



Submission to the Independent Review of the Australian Aid Program

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) welcomes the opportunity to input to the Independent Aid Review. This brief submission formally endorses the submission from the ACFID Gender Equity Working Group, which IWDA co-convenes. It also highlights what IWDA sees as the key issues to be addressed in and through the Review, from IWDA's situation as a specialist non-government organisation focused on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and, through this, achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

There is widespread global recognition that gender equality is at the core of transforming poverty, achieving sustainable human development and advancing human security. But there remains a yawning gap between commitment and action, policy and practice.⁵ 'Most development assistance organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, have not yet institutionalised approaches for addressing gender issues in their work.'⁶This is where the Aid Review must focus.⁷

The costs to individuals, families, communities, economies and nations of the violence, systemic barriers and ingrained discrimination that deny women their rights and their ability to contribute to their full potential are many times greater than the costs of implementing the very good and relevant policy frameworks that already exist. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

We know what strategies work and the actions needed to embed policies in the work of organisations, and we know this will improve policy coherence and aid effectiveness. Much good work has been done in identifying key strategic priorities – by AusAID, in key donor fora, and at a global level. For example, the UN Millennium Project Taskforce on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, brought together the best international thinking about how to accelerate achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals by focusing on MDG3.⁸

⁵ A 2005 review of nine OECD bilateral donors finds very significant 'policy evaporation' in the progression from commitment to implementation. It becomes increasingly difficult to track resources for gender equality as the policy process moves from framework through programming and budgeting to implementation, evaluation and measurement of impact. Mirijam van Reisen with Maxi Ussar (2005), *Accountability Upside Down: Gender equality in a partnership for poverty eradication*, Eurostep and Social Watch. The report looked at gender policy implementation in Canada, the European Community, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁶ Interaction website, <http://www.interaction.org/caw/services.html>. This assessment is confirmed by OECD peer reviews of donor performance and independent evaluations of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).

⁷ A paper prepared as part of the evaluation of DFID's gender equality strategy made this point directly: 'The critical challenge for DFID and other international actors is the implementation of the sound international and national gender policies that are being developed.' Johnston, N (2005), 'Phase II Thematic Evaluation: Conflict and Post Conflict Reconstruction', Evaluation of DFID Development Assistance: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, *Working Paper 12*, DFID, UK

⁸ UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (2005), *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. Earthscan, 2005.

When women benefit, the whole community benefits.

There is simply no excuse for inaction, for gender equality continuing to languish as a development priority in practice. To use clichéd but apposite language, gender equality and empowerment of women is a win-win focus for Australia's aid program and the individuals, communities and partner governments it seeks to assist, advancing rights, accelerating achievements in other sectoral areas and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of development assistance.

Gender equality needs to be treated in the same way as budget management – mission critical, for all partners in the aid program. The key to giving effect to the good policy work and research done to date is to 'make the advancement of gender equality & women's rights one of the standards against which ...performance is assessed'.⁹ This continues to need systematic integration and resourcing of gender analysis and gender equality objectives at the organizational level, within regional, country and sectoral strategies, and at activity level, from situation analysis through design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.¹⁰

Mainstreaming gender has been the key strategy for progressing gender equality since the UN World Conference on Women in 1995. However, in the absence of commitment and resourcing sufficient to support the transformation that gender mainstreaming requires, it has too often resulted in gender being 'everywhere but nowhere'. Mainstreaming has often resulted in a loss of focus on the specific disadvantages and barriers experienced by women. Australia's development assistance needs to reflect the fact that gender mainstreaming is a dual strategy – to avoid gender equality being marginalised as women's business and recognise that gender inequality has a women's face. Enabling change requires deliberate, long-term and resource intensive efforts to address profound marginalisation, discrimination and disempowerment.

In contexts where women are largely absent from decision making, or face leadership structures and cultural expectations that are male dominated and patriarchal, women's organisations provide a key mechanism for aggregating power and widening the space for women's participation. From observing change in our own and other societies, we know that sustained improvements in gender equality depend on well-resourced women's organisations being able to network, mobilise and build alliance.

AusAID has a critical role to play in establishing gender equality as 'mission critical', through linking policy and accountability frameworks with resource allocation. Changing cultures is about attitudes as well as skills and knowledge, and political will matched with resources. While it no longer implements the aid program, AusAID sets the terms on which activities are commissioned, assessed and financed; there are few more powerful influences on change.

⁹ UNIFEM (2009), *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women? Gender & Accountability*

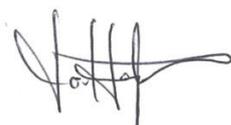
¹⁰ The 2006 OECD DAC peer review of the Netherlands identifies inclusion of gender equality in strategic plans and embassies' annual planning and reporting process as one of the factors that has avoided the problems with mainstreaming experienced by other donors. OECD (2006b), *Peer Review of the Netherlands*, Development Assistance Committee, OECD, Paris, pp.41-42. The need to embed responsibility across organisations and at all management levels was also noted in the evaluation of Norad's work on gender equality. See Norad (2005), p.10

Civil society is a key development actor and partner. There is a clear understanding among Australian-based NGOs that gender is critical to good development. But this is not reflected in their daily work¹¹. IWDA is currently working with the Australian National University to map how Australian-based development NGOs are approaching gender and begin to identify the barriers and challenges they experience, so they can be addressed. NGOs know they need to build capacity and improve performance but even the largest organisations find it difficult to mobilise the resources needed to transform their work. Organisations are under considerable pressure to focus donor funds in the field rather than on organisational development or institutional change – even if they know there is an intimate connection between the two.

The GEWG submission to the Independent Aid Review calls for a significant investment in the capacity of development NGOs to integrate gender and promote gender equality in and through their work, at a sector and agency level. IWDA urges the Independent Aid Review to support the submission's recommendations. In a growing aid program, investing in the capacity of civil society must be a key strategy for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women.

IWDA also underlines the GEWG's call to reinstitute a gender budget process at a whole of government level, to strengthen gender-responsive policy-making and return the Australian Government to a leadership role in achieving gender equality.

Gender needs to be 'mission critical' for Australia's aid program. It is not. This Review must be the point at which that changes.



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¹¹ ACFID (2009) *Promoting Voice and Choice*