

2010 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness

Submission of the Australian National Committee for UN Women

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Introduction

The Australian National Committee for UN Women (known as UN Women Australia and formerly UNIFEM Australia) is one of 19 National Committees supporting the core programs of UN Women around the world. The National Committees do this through engaging with government, membership programs, raising public awareness on gender and development issues and supporting regional UN Women programs through fundraising.

UN Women Australia focuses its activities on fostering women's empowerment and gender equality both domestically and internationally. This is achieved through initiatives aimed at reducing women's economic exclusion, eliminating violence against women and supporting women's leadership and political participation.

It is with this mandate and core programming, and addressing the issues of the Terms of Reference, that UN Women Australia proposes a number of items to be considered during the AusAID Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness. In addition to its own recommendations, UN Women Australia fully endorses the submission put forward by the ACFID Gender Equity Working Group.

Gender Programming

*Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals- peace, security, sustainable development- stand in jeopardy.*¹

Gender equality is a human right, every woman and girl is entitled to live in dignity and free from fear. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is also a key goal within the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which are currently overarching goals of the Australian aid program. It is now widely acknowledged that gender equality plays a crucial role in the success of all the MDGs and similarly all the MDGs are interdependent². As argued in this submission, a clear and unwavering focus on gender – particularly on the education of women will greatly improve the prospects for the achievement of all the goals.³

World Bank (WB) research has shown that the economic advantages of achieving gender equality are paramount. Investments in gender equality, specifically in health and education, yield some of the highest returns of all development investments generating reduced rates of maternal mortality, better educated and healthier children, higher household incomes and stronger economic growth. It is argued that, overall, gender *inequality* imposes large costs on a developing country's capacity to increase economic growth and raise living standards.⁴ It is therefore clear that achieving gender equality and empowering women plays a vital role in aid effectiveness.

It should also be recognised that through the promotion of women's rights and empowerment, aid effectiveness in turn leads to gender equality. In supporting women and girls within communities and helping create a stronger, more positive relationship between men and women, the beginnings of a gender equitable environment is developed. There is therefore a mutually reinforcing relationship between effective aid and gender equality, and the importance of upholding both is vital. Without effective aid, gender equality is difficult to achieve, and without gender equality being implemented, aid is less effective. This places emphasis on the recommendation for how and why gender equality must be core to the activities of the Australian aid program.

Recommendation 1: Gender to be made a core policy theme for the Australian aid program.

¹ UNIFEM (2010), 'Gender Justice: Key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals', p.3.

² Refer to the substantial findings of UNIFEM (now part of UN Women) including 'Gender Justice: Key to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals' (2010); 'Making the MDGs Work Better for Women' (2008); UNDP 'Beyond the MidPoint: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (2010); 'Millennium Development Goals Report' 2009 and 2010.

³ Ibid.

⁴ AusAID, 'Gender Equality in Australia's Aid Program- Why and How Report', 2007, p. 6-7.

Funding through civil society and NGO capacity building

UN Women Australia strongly supports the findings of the ODE *Working Paper on Good Practice Donor Engagement with Civil Society* and urges AusAID to adopt its findings with the following observations and recommendations:

Government programs can effectively use intermediaries to fund advocacy groups that are critical of regional governments' human rights abuses. Considering this avenue would significantly contribute to the advancement of core gender advocacy priorities that have in recent years received little to no attention from our Pacific neighbours. These include the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) - both of which are core themes for AusAID's gender policy outcomes.

To further exemplify this point, now is an opportune moment to direct core funding to the newly established UN entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women. Such an organisation is strategically placed to advance Australia's aid priorities with a strong emphasis on women, state-building, peace and security in addition to democratic participation, health and education. UN Women is mandated to work in consultation with both government and civil society therefore would effectively serve as a conduit for technical assistance and advocacy on core development priorities – in particular those with a gender concern. Furthermore, in doing so, this would place Australia in an advantageous position to take up a seat on the UN Women Board in the next round of elections coming in two years.

Working through country-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community service organisations (CSOs) serves to support and understand the local context in which the aid program operates. Arguably “providing funds through international NGOs allows for expertise to be provided in areas where these organisations generally have a comparative advantage”, enhancing linkages between governments and CSOs in country for service delivery as NGOs “may have closer contact with these target groups”⁵. This is significant in dealing with gender issues considering cross-cutting issues of political will and socio-cultural acceptance. Thus support to local NGOs and CSOs can facilitate such an understanding for effective aid distribution that considers a positive gender outcome.

Recommendation 2: AusAID to adopt the findings and recommendations of the ODE Working Paper on Good Practice Donor Engagement with Civil Society;

Recommendation 3: Dedicate further resources to working through NGO intermediaries and local NGOs.

Australian NGO Sector support

In addition to direct support to local civil society, ACFID has recently noted the strengths in approaches taken by Australian NGOs including:

- High levels of participation and responsibility;
- Breaking barriers that impede access to services;
- Seeking legitimacy;
- Targeting and working with unconventional partners;
- Standard and innovative ways of measuring changes; and
- The significant involvement of the community to allow for sustainability⁶.

The Australian NGO community has a long and notable track record of working with local communities within our region thus presenting another avenue for effective distribution to the local level. The additional introduction of a transparent core funding program for Australian based

⁵ Office of Development Effectiveness (2010), 'Working Paper: Good Practice Donor Engagement with Civil Society', p.15.

⁶ The Australian Council for International Development (2010), 'Fact Sheet 1: Who are Australian NGOs?', Meeting with Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness Panel 8 December 2010.

NGOs to access, would enhance their ability to form new partnerships, strengthen existing partnerships and facilitate community ownership for program outcomes.

A thorough NGO funding program which allows for investment in the NGO sector would support capacity development, sharing of best practices and learning, early dissemination of good practice, training and support as well as resource sharing.

Recommendation 4: Establish and properly resource clear yearly funding programs to build the capacity and programmatic work of the Australian NGO sector.

Ambassador for Women's Rights

In order to make gender concerns a core priority and with the leadership to support it within Australia's foreign aid assistance, UN Women Australia proposes:

Recommendation 5: Implementation and full funding to the position of an Ambassador for Women's Rights to work within DFAT.

The position would be similar to that of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner serves in Australia but with an international mandate. Such a position would put gender equality on the table of DFAT priority issues ensuring that gender equality is a thematic priority across all regional aid initiatives, similar to the purpose of the Ambassador for HIV/AIDS.

Aid Effectiveness Action Plan and Timetable for implementation

At the Millennium Development Goal Summit in September 2010 the Australian Government announced the intention to increase the proportion of ODA to 0.5% of GNI by 2015. This has been stated however, without a clear indicative timeline of how it will be met and when. Moreover, this remains below the internationally recognised target of 0.7% of GNI.

If aid is to be most effective and reaching our internationally recognised standards, UN Women Australia believes that AusAID should introduce an Action Plan for Aid Effectiveness modelled on the efforts of the Canadian International Development Agency which is then used against a clearly established timetable for implementation. This will enable greater transparency to the goals and intentions of the aid program for the public and aid partners, while providing an element of accountability to ensure that aid is delivered in a timely, informative and equitable manner.

Recommendation 6: Introduce an Aid Effectiveness Action Plan including a timetable for implementation.

Regional Distribution

The CIDA Aid Effectiveness Action Plan is a concerted effort for monitoring country-based progress. CIDA shifted to a 20 country focus for 80% of the bilateral country aid program. Under this model, CIDA has been able to better advance thematic priorities and ensure effective development modelling in country with ongoing monitoring and evaluation on select country strategies.

Following a similar model, AusAID is strategically positioned to take a regional focus rather than country-based or broad-based extending too far, focusing in the Pacific, Asia and South-East Asia. A regional focus for an aid program timetable ideally would indicate what percentage of the aid budget is to be distributed to which region as well as clearly identifying a timeline for withdrawal away from countries that are outside of this regional scope.

For example, contrasting again to the CIDA model, the 2009 switch to a country based focus was done without a clearly designated timeline for how the model would shift and when. This brought more volatile aid programming with quick shifts in funding from previous country recipients resulting in a stalemate or detracting from certain programs that were previously experiencing

positive results. Therefore, any regional shift that may be undertaken by AusAID must be done with dual consideration for country's that will be experiencing a withdrawal of funding as such a quick removal could cause detrimental outcomes once removed.

Furthermore, the CIDA country based strategy has been developed in line with Canada's foreign policy priorities rather than consideration of the beneficiary motivations and needs. As a result, there has been an increasing divide between the funding opportunities available for CSOs and civil society collaboration which in turn hinders efforts towards harmonizing aid resources. Australia is well positioned to take a strong lead on development priorities regionally, however rooted in consultation with and considering the needs of those receiving the aid itself. This approach is needed in order to have an effective aid program based on a human rights approach to development and in order to have recipient ownership of results and outcomes.

Recommendation 7: Introduce a regional focus around Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific with targeted percentages for regional distribution within a timetable for implementation. Additionally, consider the implications such a regional focus could have on ongoing programs and include a timeline for withdrawal in consultation with country-based actors.

Gender and Human Rights

In the development of an Action Plan for Aid Effectiveness, certain thematic priorities should be included in a timetable for implementation. In order to ensure that gender remains a strategic priority and is receiving positive advancement through aid delivery, UN Women Australia proposes:

Recommendation 8: Introduce and properly resource a Gender Policy within AusAID explaining how gender is considered in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of AusAID programs.

Such an endeavour will ensure that gender and acknowledging women's human rights remains a priority thematically through research and program development however, similarly through staff practice and program monitoring. Moreover, such a policy will assist with the evaluation of qualitative indicators within a timeline for implementation – similarly modelled on the Gender Policy that has been applied to the CIDA Action Plan for Aid Effectiveness.

Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies

The effectiveness of aid has a great deal to do with the political context in which the aid program operates. With over three quarters of Australian bilateral aid programs operating in countries that are experiencing, recovering from or vulnerable to conflict – this has significant effects on the provision and type of aid that is offered. Informing efforts to strengthen the aid programs role in addressing systems of conflict, AusAID implemented in 2002 a *Peace, Conflict and Development Policy*.⁷

Within the 2002 Policy, facilitating dialogue with women in peacebuilding efforts is taken into account with further consideration for the fact that women and children compose the large majority of displaced populations. What is lacking from this policy however is a framework recognising how gender disparities are experienced in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. This means accounting for the differential impact of men and women prior to, during and after a state of conflict. It was the noticeable lack of participation of women and attention to their specific experiences in conflict situations that lead to the creation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325).

⁷ For more information about this policy see AusAID (2002) 'Peace, Conflict and Development Policy' and AusAID (2005) 'Australian Aid: Approaches to Peace, Conflict and Development'.

Recently, AusAID has taken on increased programmatic focus and support to implement SCR 1325.⁸ Despite this programmatic focus, AusAID continues to operate under the 2002 policy which fails in an account of the four principles which surrounding SCR 1325:

- Prevention of conflict;
- Protection of women and girls during conflict; and
- Participation of women in: peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding and political decision-making.
- Prosecution of gender-based war crimes.

Since 2005, National Action Plans have been a model for SCR 1325 implementation that has been promoted by the United Nations Security Council. 'The creation of an action plan provides an opportunity to initiate strategic actions, identify priorities and resources, and determine the responsibilities and timeframes. The whole process of developing a plan is also a process of awareness-raising and capacity-building in order to overcome gaps and challenges to the full implementation of resolution 1325'.⁹

For Australia, despite the presence of the 2008 government funding for public consultations conducted by the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom to begin the drafting of a National Action Plan on SCR 1325, the plan is yet to be released and a civil society consultation on a draft product have not been announced. The lack of progress on the National Action Plan is concerning although more concerning is how or if it will be integrated into a coherent Policy for how the Australian aid program provides development assistance in conflict societies in addition to ensuring that it is continually properly resourced.

Recommendation 9: Security Council Resolution 1325 – focusing on women, peace and security, must inform and be foundational to AusAID work in conflict and post-conflict societies. This includes the development and proper resourcing of an Australian National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325.

⁸ For more information see AusAID (2010), 'Women, peace and security: AusAID's implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325'.

⁹ Task Force on Women, Peace and Security (2010), 'National implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)', a part of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Gender to be made a core policy theme for the Australian aid program;
2. AusAID to adopt the findings and recommendations of the ODE Working Paper on Good Practice Donor Engagement with Civil Society;
3. Dedicate further resources to working through NGO intermediaries and local NGOs;
4. Establish and properly resource clear yearly funding programs to build the capacity and programmatic work of the Australian NGO sector;
5. Implement and fully fund the position of an Ambassador for Women's Rights to work within DFAT;
6. Introduce an Action Plan for Aid Effectiveness including a timetable for implementation;
7. Introduce a regional focus around Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific with targeted percentages for regional distribution within a timetable for implementation. Additionally, consider the implications such a regional focus could have on ongoing programs and include a timeline for withdrawal in consultation with country-based actors;
8. Introduce and properly resource a Gender Policy within AusAID explaining how gender is considered in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of AusAID programs;
9. Security Council Resolution 1325 – focusing on women, peace and security, must inform and be foundational to AusAID work in conflict and post-conflict societies. This includes the development and proper resourcing of an Australian National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325.