

Women leading change

AusAID's support for women's leadership
and decision making

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Introduction

The 100th anniversary of International Women's Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the role women have played in leading change in their communities. It's also an opportunity to consider what more can be done to achieve equality between women and men.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of supporting and promoting women in leadership and decision making.

Women have a right to fully participate in all aspects of economic, social and political life. This is key to reducing poverty, enhancing economic growth and democratic governance, and increasing the wellbeing of women, girls and their families. Central to this is ensuring that women and men can make decisions regarding their lives, and the lives of their families and communities.

Australia's international development assistance program is working to ensure that the needs and views of women and men are reflected in decision making at community and national levels. This involves funding and skills support for individual women, women's organisations, partner governments and international organisations.

Our aim is to allow women's voices to be heard, to strengthen women leaders and to promote women's rights.

Section 1 Women and politics

Women are under-represented in almost all national parliaments around the world. The United Nations reports that internationally women hold only 18.5 per cent¹ of parliamentary seats, and in some countries there are no women at all in parliament.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women recognises that women have a right to participate in the political and public life of their countries.

Active involvement of women in political decision making is considered crucial in global attempts to eliminate poverty. In part this is because national decisions made by parliaments are less likely to address the concerns of women when women are under-represented in parliament. The internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals also include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament's as an indicator of progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Ensuring that women are elected as members of parliament is not enough to guarantee that political decision making reflects the needs of both women and men. For women to work effectively in parliaments alongside their male colleagues, attitudes need to be changed about women's roles and responsibilities.

Women and men elected to parliament need to be aware that the impact of policies is different for women and men and that they need to take these types of issues into account. Also, mechanisms are needed for women at the community level so they can communicate their views to parliaments and other public decision making bodies.

Putting it into practice—in Solomon Islands

The Women's Leadership Mentoring Program is a success story in Solomon Islands. It falls under the Women in Government Strategy in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands' Machinery of Government program. Since October 2008 it has involved female leaders and emerging female leaders within government, civil society and the private sector. It builds women's confidence to realise their potential and develops mentoring networks to support women.

The program empowers and assists Solomon Islands women to overcome challenges in achieving leadership positions. It has so far helped 100 women build their leadership skills and is encouraging others to be involved. It also brings together women with a diverse range of experience who are from different age groups, ethnic groups and organisations—creating linkages between participants.

Under the Women's Leadership Mentoring Program, participants explore three themes—leadership, lifelong learning and the power of listening and conversation. This approach builds their confidence to become involved in decision making and leadership. One participant has said the program helps women work with their male managers and 'create a more equitable environment which attracts, retains and develops a diverse workforce'.

As another participant stated:

Previously, I would sit back and wait for someone to ask for assistance. Now I go out of my way and offer it. More team work and less animosity creates a better work environment.

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands is a partnership between the people and Government of Solomon Islands and 15 contributing countries of the Pacific region including Australia.

Women leading change—profile of Maryline Arnhambat

Maryline Arnhambat is on a mission. She is the National Coordinator for Vanuatu's National Community Association Party and is fighting to get women into parliament. A former mayor and member of the women's wing of the *Vanua'áku Pati* for many years, Maryline considers it unacceptable that Vanuatu currently has no women parliamentarians at the national level. While women are involved in party politics, they are often in a silent, not vocal role. As Maryline says:

Women work in ministries and are politically affiliated, but only as secretaries, personal assistants, office supervisors or file clerks, not in higher advisory positions with decision making power.

Maryline believes that women need to be elected into parliament where they can make or influence decisions covering the needs of all community members.

¹ United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, United Nations, New York, 2010

Drawing inspiration from Hilda Lini, the first woman elected to Vanuatu's Parliament in 1987, Maryline's message to women in the Asia-Pacific is to move forward. She emphasised this at the Women in Politics Course, held recently by the Centre for Democratic Institutions in Australia. The centre works with participants from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, East Timor and Indonesia, which are all seeking to support and increase the number of women in politics and public office—for the benefit of the region. Maryline encourages women in Asia-Pacific to face up to the challenges and achieve what their nations call for.

AusAID funds the Centre for Democratic Institutions and its Women in Politics Course. The course builds social and political capacity in the Asia-Pacific region. It supports women intending to enter politics and helps elected officials better represent women's needs.

Putting it into practice—with members of parliament

AusAID is supporting the United Nations Population Fund, the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development and the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) to further engage parliamentarians in developing countries on reproductive health and women's empowerment in the Asia-Pacific region.

Members of parliament, both male and female, can play a key role in ensuring that issues that affect women are considered by parliament, and that the views of women are part of government decision making.

This work has supported the establishment of a Parliamentary Group on Population and Development in Papua New Guinea and the development of a similar group in East Timor.

These groups bring together members of parliament with a commitment to improving reproductive health issues, including maternal mortality and violence against women. They are important as a means of bringing women's health issues to the attention of parliament, and a way for women to communicate with parliament.

ARHA and the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development are working with these parliamentary groups to enhance their skills in working with the media to communicate key sexual and reproductive health and gender equality messages. The initiative is also engaging them in networking and awareness-raising activities with parliamentarians across the region.

Section 2 Women leading in their communities

Women's participation is not just about seats in parliament. It is about influencing change at all levels. This includes the social, political and economic decisions affecting women's lives, and the lives of their families and others living in their communities.

Civil society has long been an area where women lead the way.

Women's organisations and civil society organisations play an important role in advocating for women's rights and providing services to meet women's needs. Women's organisations also build the leadership skills of young women and girls, drawing upon their energy and perspectives.

Women leaders are committed to shaping agendas, changing community attitudes and holding governments to account. By speaking out about women's rights, these leaders exert influence and help change the daily lives of women in their communities.

Putting it into practice—in Burma

Australia supports refugees and displaced people living on the Thai side of the Thailand–Burma border. An important aspect of this support is promoting women refugee leaders.

AusAID supports the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, an alliance of 11 non-government organisations (NGOs), including Act for Peace from Australia, to work with displaced people of Burma. Working with the Royal Thai Government, the consortium provides food, shelter and capacity-building support to around 150 000 Burmese refugees located in ten camps along the border.

While women from Burma have played an essential role in the struggle for human security, they have only recently been involved in central camp decision making bodies. This is thanks, in part, to the consortium promoting community-based management based on diversity and gender equality. Refugee women are progressively assuming prominent community leadership roles within the camps, and refugee women's organisations are working to improve women's participation in all aspects of society.

To enable more women to be involved in management committees, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium has programs for child care and other care functions. The camp management program also provides women with access to justice and support services.

This has led to a significant increase in the number of women refugees taking up leadership roles in the camps as section or zone leaders. Women now can control issues affecting life in the camps such as food distribution, water, sanitation and education. The changing role of women is shifting attitudes. Women's capabilities are now recognised as critical to improving the running of these refugee camps.

Putting it into practice—in South Africa, Jordan and Egypt

AusAID is working with a range of partners, including Oxfam Australia, the Asia Foundation and German International Cooperation on a policy initiative called the Developmental Leadership Program. This program is developing a deeper understanding of the important role of leadership and political dynamics in development. Women's leadership is a priority focus of this work.

The program is supporting research and analysis into the nature and role of women's leadership and coalitions in diverse countries including South Africa, Jordan and Egypt. A case study approach is being used to examine the impact of women's leadership, civil society organisations and networks in promoting gender equality and institutional change. The research is being undertaken with leading international experts and local partners.

This research will inform AusAID's support to promote women's leadership and decision making into the future. The findings will enable AusAID to better understand how, why and when women's leadership, coalitions and alliances emerge, and the factors that promote and frustrate real progress towards women's leadership.

Women leading change—profile of Nani Zulminarni

Nani Zulminarni is an activist for women's rights and her leadership has given voice to the poorest of the poor in Indonesia. Nani's work is helping to empower women and develop women leaders.

As head of Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), the Indonesian organisation for empowerment of women-headed households, Nani says defining empowerment is important:

Empowerment is when women who are powerless, marginalised and excluded from the system are able to build their power individually and collectively.

Previously, female-headed households were not recognised in Indonesia—culturally or by law. As Nani explains:

Many areas in Indonesia face conflict with men dying or migrating, leaving widows and women with no property rights or legal recognition to claim social services. Indonesia national statistics shows that almost 14 per cent of households are headed by women yet these are the poorest of the poor.

PEKKA, an NGO established in 2001, was the first to organise at grass roots level on behalf of these female-headed households. It has worked with 12 000 households, making them agents for change. It does so through research, and by using an advocacy approach up to the highest levels of government.

PEKKA demonstrates how women can reach their potential and help others to do so too. Nani sums it up:

They organise literacy classes, education programs and activities including legal and political education with other poor women. This makes people see and think about the good that can be done. This is how we influence people in Indonesia—from village level to national level. I think PEKKA can show that women have amazing potential if we give them the space and opportunity to grow.

AusAID provides funds for PEKKA to improve women's access to justice and raise awareness of women's legal rights. PEKKA works across 330 villages in 14 provinces empowering women.

Section 3 Building women's capacity as leaders

Women face many challenges when seeking to have a voice in decision making forums. Poverty, lack of education and training prevent women from enjoying full participation and controlling resources in their communities. Other barriers are family responsibilities and lack of access to networks and mentors, which can limit women from becoming active leaders.

Gender equality means that both women and men have equal opportunities to fully realise their individual potential, to make a full contribution to their country's social and economic development, and to benefit equally from their participation in society.

It is essential to build the capacity of women so they can influence the decisions affecting their lives and communities. Women need access to education, and the training and support to build leadership skills. Women need to be supported as role models in their community, so they can showcase their skills and abilities, and encourage other women to take up leadership opportunities.

Actively supporting women's full participation in economic, social and political life is a key factor in reducing poverty, enhancing economic growth and democratic governance, and increasing the wellbeing of women, girls and their families.

Women leading change—profile of Afshan Khan

Afshan Khan completed a Masters of Public Health at the University of Melbourne in 2010. She is one of around 120 Pakistani students in Australia annually undertaking post graduate study on a development scholarship as part of the Australia Awards.

The program is designed to provide people from developing countries with the skills and expertise to help develop their home country. Graduates return to contribute in areas including education, health, governance and economics. These graduates now include Afshan, who says:

There are patches in Pakistan with people like me, or girls like me, who represent the modern face of the country, but we are a minority. We are career-oriented and care about working face-to-face with men and competing for positions in the market.

Afshan aims to take her Melbourne-acquired masters degree in public health into the area of policy development for preventative medicine. As her home country struggles with the aftermath of an earthquake and devastating floods, pressure on Pakistan's health sector is intense, as are demands for every type of medical skill.

Afshan's particular expertise is in research and her contribution to Pakistan's health needs will be welcomed.

I would like to work in any organisation in Pakistan where I can use the research skills that I have learned and contribute my bit to the preventative medical research.

The Australian Government Australia Awards promote knowledge, education links and enduring ties between Australia and its neighbours. The awards bring together the scholarships provided by AusAID and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Putting it into practice—with young leaders

Investing in young people so they can achieve their full potential and be a part of decision making is vital for building peaceful and sustainable communities throughout the world.

Recognising that young people have much to contribute, AusAID supports the Commonwealth Youth Program which is designed to engage young leaders in the development process and in all levels of decision making. The program's activities develop the potential of young women and men and provide opportunities for them to contribute to international youth policy and to access decision makers.

To build the leadership skills of young people, the Youth Program provides training in national youth policy development, strategic planning and leadership. It also funds internships so young people can gain work experience in government ministries for youth and in the Commonwealth Youth Program itself. The program holds a unique place among international youth programs because young people are represented at all levels of decision making, including at the triennial Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

The program supports both young women and young men. It provides them with opportunities to participate in decisions that

affect their lives—in the short term through work on issues relating to youth and in the long term by providing them with the skills they need to be active in influencing decisions in their communities.

In 2010, two young women from the Pacific Islands, Noelyn Wagapu (Solomon Islands) and Rebecca Solomon (Vanuatu), were selected by the Commonwealth Youth Caucus as the Pan Commonwealth Chair and Vice Chair of the Commonwealth Youth Caucus.

Women leading change—profile of Julia Keenan

Julia Keenan is an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development working as a Research, Gender and Documentation Officer with the *Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta* foundation in Indonesia. The foundation was established by a mining exploration company to improve the quality of governance in Kalimantan and to bridge the gap between community and government.

Working as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development in Kalimantan has been challenging for Julia. It is a unique opportunity, enabling her to contribute to international community development. Like other youth ambassadors, Julia is building her leadership skills and reflects on her experience in Kalimantan:

... getting the chance to be a leader and a trainer—using the skills I already have and transferring them to other people—has been a huge challenge.

Julia also helps incorporate gender equality perspectives into the organisations she works with so the different impacts of the programs on women and men are understood and responded to.

When asked about what drives her, Julia says:

I have had inspiring women in my workplace and lots of my mentors have been women. I am inspired by the women who work hard for their families in their villages. My motivation is my belief that everyone should have equal opportunity to do what they want with their lives.

Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development is an international volunteer program providing skilled young Australians with the opportunity to volunteer overseas in Asia, the Pacific and Africa. It is an Australian Government initiative delivered by AusAID.

Section 4 Promoting women's rights

Ensuring women's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled is central to eliminating poverty and injustice. This includes stopping discrimination and violence against women.

Supporting and developing women's leadership and decision making is key to the successful promotion of women's rights. It requires joint action on the part of many institutions and individuals—national governments, civil society, NGOs, international partners, and women and men in the community.

The international community recognises this through the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The convention recognises women's rights, and the need for national action to end discrimination against women. The women's rights covered under the convention include political participation, health, education, employment, family relations and equality before the law.

As of January 2011, 186 countries were parties to CEDAW.² These governments are committed to supporting equality between women and men and taking measures to promote women's rights.

Women's and civil society organisations are key advocates for women's rights. For women to promote women's rights, they need to be safe and have the resources to do this work. Their work and advice need to be valued and supported by decision makers and governments.

Putting it into practice—in the Maldives

One way Australia promotes and protects women's rights is by supporting the grassroots activities of human rights groups.

Huvadhoo Aid is a youth NGO working on development issues affecting remote atolls in southern Maldives. The project focuses on governance and protection issues. Its overall aim is to improve public awareness about the rights and responsibilities of Maldivian citizens. It equips them with relevant skills and knowledge to contribute to public debate on important social and development issues.

Through AusAID's Human Rights Small Grants Scheme, Huvadhoo Aid has so far conducted two workshops (with four more to follow). These workshops are designed to educate young women and men about various topics, with a particular focus on human rights—including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The relationship between climate change and human rights is another topic explored.

Huvadhoo Aid's workshops also help young women to develop their leadership skills. This, in turn, strengthens the ability of institutions at the local level to promote gender equality and women's rights.

Putting it into practice—with UN Women

Strong champions are required in global efforts to promote gender equality and empower women. The new United Nations organisation UN Women will be a strong campaigner for women and girls, and will give women a powerful and influential voice at the global, regional and local levels.

UN Women was created to address the challenges of promoting gender equality, expanding opportunities for women and tackling discrimination across the globe. It merges and builds on the work of four previously distinct parts of the United Nations system which focussed on gender equality to create a single agency that will meet the needs of women worldwide.

UN Women will work with UN Member States, other UN agencies and civil society partners to agree on international standards for gender equality, and help countries implement those standards.

UN Women will initially focus on six priority areas that are fundamental to women's equality and where real progress can be achieved. Using the Millennium Development Goals as a roadmap for development, UN Women will work on: violence against women; women, peace and security; women's leadership and participation; economic empowerment for women; gender sensitive national budgeting and planning; and women's human rights.

In November 2010, Australia was one of the first countries to pledge multi-year core funding for UN Women. Australia will

² United Nations, *United Nations Treaty Collection—Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, United Nations, 2011 http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

provide \$14.5 million to UN Women over two years from 2011 to support international efforts to empower women and promote gender equality.

Women leading change—profile of Shamima Ali

Shamima Ali is Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre which provides counselling, legal, medical and other practical support services for women and children survivors of violence.

Under Shamima's leadership, the centre's approach to the elimination of violence against women is based on women's experiences of violence and discrimination.

Shamima has a teaching and media background but knows about violence and discrimination first hand through her own relatives, community and her own experiences. This developed a strong sense of justice in Shamima. It led to work as a volunteer at the centre and later as the coordinator. Her inspiration is the women she serves and works with:

...the women that I admire are the women I work with ... their ability to survive against all odds.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is also involved in training, capacity building, lobbying and advocacy and community education on gender-based violence in Fiji, the Pacific and internationally. Its work is based on a conviction that violence against women is a fundamental human rights and development issue.

Shamima Ali was recently awarded the first-ever Human Rights Defender Award by Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand. But Shamima's work and energy is boundless. For the future she will place even more focus on mentoring and empowering young women to take up leadership on women's human rights, and on expanding men's involvement in ending violence through the male advocacy program at the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

AusAID provides funding support to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. The crisis centre is a leader in advocacy for women's rights. It delivers practical support services for women subjected to violence in Fiji and across the Pacific region. It also coordinates a program with male advocates on ending violence against women.

Putting it into practice—with the United Nations Development Programme

Women are frequently victims of atrocities and injustices during conflict, and left out of the peace building process once conflict has ceased. Women and men experience armed conflict and other humanitarian disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, differently. Women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment and needs that men do, and this is exacerbated in armed conflict and humanitarian disasters.

AusAID is supporting the United Nations Development Programme's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery to strengthen and advance access to justice and security in conflict and post-conflict situations, with a focus on promoting women's rights. Priority countries for Australia in this global program include East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and Nepal.

The program recognises the needs, interests and contributions of both men and women in its work to establish the rule of law in conflict affected communities. By taking this approach to recovery, the program helps ensure that women and girls have access to legal assistance and representation.

Women's law and justice needs are being addressed, for example, through gender-sensitive training for police, lawyers, judges and prosecutors, and by providing women with access to legal aid. Both women and men are also being given information about human rights and domestic law. Legal aid and information centres are providing secure spaces for debate and discussion between communities and government authorities.

The program also includes training for international and regional peacekeepers and police to address the special protection needs of women and girls. To support these efforts, the program is increasing the number of women in law and justice institutions, including as police, lawyers, judges and prosecutors.