

New Australian Development Policy

CARE Australia submission to DFAT Development Policy Division - Nov. 2022

“If you look at the world economy, it’s not the same. Life is not the same as it was before.”

Silaumua Leilua – Saleilua Village, Upolu, Samoa
A participant in CARE’s program led by local NGO WIBDI

Introduction

Australian Aid is ready to support our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific in meeting their challenges with smart and targeted investment. Climate change continues to be a significant challenge to development gains in the region, exacerbating a global hunger crisis. CARE [notes](#) that 150 million more women than men were food insecure in 2021 as a result of the pandemic, climate change and the war in Ukraine. The pandemic undeniably intensified burdens of unpaid care work on women and girls. It also resulted in higher rates of gender-based violence globally. In the Pacific region, women experience some of the highest rates of violence in the world¹.

CARE welcomes the recent increase in aid budget. It is a timely acknowledgement of increasing needs and rising instability in our region and beyond. This increase in funding must also be combined with proactive advocacy towards structural change to the way aid is delivered and how gender equality is realised. Australian Aid must be accountable to those it intends to serve and driven by the voices of those most affected by disaster and conflict, particularly women and girls. To meet these challenges, a new Australian Development Policy must seek to:

1. [Break down the silos](#)- Scaling up Australia’s aid capacity across both humanitarian aid and development and investing in building resilience across the nexus.
2. [Take a transformative approach to gender justice](#)- Prioritising gender equality is essential for effectively meeting humanitarian needs and longer-term development outcomes. We urge Australia to craft a truly horizontal, multi-country international assistance package with a thematic focus on gender transformation.
3. [Support equitable local partnership](#)- Purposefully directing core and program funding to local women’s rights organisations working to address gender equality. We urge Australia to become a ‘champion’ like other institutional [donors](#) globally, with proactive policy in support of equitable local partnership.

Beyond competition - Australia’s commitment to principled aid

In an era of slowing global growth, high inflation, post-pandemic recovery, catastrophic impacts of climate change and a rapidly widening gender gap, governments across the world are playing an increased role in societies and economies. It is critical that women and girls play a leading role in determining government priorities to deliver gender, social and climate-just development. Women and their representative organisations must not only have a token seat at the table but a definitive say in how resources are allocated and what social returns on investment are expected. It is only in this way that states will effectively be able to drive equitable development.

Strategic competition in the region is also characterised by competing development models. The ‘social infrastructure’ of gender equality and inclusive and responsive government at all levels is critical to accompany infrastructure and capital investment. Both government and civil society voices from the region have stated emphatically that they themselves want to determine their futures. We must be clear that aid does not diminish the role of governments or local capacity, being mindful of absorptive capacity. Future Australian Aid policy must practise principled aid.

CARE knows from decades of experience and evidence that the way to achieve transformational change for gender equality is to a) [build agency](#) of people of all genders and life stages, b) [change relations](#) between them and c) [transform structures](#) so that people live life in full gender equality. A successful Australian Aid policy must work at all levels of society, if it is to leave no one behind.

Redefining Australian aid in the face of perpetual crisis

Australian Aid at present supports action on gender equality, disaster risk reduction (DRR), humanitarian response and longer-term development programs. As aid practitioners working with local, national and international networks we have made progress on gender equality outcomes, improving service delivery, enhancing economic opportunity, driving inclusive governance, and preventing increased conflict and fragility. Our teams, including at country-level, reflect that:

- Comparative to other donors, DFAT can work towards greater flexibility when it comes to adaptive management and amending project design due to changing realities on the ground. Our experience has been that when we or our local partners are able to change our approaches based on community feedback, this leads to greater impact and cost-effectiveness for interventions over the long term.
- Australian-funded programs often operate in silos, across various instruments and facilities, despite significant complementarities across interventions. Funding and advocacy should work across the line between humanitarian aid and longer-term development. Increased country-level planning can assist with realising this coherence.
- Aid program management is highly centralised with low risk tolerance and is overly bureaucratic, resulting in reduced aid funding access for local and women's rights actors who are best placed to bring transformative change.

Unmet needs are rising and the impacts of climate change and an increase in gender inequality are being felt daily. This makes the risk of fragmentation and increased transaction costs associated with a strict humanitarian and development divide greater. An Australian Aid Policy which brings greater coherence and flexibility will serve Australia well in utilising its donorship in a strategic way. Australia's aid ambition should build on the agenda of governments in the region, with Australian-funded programs helping build an evidence base to shape future approaches across the regional architecture.

Recommendations.

DFAT should:

- focus on longer-term impact beyond short-term project cycles by providing funding that is flexible, patient and predictable; with average programmatic funding cycles of 5 years;
- ensure coherence through different programs and instruments with increased country-level planning and aligned strategic planning, to enable those practically delivering programme results;
- rebuild capacity for aid and development in-house including in critical areas related to localisation, locally-led programming and gender equality which can respond to calls for the "decolonisation" of aid;
- determine the most impactful delivery mechanism for aid delivery with a view towards the short, medium and long-term (NGOs, contractors, multilateral institutions and partner governments);
- articulate the key role of civil society in the Australian Aid program and the link to locally-led development.

CARE urges the Australian Government to set [strategic commitments](#) to focus Australia's new Development Policy and its resourcing and implementation.

[Strategic commitment 1](#) - Investing in women from community to national-level and driving gender equality outcomes across society

Local realities, local voices

Building effective and accountable states is essential to sustainable development, and this can only be achieved through inclusive governance and gender equality. Community-led approaches take time to catalyse, with processes and approaches defined by local contexts. It is only through approaches rooted in these local realities that Australia can realistically support with [realising](#) the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). This approach often requires a careful redefinition of relationships between national and provincial levels. As CARE, our resources are directed to remote and disadvantaged communities, who often have limited or varying interactions with central authorities and decision-making processes. Australian Aid should play its part by trialling, testing and adapting aid approaches to allow programmes to become more contextual, relational as well as resourcedⁱⁱ. Such an approach will better realise the ambition of a First Nations Foreign Policy more broadly.

Community resilience through gender equality

CARE's work on women's leadership has found that when women are supported to strengthen their skills, knowledge and confidence, an enabling environment for women's leadership is created. When women take up more leadership roles, the whole community works together more effectivelyⁱⁱⁱ. Going beyond simply 'including' women to addressing the underlying drivers of gender equality can also strengthen social structures that can increase communities' resilience. This enables communities to better anticipate, absorb, adapt to and transform shocks and address underlying causes of vulnerability.

Towards structural change

Women across the Asia-Pacific are largely marginalised from leadership and decision-making processes governing their lives. Women's representation in parliaments across the region remain at some of the lowest levels in the world, with recent elections doing little to change this^{iv}. An approach which focuses on community mobilisation and gender equitable participation at the provincial government level can create local government structures that better support service provision, safety nets and crisis response. This plays an important complementary role to technical assistance and bilateral government support.

Based on CARE's experience, sub-national and local level infrastructure planning, development and recovery is also strengthened by including women's voices^v. While managing environmental and social risk through the [Equator Principles](#) is important, so too is giving women a say in what infrastructure should be prioritised and where. At present in Vanuatu, for instance, Australian Aid is enabling the development of *Strategic Development Plans* through participatory processes which enable women's leadership. Laying this groundwork is essential. In the past, Australian Aid worked to promote inclusive local governance and it must do so again at a greater scale.

Recommendations.

Australian Aid should:

- scale up gender financing, with a particular focus on increased investments in women's rights movements that can drive gender equality gains;
- provide tangible support to inclusive governance and integrated community development and small-scale infrastructure which has gender equality dividends, alongside *Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific* (AIFFP) projects and *Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnerships*;
- outline how the new Australian Aid policy will contribute to the full realisation of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Strategic commitment 2 - Supporting a locally-led and bold aid agenda with women in the lead

"One after the other - the Cyclone, then COVID. Women were solely focused on survival, on repairing their homes, on how they would feed their families, and look after their children. Experiencing violence in the home was secondary to meeting those immediate needs."

Pacific-based CARE staff member

Supporting women in crisis

Applying a gender transformative lens is crucial to effective humanitarian response and recovery. We know that in emergencies, women are more at risk of intimate partner violence, have comparatively

less access to food and shelter, and experience negative impacts on livelihoods^{vi}. Women's equal participation and leadership is essential before, during and after disasters. [Evidence](#) and experience shows that ensuring women's engagement in planning, resourcing and decision-making leads to greater coordination of community action and complementarity with governments at local levels. When governments pay attention to these developments at local levels, it leads to more [inclusive](#) national policy development and budgeting around DRR.

When disaster preparedness plans are more inclusive of gender considerations, they are better adapted to specific contexts and communities. In addition to emergency response, Australian Aid investments should also be made in continuity of life-saving, multi-sectoral services including: health, psycho-social support, case management, GBV and SRH services and legal services. In our experience, these are not optional add-ons to humanitarian delivery, but are essential components of reaching all those in need in times of crisis.

Shifting leadership to the local-level

In the design of a new development Policy, Australia should endeavour to strengthen the ability of local organisations to access funding that is flexible, covers core costs and builds a sustained local capability. We can achieve this through more innovative ways of working around localisation. For both contractors and ANGO partners, KPIs and policies on issues such as provision on overheads and resources for system strengthening and capacity development with local NGOs should be included. This already forms part of CARE Australia's [commitment](#) under the *Pledge for Change*, ensuring that national and local organisations will lead humanitarian and development efforts wherever possible.

Australian Aid can strengthen both formal and informal organisations, recognising their context-specific expertise and proximity to communities. Further, we also see a need for Australia to play a more active role in facilitating exchange, learning and collaboration amongst local partner organisations in the region to further the goal of gender equality. This can build upon the solid depth and breadth of partnerships that already exist with ANGOs and across the Aid program.

Supporting humanitarian aid amidst increasing complexity

Symptomatic of the cyclone season is that Australian Aid to the Pacific region has taken a reactive stance. Whilst the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) is a tried and tested model of policy and practice, we increasingly see the need to take anticipatory action. At present the short-term nature of AHP activations means that Australia is not leveraging the full impact of its aid investments. This constrains interventions at the level of meeting basic needs without building resilience more broadly.

Further, Australia's support to humanitarian aid should cohere to an overarching strategy, with thematic focus and strategic framing. Such framing will assist more transparent decision-making over activations and allocations. It is essential that Australia does not overlook forgotten crises in need of support.

Increasingly adversarial geopolitics and climate change have changed risks and opportunities within humanitarian aid. Complex emergencies are on the rise, increasing operational complexity for humanitarian frontliners. Redefining risk will be essential if Australian Aid works to support more locally-led approaches. More broadly, our proximity to crises can better inform Australia's aid Policy ambition and diplomatic engagement. NGOs in humanitarian response deliver better aid, with lower transaction costs than our multilateral counterparts. Further, we provide unique analysis, an alignment of values and iterative program design. Rather than a risk-averse Policy that relies on multilateral organisations, Australia can draw upon the rich humanitarian networks and capacities of ANGOs and their local partners globally.

Greater attention needs to be given to the design of Australian Aid, beyond considerations of the overall budget. The mix of Australian Aid funding between multi-year development funding and humanitarian response (including multi-year packages) is an approach that should be expanded upon. Moving

forward, consideration should be given to including gender and climate as core constitutive elements of response rather than mainstreamed elements.

Recommendations.

Promote the centrality of local organisations to humanitarian and development programming across the region through:

- becoming an early donor adopter of the *Pledge for Change* commitments and work alongside ANGOs to advance them;
- taking practical steps such as signing tripartite agreements (Australian government, ANGO, LNGO) for aid delivery;
- supporting women's rights, women-led and other representative organisations to meaningfully shape and participate in development and humanitarian programs, including through increased funding;
- moving to longer-term funding cycles, which allow for longer-term planning which leads to deeper and more sustainable impact.

Having endorsed the *Principles and Practice of Good Humanitarian [Donorship](#)*, Australia should reaffirm the following:

- strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises;
- provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development;
- recognising the necessity of dynamic and flexible response to changing needs in humanitarian crises, striving to ensure predictability and flexibility in funding.

Australia's humanitarian responses should:

- expand multi-year assistance packages where long-term assistance is required for affected populations amidst protracted displacement;
- work towards a shared risk approach, ensuring that risk aversion does not undermine the valuable role played by humanitarian actors in complex settings;
- ensure sustained meaningful core funding to local frontliner organisations, particularly those owned and led by women.

[Strategic commitment 3](#) - A comprehensive approach to advance climate justice for both short-term shocks and long-term risk

CARE and other aid agencies have witnessed first-hand a tangible rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather and climate-related disasters that directly and negatively impact the poor and most vulnerable people we work with, especially women, girls and people with disabilities. Within the design of new long-term strategy and policy settings, focus should be placed on gender equality and how this intersects with climate change. Australian-funded climate change programming has waned in recent years, however, there is experience of previous Australian Aid investments that delivered [impact](#) which can be drawn upon.

As Australia re-defines its relationships in the Pacific, including with its strong and diverse civil society, this should include tangible and strategic support to its frontline organisations working on the response to climate change - especially those led by and representing women, girls and people with disabilities. The increasingly cyclical nature of crises requires Australian-funded humanitarian and development programmes to have an increased focus on resilience and adaptation.

[Increasing primary climate adaptation programming](#)

Increasing attention should be given to transformative climate change programming, that better recognises and deals with the limits to adaptation already breached and nearing their hard limits, particularly in the Pacific. This requires a greater shift from a climate change and gender mainstreaming

approach, towards a greater share of programming designed with the primary intention to test and innovate in transformative adaptation. Such solutions that can support Asia-Pacific to shift towards gender and climate-just development.

The new Development Policy should outline a renewed push by the Australian government to support and provide dedicated resourcing to climate change adaptation, as well as inclusive and locally-led DRR in the region. The policy can also seek to be forward looking by exploring opportunities for sectors to develop new forms of climate relief, transition support and legal protections^{vii}. The framing for a major component of the policy should be in terms of how best Australia can target its support and assistance to the most vulnerable at risk of severe losses and damage^{viii}.

Advancing climate justice requires not just changes to Australia's climate finance and aid, but playing a bold and ambitious role internationally. This is why we believe Australia must play its part in operationalising the *Global Goal on Adaptation*^{ix}, including by championing the role and leadership of women, girls and people with disabilities, along with other local actors.

Recommendations.

Australia should match the leadership shown by other OECD donors by:

- increasing domestic mitigation ambition to align with the limit of 1.5°C of global warming;
- meeting climate finance commitments - including concrete figures for near-term adaptation spending to demonstrate Australia's contribution to the global agreement to double adaptation finance;
- significantly increasing the share of primary adaptation finance, to support innovative solutions to gender-just transformative adaptation;
- endorsing the [8 principles on locally-led adaptation](#) to guide all Australian adaptation finance;
- integrating GEDSI and LLA as core features of nature-based solutions programming, to ensure that people of all genders, ages and abilities can participate and benefit equally, and prevent the risk of maladaptation;
- committing loss and damage financing that is additional to aid and adaptation finance;
- prioritising women and girls and locally and female led organisations in climate action; ensuring climate finance reaches the most marginalised.

Conclusion

To conclude with more from Silaumua in Samoa: "The whole world is facing challenges, and in the event we cannot import food from overseas, at least we are utilising our own land and growing our own food to feed our families." A critical question that the future Australian Policy must answer is, how will it work in partnership with women like Silaumua across the region? Both amidst global uncertainty and in times of acute crisis? As Australia rebuilds its development capability, it should not simply reboot aid orthodoxy, but rather redefine the way aid is delivered and who it is delivered by.

CARE Australia supports women around the globe to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. We work in partnership with local communities to provide equal opportunities for women that they have long been denied: the ability to earn an income, gain access to their fair share of resources, to lead and participate in decisions that affect their lives, and to be able to withstand the increasing impacts of climate disasters and other crises. As CARE Australia, we have built strong, long-term relationships with partners who work in their own communities in the South-East Asia and Pacific regions and we know that this is where we can be most effective. CARE Australia manages all programs and activities of the CARE International confederation in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Vietnam. In addition, CARE Australia undertakes development assistance and disaster response activities in partnership with local organisations in Tuvalu, Kiribati, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Samoa.

Submitted on 30 November 2022 to the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade

For more on CARE Australia's vision of a gender-transformative Australian Development Assistance Strategy, including practical examples of our work please go [here](#).

NOTES

ⁱ <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/>

ⁱⁱ https://startnetwork.org/sites/default/files/start_networks_anti-racist_and_decolonial_framework.png

ⁱⁱⁱ Julie Webb, Does Gender Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Make a Difference? (CARE International, January 2017), 39.

^{iv} <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/in-focus/csw/snapshot-of-womens-leadership-in-asia-and-the-pacific>

^v https://www.academia.edu/19547112/Go_PNG_INGO_Partnerships

^{vi} https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/%20docs/publications/2020/04/ap_first_100_days_covid-19-r02.pdf?la=en&vs=3400

^{vii} <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/10/25/COP26-time-to-pivot-from-war-aid-to-climate-aid>

^{viii} <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/13/climate-change-limits-to-adaptation-and-the-loss-and-damage-debate/>

^{ix} <https://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CARE-COP27-position.pdf>