indigenous peoples constitute just 5 per cent of the global population but make up 15 per cent of the world's poor and about one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people (DFAT, 2018). Globally, Indigenous women face a "triple discrimination" of poverty, gender and ethnicity, resulting in far higher rates of poverty, chronic malnutrition and illiteracy as well as low access to health care and participation in political life (FAO, 2018).
- Women comprise up to three-quarters of persons with disabilities in low and middle-income countries (UN Women, 2017). Women with disabilities are significantly more likely to experience violence; a study in Cambodia found that women with disabilities were 4 times more likely to experience controlling behaviour from a partner, while over 50% had experienced emotional abuse, 24% physical abuse and 6% sexual abuse from family (Astbury & Walji, 2013).

Background

Gender inequality persists in every country and shapes opportunities and outcomes for women, men and people of all gender identities. Gender is a crucial factor in shaping the economies, governance and stability of nations around the world (Ban Ki-Moon, 2014), and as such is critical to Australia's national interests. Further, considering how gender intersects with other factors such as age, disability, rural/urban location and socio-cultural background is essential to understanding the broader factors shaping economic, social and political development.

There has been increased focus in recent years on the concept of a feminist foreign policy, after Sweden launched its feminist foreign policy in 2014 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014). The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy describes feminist foreign policy as "a framework which elevates the everyday lived experience of marginalized communities to the forefront and provides a broader and deeper analysis of global issues." (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2016).

At its core, a feminist approach to foreign policy consists of embedding gender equality as a goal, ensuring analysis of the gendered impacts of foreign policy decisions and approaches.¹ To be truly feminist, this analysis must involve an interrogation of the differentiated impacts of policy upon people based on their gender, as well as the harmful gender norms and power dynamics of patriarchy that have given rise to gender inequality. It must also be intersectional – considering the intersection of gender with other characteristics such as race, class, age, sexuality, and disability – and take a 'do no

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¹ See for example, "The feminist foreign policy entails applying a systematic gender equality perspective throughout foreign policy. One starting point is that gender equality is an objective in itself, but it is also essential for achieving the Government's other overall objectives, such as peace, security and sustainable development." (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014)

harm' approach, by mitigating the risk of negative impacts and side effects to policies and programs. This analysis must then inform policy approaches and actions taken across all realms of foreign policy, recognising that "(e)mpowerment is not primarily a technical challenge, but a political one" (Kripke, 2017). Tools such as the Gender at Work Framework, which "highlights the interrelationship between gender equality, organizational change and institutions" provide a strong foundation for this analysis.²

In the Australian context, the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* names gender equality among Australia's values and argues that pursuit of gender equality internationally is in Australia's national interest (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). Additionally, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy* argues that gender equality "is a global issue, relevant to Australia and the economic, social, welfare and foreign policies of all countries", and outlines priorities for the advancement of gender equality across Australia's foreign policy, trade and international development work (DFAT, 2016). Australia's funding for sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian emergencies is highly regarded by the global humanitarian community. DFAT has been referred to as a leader on this issue, demonstrating the importance of Australia's work and the need for continued investment in programs such as SPRINT (Sexual and Reproductive health programme in Humanitarian settings), which improves the health outcomes of crisis-affected populations by reducing preventable sexual and reproductive ill health (IPPF, 2015). At a global level, Australia has signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals, which include a dedicated goal on gender equality as well as a mainstreamed approach to gender across all 17 SDGs.

While we applaud these commitments, gaps persist in terms of comprehensive integration of gender equality aims across all areas of Australia's international engagement, as well as the extent to which gender analysis informs our foreign policy approaches. Historically, the focus on gender equality in Australia's foreign policy has assumed that our national interests are gender neutral and can be met without consideration of the gendered implications of our trade, diplomacy and international engagement. This failure to consider gender and power as a routine part of foreign policy (including defence, trade, diplomacy, engagement in multi-lateral forums and ODA) hides issues of importance to Australia's bilateral and regional relationships and represents a missed opportunity to work towards a more equal world while simultaneously advancing Australia's interests. On this basis, Australia's international engagement falls short of what could be considered a feminist foreign policy approach.

Additionally, deeper connection between Australia's domestic policy agenda and our international engagement is critical to ensure policies at home are consistent with advancing gender equality and the human rights of women around the world, while at the same time advancing Australia's own interests. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework to ensure policy coherence across Australia's domestic and international engagement and ensure progress in one area (such as trade) does not come at the expense of others (such as decent work and labour rights). The SDGs provide a comprehensive blueprint for collective action that has been agreed to by all nations and will ensure that Australia's efforts are aligned to a global agenda for peace, prosperity and justice. A feminist foreign policy aligned to the SDGs would provide a strong foundation for ensuring gender analysis is embedded in all aspects of Australia's international engagement and enable us to pursue gender equality across all aspects of our international and domestic policy.

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2 The Gender at Work Framework maps opportunities and barriers to gender equality across four domains: individual/informal (consciousness and capabilities), individual/formal (resources), systemic/informal (informal norms & exclusionary practices), and systemic/formal (formal roles and policies). (Gender at Work, 2018)

In practical terms, a feminist foreign policy approach for Australia would incorporate a range of policies and approaches. The following paragraphs outline priority actions in shifting Australia's approach towards a feminist foreign policy:

- **Strengthening institutional mechanisms for understanding the gendered impacts of foreign policy:** DFAT's *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy* provides a high-level commitment to integrating a gender lens across all areas of the Department's work, however its impact beyond international development has been limited. Stronger mechanisms are required to ensure a gender impact assessment of trade and foreign policy decisions. An **annual report from the Minister for Foreign Affairs** to parliament on the gender equality outcomes of Australia's international engagement would provide an opportunity to consolidate successes and achievements and identify areas for improvement. Continued support for the position of the Ambassador for Women and Girls provides additional high-level capacity on gender equality and can assist in promoting Australia's commitment to advancing women and girls. Additionally, greater resourcing for and engagement with global and regional coordination mechanisms – including multi-lateral bodies such as UN Women and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat – alongside support for grassroots networks of women's rights organisations is critical to enabling women around the region to contribute to global processes. The role of women's rights organisations (and civil society more broadly) in monitoring progress should be clearly defined, and regional government capacity to bring about gender equality in their countries explicitly supported. Strengthening mechanisms for transparency and accountability will support coordinated action, domestically and externally.
- **Pursuing gender equality through diplomacy and multilateral engagement:** Civil society is under attack in six out of ten countries worldwide, as "societies fracture under the weight of rising social and economic inequalities and the increasing dominance of political leaders seeking to exploit societal divisions for their gain" (CIVICUS, 2018). We are also seeing a concerted effort driven by religious actors to use multilateral processes to challenge advances in women's human rights (Shameen, 2017). Australia's recent role on the UN Security Council, our current position on the Human Rights Council and our membership of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) provide key opportunities for Australia to promote gender equality and women's rights on the global stage. As some nations seek to narrow the space for civil society, the Australian Government can play a key role in promoting the voice and participation of diverse women from Australia and beyond in international forums, through both consultation and funding to support direct participation of civil society. At a bilateral and regional level, we can use our diplomatic relationships with other nations, as well as our role in regional forums to raise concerns about the closing of space for civil society. And through our aid program we can fund civil society groups and women's rights organisations who are doing the work of promoting human rights on the ground.
- **Taking action on climate change:** Climate change and environmental disasters pose an increasing threat to the region, with Pacific Island countries among the most vulnerable in the world. Simultaneously, eastern states of Australia are facing severe drought conditions with 60% of Queensland and 100% of NSW officially classified as in drought (Woodburn, 2018) and these conditions are exacerbated by climate change (Climate Council, 2018). Gender inequality compounds the impact of climate change on women; a study of 141 countries found that more women than men die from natural hazards (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007), and gender inequality in access to decision making, control over financial resources, technology and information are compounded by environmental disasters. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change provide a global framework to align Australia's domestic and internationally focused efforts. Australia must also play its part in funding and implementing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's Gender Action Plan (UNFCCC, 2018).

- **Conducting gender analysis on all trade and economic policy:** Taking account of gender perspectives in macro-economic policy, including trade policy, is essential for pursuing inclusive and sustainable development and achieving fairer, more beneficial outcomes for all (UNCTAD, 2016). The mixed effects of trade liberalisation and globalisation on women so far demonstrate both the potential and the risks. In many cases, trade liberalisation has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and worsened women's economic and social status (Kabeer, 2018). One of the reasons behind these negative effects is that trade policies are often designed and implemented without consideration of gender issues. For example, the PACER Plus negotiations lacked transparency, and failed to adequately account for the different economic and social roles of Pacific women and men (Pacific Network on Globalisation, 2016). When economic analysis and modelling ignores gender issues it results in missed opportunities, gender inequitable outcomes, as well as inefficient and ineffective policy. Trade can be a catalyst for gender equality, but this requires routine gender analysis in formulating trade policy if choices are to be fully informed, effective, sustainable and contribute to outcomes that meet the needs of both women and men.
- **Lifting Australia's commitment to ODA and applying intersectional gender analysis:** Australia has made significant commitments to integrating gender equality across the aid program – through the gender equality strategy, and the commitment that “at least 80% of investments, regardless of their objectives, will address gender issues in their implementation” (DFAT, 2014). However, DFAT's ability to enact these commitments has been impeded by significant cuts to ODA over the past several years. Australia's current contributions have been cut by over a quarter since 2014 and are at a record low, amounting to just 0.23% of Gross National Income (GNI) and projected to continue to fall to 0.19% of GNI by 2021-22 (ACFID, 2018). In contrast, by 2021, for every dollar spent on ODA, Australia will spend \$11 on defence. It will also divert an additional \$3.8 billion (the equivalent of the annual aid budget) towards arms manufacturers (ACFID, IWDA & CARE, 2018). A diminished overall aid budget reduces Australia's ability to contribute to gender equality and the advancement of the rights of women and girls.

Applying a feminist foreign policy approach to the aid program would require more to be done to ensure objectives are pursued in a way that gets to the heart of the gender norms and unequal power relations that constrain women. This necessitates intersectional gender analysis at all stages of project design and implementation – asking critical questions to determine the ways in which gender norms and other factors such as age, race and ability may impact the extent to which women and girls can benefit from and participate in development activities.

- **Targeted investment in gender equality initiatives and women's rights organisations:** Targeted investments in programs that contribute to women's rights are critical. One area of underinvestment is in women's rights organisations. 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 needs. Women's rights organisations continue to face financial unsustainability and current funding trends often constrain the ability of these organisations to access funding. Flexible long-term core funding is vital for sustaining the long-term movement building work that underpins progress towards gender equality (AWID, 2013). In Australia, support for women's equality organisations and institutions represented only 1.22% (22.379 USD million) of total sector-allocable aid in 2016 (OECD, 2018).³ Additionally, greater investment is needed in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to address gaps in disaggregated data collection to ensure programs can be targeted to those most in need (Commonwealth of Australia, ANU & IWDA, 2018).

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3 As reported to the OECD Creditor Reporting System, purpose code 15170 as a percentage of total sector allocable aid 2016.

Recommendations

To move towards a feminist foreign policy, the Australian government should:

Recommendation 1: Formally adopt a feminist foreign policy which outlines Australia's commitment to gender equality as a goal of our foreign policy, and mandates intersectional feminist analysis of the gendered impacts of foreign policy decisions and approaches and a do no harm approach.

Recommendation 2: Develop a national implementation plan for the Sustainable Development Goals which covers all areas of domestic and international policy and includes a cross-cutting analysis of synergies and trade-offs in our efforts towards the Goals. The plan should include shorter-term targets as stepping stones to enable consistent progress towards the 2030 deadline, supported by specific financial commitments.

Recommendation 3: Action Australia's commitments under the Paris Agreement domestically and ensure that women in Australia and internationally can contribute as agents of change in low-carbon development and climate change adaptation and as equal decision makers in relation to climate change responses, including by funding and implementing the UNFCCC's Gender Action Plan.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality including mandating the Minister for Foreign Affairs to present an annual report to Parliament specifically detailing expenditure and programming for gender equality targets in the Australian aid program.

Recommendation 5: Embed gender analysis across bilateral and multilateral engagement efforts and use its position in multilateral forums to amplify existing international agreements and agreed language on women's rights, champion space for civil society, and promote women's rights organisations and advocates in particular.

Recommendation 6: Embed gender analysis in trade negotiations, including by analysing the gendered impact of agreements, promoting women's economic empowerment strategies and participation, strengthening women's business networks and increasing consultation and engagement with working women and female entrepreneurs.

Recommendation 7: Reverse cuts to the international development budget and recommit to reaching the internationally agreed target of 0.7% of GNI.

Recommendation 8: Maintain the commitment to ensuring that 80% of Australia's development program will effectively address gender issues and set a new target to increase expenditure on aid investments which set gender equality as a principal objective.

Recommendation 9: Increase funding support for women's rights organisations and networks, lifting aid coded as supporting 'women's equality organisations and institutions' above current levels.

Recommendation 10: Continue to champion sexual and reproductive rights as a core part of Australian Aid in the Indo-Pacific region and uphold its previous commitment at the 2012 Family Planning Summit to invest at least AU \$50 million per year in contraception and contraception-related information and services. Maintain commitments to the SPRINT program.

Recommendation 11: Maintains Australia's leadership and investment in addressing global gender data gaps, including support for the UN Women's Making Every Woman and Girl Count program, and its investment in readying the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) for global use by 2020.

Our International Commitments

- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
 - Australia has committed to allocate 0.7% of GNI to aid (paragraph 43)
 - The SDGs commit to targeted work on gender equality (Goal 5) and mainstreaming of gender across all goals (paragraph 20)
- Paris Agreement on Climate Change
 - Maintaining global average temperature to well below 2°C (Article 2, point 1 a)
 - Common but differentiated responsibilities according to different national circumstances (Article 2 point 2)
 - Gender Action Plan recognises the need for gender mainstreaming through all relevant targets and goals of the UNFCCC (paragraph 3)
- CSW Agreed Conclusions
 - Commitment to support women's economic rights by facilitating their access to public services, finance, training, technology, markets, sustainable and affordable energy and transport and trade (60th session, point 23, paragraph f)
 - Refrain from applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures that may inhibit economic or social development, particularly in developing countries (60th session, point 23, paragraph n)
 - Commitment to eliminate the practice of gender-based price differentiation "pink-tax" (61st session, point 40, paragraph p).

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