



**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

**Inquiry into**

**The human rights issues confronting women and girls in the  
Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific Region**

**Submission**

**Oxfam Australia  
May 2014**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Gender inequality is arguably the most acute and persistent example of inequality. It is the most fundamental obstacle to eradicating poverty and achieving economic and social development.
- Seventy percent of the 1.2 billion people who live in extreme poverty worldwide are women and girls.
  - Two-thirds of the more than one billion adults who lack basic literacy skills are women.
  - While women perform two-thirds of the world's work and produce half the world's food, they only earn ten percent of the world's income and own one percent of the world's property.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2. The World Bank reports that 'countries that invest in promoting the social and economic status of women tend to have lower poverty rates'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it has been shown that, over the past 30 years, no other indicator has demonstrated greater impact on development outcomes than gender equality.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3. However in many parts of the Indo-Pacific region women and girls' rights are undermined. Many women and girls continue to be disempowered as a result of practices and beliefs which affect their individual, economic and political rights. These include:
- *Lack of educational opportunities.* Education is not only a human right, it can be transformative in its ability to empower women and offer them pathways out of poverty. On a national level, it also makes good economic sense. However, living in poverty, the prohibitive cost of education, lack of access to schools and teachers, domestic responsibilities, restrictive family attitudes, early marriage, violence and lack of gender-appropriate facilities (such as toilets) in schools all contribute to keeping girls out of schools.
  - *Lack of access to sexual and reproductive information and services.* Women and girls who have access to sexual and reproductive information and services are able to make informed and empowered decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, stay in school and engage in the workforce for longer.
  - *Acceptance of gender-based violence* at the individual, household and community levels, and lack of services and opportunities for survivors of violence to effectively advocate for the kinds of change that could lead to social transformation.
  - *Deeply entrenched stigma and stereotypes linked to women.* Women in positions of social, economic and political leadership continue to face social barriers, resulting in the exclusion of women and girls from decision-making positions in key institutions, structures and systems.
- 1.4. Discriminatory laws, policies, and institutions that act as barriers to equality reinforce the low status of women and girls, including:
- Legal and judicial systems that fail to address the high incidence of violence against women and girls in both private and public domains.

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<sup>1</sup> International Women's Day 2014, <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/facts.asp#.UvcTfPmSwxU>

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, 'Millennium Development Goals', <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010* (UNDP, 2010)

- Failure to enforce laws that aim to protect the rights of women and girls, for example, by prohibiting early marriage, or requiring equal rights in inheritance of land and property.
  - Discriminatory laws and institutions that limit women's options to vote or run for political office.
  - Lack of opportunities for women and girls to benefit from economic opportunities due to their under-representation in formal market structures; lack of consultation about and direct benefit from natural resource revenues; and the disproportionate vulnerability of women's livelihoods, which are predominantly agricultural or in the informal sector, to displacement resulting from natural disasters and conflict.
- 1.5. These factors not only undermine the status of women and girls as equal citizens, they deter and prevent their full economic and social development.
- 1.6. The promotion of gender equality and the rights of women and girls must therefore be a pillar of Australia's aid program in order to achieve poverty reduction and address the root causes of inequality.

## **2. About Oxfam Australia**

- 2.1. Oxfam Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, secular international development agency whose vision is of a just world without poverty. We have more than 500,000 supporters in Australia who contribute skills, time and financial support to advance our work.
- 2.2. Oxfam Australia is a member of Oxfam International, a global confederation of 17 organisations that work together, investing more than \$1,085 million a year to overcome poverty and injustice in more than 90 countries around the world.
- 2.3. Oxfam:
- Undertakes long-term development programs;
  - Provides emergency response during disaster and conflict;
  - Undertakes research, advocacy and campaigning to advance the rights of poor and vulnerable people, with a particular focus on gender justice for women and girls; and
  - Promotes fair trade by supporting local artisans and producers through our shops and 'Fair' food brand.
- 2.4. In 2012-2013, Oxfam Australia responded to 17 emergencies and worked with partner organisations in 27 countries across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and Indigenous Australia to improve the lives of 5.7 million people.
- 2.5. A focus on gender justice is at the heart of all of Oxfam's work. This means recognising the needs and rights of women and girls. It means supporting them to claim their rights and hold leadership roles in order to influence and achieve change. It means women and girls are:
- Participating in the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of their lives;
  - Holding positions of leadership;
  - Accessing information, services and resources; and
  - Participating in decisions that affect their lives.
- 2.6. As part of our work to advance the rights of women and girls, Oxfam works with people, communities and organisations, including men and boys, to change the attitudes, beliefs and

behaviours that result in women and girls disproportionately experiencing poverty. Our goal for gender justice in the *Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2014-2019* is that more women and girls will be economically independent, participating in decision-making, holding positions of leadership, and living free of violence by 2019.

### 3. Scope and focus of this submission

- 3.1. This submission is informed by Oxfam's:
- Long track record of high quality gender programs in the region; and
  - Research, advocacy and campaigns to advance the rights of women and girls.
- 3.2. The submission responds to three elements of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:
- The barriers and impediments to enhancing the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region;
  - The implications for economic and social development in the region of promoting the human rights of women and girls; and
  - The effectiveness of Australian programs to support efforts to improve the human rights of women and girls in the region.
- 3.3. This submission focuses on four key human rights issues in the Indo-Pacific region that Oxfam and its partners have particular experience, expertise and demonstrated results working on, namely:
- i. Gender-based violence,
  - ii. Women's leadership,
  - iii. Economic opportunities for women and girls, and
  - iv. Women's engagement in peace-building.

### 4. Summary of recommendations

- Recommendation 1 Gender equality and the rights of women and girls must underpin Australia's aid program. As such they should be both a key objective and a cross-cutting theme of the Australian aid program in the Indian Ocean Asia – Pacific region.
- Recommendation 2 Integrate gender equality into all aspects of aid and development operations by:
- Fostering and supporting high-level leadership and accountability on gender equality,
  - Including gender equality measures in benchmarks aimed at assessing the performance of the aid program,
  - Building accountability to women and girls into all development activities, including humanitarian responses, and
  - Supporting women to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Recommendation 3 The Australian aid program needs both dedicated projects to advance the rights of women and girls as well as longer term support to women's organisations and networks.
- Recommendation 4 The Australian aid program should invest in programs focused on women's economic empowerment and education that are implemented together with programs that work to eliminate violence against women and girls and gender discrimination.

- Recommendation 5 Gender-based violence programs need to take a holistic approach which includes the provision of assistance to survivors of violence as well as preventative and law enforcement measures to protect the rights of all citizens, including the rights of women and girls.
- Recommendation 6 The Australian aid program should invest in supporting women and young women's leadership and political participation.
- Recommendation 7 The Australian aid program should ensure the measurement of outcomes and impacts for women's leadership programs. (For example, outcomes such as the extent to which programs enable women and girls to engage in decisions that affect their lives and the impacts of these decisions on consequent social and economic development.)
- Recommendation 8 The Australian aid program should support initiatives between workers, civil society, unions, and employers that focus on wage levels and factory working conditions and address workforce models that contribute to gender inequality and poverty.
- Recommendation 9 The Australian aid program should increase its focus on understanding and responding to the impacts of mining and large scale infrastructure development on women and girls.
- Recommendation 10 The Australian aid program should support women to meaningfully participate in decisions regarding the management of their natural resources and resultant revenues. Where resettlement is unavoidable, the Australian aid program should support them to be resettled in appropriate ways that support their livelihoods and fulfil their rights to personal security and access to education and health services.
- Recommendation 11 The Australian Government should implement its existing commitments under Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security including to support the full and active participation of women and integration of gender perspectives in peace processes. This should focus on women's roles in formal peace negotiations and mediation at critical junctures both leading up to, and for a significant period after, ratification of peace agreements, accords and treaties.
- Recommendation 12 The Australian Government should support and strengthen the capacity of women and girls to contribute to peace processes and ensure their rights are upheld and needs are met in conflict response, recovery and transition.
- Recommendation 13 The Australian Government should ensure that National Action Plan implementation is given priority focus in Afghanistan.

## **5. Key human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region**

### **5.1 General approach to advancing gender justice**

- 5.1.1 Any aid program aimed at increasing economic development must focus on the rights of women and girls if it is to be effective. Investing in women makes good economic sense and can have a multiplier effect for poverty reduction.<sup>4</sup>
- 5.1.2 Yet women and girls encounter structural barriers at many levels which limit their participation in, and control over, decisions that affect their lives. These barriers occur at the individual, household and community levels, and across education, health, economic opportunity, and women's leadership and political participation. The objective of achieving gender equality and protecting the rights of women and girls therefore must underpin Australia's aid program and needs to be both:
- A stand-alone pillar; and
  - A cross-cutting theme across Australia's aid program.
- 5.1.3 Oxfam is pleased to note that this 'twin-track' approach has already been articulated by the Australian Government in its negotiations for promoting gender equality within the Post 2015 Framework. This position was presented in Australia's Country Statement to the 58<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>5</sup>
- 5.1.4 An explicit focus on gender equality and the rights of women and girls in the aid program will require high level representation and commitment from decision makers. Oxfam warmly welcomed the appointment of Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls and looks forward to continuing to work with and support the new Ambassador in her work to promote the empowerment of women and girls.
- 5.1.5 The Government's clear commitment to gender equality will need to be coupled with adequate resources for development and implementation. At a time when further investment in women and girls is required Oxfam is deeply concerned that \$3.7 million was cut from gender and disability programs in the announcement of reductions to aid spending in January 2014.
- 5.1.6 With additional funding comes the need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure value for money and effective programs. Gender equality measures should be included in benchmarks used to assess the effectiveness of Australia's aid program. These should be based on strong policy and be accompanied by appropriate training and skills development for all staff, long term and predictable investment, and high-level leadership. In addition, the Government must transparently report on the delivery of its commitments to gender equality in a consistent way across all programs.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

Gender equality and the rights of women and girls must underpin Australia's aid program. As such they should be both a key objective and a cross-cutting theme of the Australian aid program in the Indian Ocean Asia – Pacific region.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, H. (2010) High Level Conference on Women's Empowerment in Copenhagen:

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2010/06/08/helen-clarks-speech-at-the-women-deliver-conference/>

<sup>5</sup> Australia Country Statement to the 58<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women: <http://www.security4women.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Australian-National-Statement-to-CSW-58-by-Senator-The-Hon-Michaelia-Cash.pdf>

### **Recommendation 2:**

Integrate gender equality into all aspects of aid and development operations by:

- Fostering and supporting high-level leadership and accountability on gender equality,
- Including gender equality measures in benchmarks aimed at assessing the performance of the aid program,
- Building accountability to women and girls into all development activities, including humanitarian responses, and
- Supporting women to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

5.1.7 Strengthening respect for the human rights of women and girls takes time. Investments need to be focused both on changing behaviours and attitudes, and also on changes to formal institutions and laws. These are critical long-term solutions. For these solutions to be successful, they rely on sustained, multi-year predictable commitments and an approach to impact assessment that looks beyond merely outputs.

5.1.8 Women's and civil society organisations are best placed to work with both women and men in culturally appropriate ways. These organisations play an integral role in delivering services to women and girls and working with them to address their particular needs. The Australian Government should support and work with these organisations to ensure that women's leadership is promoted both within these organisations and in the community more broadly.

### **Recommendation 3:**

The Australian aid program needs both dedicated projects to advance the rights of women and girls as well as longer term support to women's organisations and networks.

## **5.2 Gender-based violence**

5.2.1 Violence against women and girls is endemic. It is a critical barrier for women and girls to achieve control over their lives and to realise their human rights. Violence against women and girls in Pacific countries, for example, is among the highest in the world, with up to 68% of Pacific women reporting physical and sexual abuse,<sup>6</sup> and 40-70% of women experiencing violence from family members in their lifetime.<sup>7</sup> In Afghanistan, as many as 87% of Afghan women suffer at least one form of physical, sexual or psychological violence, with more than half experiencing multiples kinds of abuse.<sup>8</sup>

5.2.2 High rates of violence against women can be attributed to many factors including: low economic participation of women and their associated poverty, low political participation of women, practices such as bride price and the tolerance of the subordination of women, a culture of silence surrounding gender issues, impunity for perpetrators, poor access to health services and quality education for women, and armed conflict.<sup>9</sup>

5.2.3 A growing body of evidence is revealing the costs of violence against women which are felt by individuals (survivors, their children, and perpetrators), families and communities, and

<sup>6</sup> UN Women (2014) *In Brief: Ending Violence against Women and Girls*. [http://www.pacificwomen.org/wp\\_content/uploads/UNWomen-EVAW-Brief.pdf](http://www.pacificwomen.org/wp_content/uploads/UNWomen-EVAW-Brief.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UN Women (2011) *Ending Violence against Women and Girls: Evidence, data and knowledge in Pacific Island Countries*, Suva, Fiji.

<sup>8</sup> Global Rights (2008) *Living with Violence: a national report on domestic abuse in Afghanistan*.

[http://www.globalrights.org/site/DocServer/final\\_DVR\\_JUNE\\_16.pdf?docID=9803](http://www.globalrights.org/site/DocServer/final_DVR_JUNE_16.pdf?docID=9803)

<sup>9</sup> Asia Pacific Centre for the Prevention of Crime (2013) *Gender Violence in the Pacific Islands*, Policy Brief Series #1

society more broadly.<sup>10</sup> These costs are monetary, resulting from increased absenteeism, decreased labour market participation, reduced productivity, lower earnings, investment and savings, and lower intergenerational productivity, and non-monetary<sup>11</sup>, such as the impact on interpersonal relations and quality of life, including the impact on children.<sup>12</sup>

5.2.4 For example, in Fiji, productivity losses due to violence against women have been estimated at seven percent of GDP.<sup>13</sup> In Vanuatu, a national survey conducted by the Vanuatu Women's Centre revealed that 80% of the women surveyed earned an income (mostly from marketing or trading) and that work was disrupted for 30% of women who experienced physical or sexual violence.<sup>14</sup> Limits on women's participation in the workforce across the Asia-Pacific region cost the regional economy an estimated US\$89 billion every year.<sup>15</sup>

5.2.5 However, earning an income does not on its own guarantee that women and girls will live free from violence. In some instances economic progress can increase a woman's risk of violence,<sup>16</sup> with many women facing the threat that their income will be taken from them by force by their husbands or other family members. In addition, given the reproductive, productive and community roles that women play, and the predominant role of women in the informal sector, women's economic empowerment strategies must be careful not to add to the burden of women or lead to their commodification or exploitation.

5.2.6 To address these risks, Oxfam supports an evidence-based approach in which women's economic empowerment and education programs operate alongside programs that work to eliminate violence against women and gender discrimination. Data from the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS clearly demonstrates that adding participatory gender training (including violence against women components) to a small loans program can result in a substantial reduction in physical and sexual intimate partner violence in addition to improved economic outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

5.2.7 For example, Oxfam's Women's Literacy and Skills Building Project in East Sepik, PNG, demonstrates that engaging and educating the entire community adds to program acceptance and impact. In this case, when family and community members understood the project ambition and the role they could play to support this, and could see the potential benefits for the community, women received enhanced support that further enabled their participation and helped minimise the threats that economic progress can pose for women.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The Australian aid program should invest in programs focused on women's economic empowerment and education that are implemented together with programs that work to eliminate violence against women and girls and gender discrimination.

<sup>10</sup> International Centre for Research on Women (2009) *Estimating the Costs and Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence in Developing Countries: A Methodological Research Guide* <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Estimating-the-Costs-and-Impacts-of-Intimate-Partner-Violence-in-Developing-Countries-A-Methodological-Resource-Guide.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Grown, R G Gupta, & A Kes, *Taking action: Achieving gender equality and empowering women. UN Millennium Task Force on Education and Gender Equality*. London: Earthscan, 2005, p114-115. <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Gender-complete.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> C, Bradley (2011), *Ending Violence against Women and Achieving MDG3*, Office of Development Effectiveness, AusAID, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> UN Women website, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/301-consequences-and-costs-.html>

<sup>14</sup> Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011, *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships*, p. 139

<sup>15</sup> UN Women (2011-2012) *Progress of World's Women: Access to Justice*

<sup>16</sup> WHO, 2005, *Integrating Poverty and Gender into Health Programmes, Module on Gender-Based Violence*. p13. [http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/E517AAA7-E80B-4236-92A1-6EF28A6122B3/0/gender\\_based\\_violence.pdf](http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/E517AAA7-E80B-4236-92A1-6EF28A6122B3/0/gender_based_violence.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> WHO and UNAIDS, 2010, *Addressing violence against women and HIV/AIDS. What Works?* p16. [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599863\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599863_eng.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Godden, N., (2013), *Independent Evaluation of Oxfam Australia's Pilot to Strengthen Women's Literacy and Training Services in Yehimbole, East Sepik, Papua New Guinea*.



5.2.8 Oxfam also supports stand-alone programs to eliminate the acceptance of gender-based violence and provide services to survivors. Examples include the Ending Violence against Women Program in PNG (presented in the box below) and the Standing Together against Violence (STAV) Program in the Solomon Islands.<sup>19</sup> Our lessons from these indicate that effective gender-based violence programs should include:

- Universal access to services for survivors of violence, including safety, shelter, health and legal aid.
- Locally developed mechanisms to support early intervention and prevention, including working with women, girls, men and boys to support attitudinal and behaviour change at the individual, household and community levels.
- Investment in initiatives that operate at the institutional level and support system-wide change and the creation, implementation and enforcement of laws and policies aimed at protecting the rights of all citizens, including the rights of women and girls to be and feel safe, and holding governments accountable.

5.2.9 This is consistent with the Australian aid program's current approach to preventing and responding to violence against women which has three pillars: access to support services, access to justice, and prevention.<sup>20</sup> This provides the aid program with solid foundation to build on.

#### **Case Study: Ending Violence against Women Program in Papua New Guinea**

Oxfam's Ending Violence against Women Program in PNG partners with 12 community-based organisations across eight provinces and is one of the largest supporters of non-medical crisis services to women and children affected by violence. In 2013/14, more than 5000 women were assisted with crisis support, counselling, paralegal advice, referrals, and safe-house accommodation. The program supports four 'safe houses' nationally, making it the largest provider of this type of service in PNG.

The program also delivers community awareness sessions to men and boys in areas known to be violence 'hot spots'. The sessions are conducted by men for men and draw on a simple set of key messages focused on the criminal sanctions for violence against women and the new protection orders available to survivors. Our target for 2013/14 is to reach 8000 men and boys with these messages. Oxfam is one of the few agencies in PNG working with men and boys to change the social norms that give rise to the acceptability of violence against women.

A component of our work focuses on sorcery-related violence. Oxfam research commissioned in 2010 found that those accused of sorcery are among the most vulnerable in society, typically women aged between 40-60 years. Sorcery accusations not only result in individual torture and deaths but have strong links to tribal fighting in the highlands. Oxfam supports three community-based organisations that address sorcery-related violence. In addition to working with police, health professionals, legal officers, and local Government officials to raise awareness of the need to intervene in sorcery cases, the program has also supported a repatriation fund that enables women accused of 'witchcraft' to be quickly removed from danger and repatriated to a safe location.

<sup>19</sup> Oxfam's STAV program is a case study in: Australian Government (2009) *Responding to Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Australia's response to the ODE Report*: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/aidissues/gender/Documents/a-safe-place.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> The current approach is found at: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/aidissues/gender/Documents/a-safe-place.pdf> and also stems from the Australian Government (2009) *Responding to Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Australia's response to the ODE Report*: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/aidissues/gender/Documents/a-safe-place.pdf>

- 5.2.10 Education, resourcing and support for those responsible for enacting and enforcing laws and policies that protect the human rights of women and girls, as well as increasing women's participation in these roles, is also critical. For example, while there is strong evidence that Afghan women feel more comfortable reporting crimes to policewomen,<sup>21</sup> women currently make up less than one percent of the Afghan National Police. Policewomen face major challenges including a lack of promotion prospects, sexual harassment, a lack of support from senior male police, and opposition from community members. Although female police are vital for Afghan women to be able to report crimes and access desperately needed justice, few Afghan women will ever encounter one.
- 5.2.11 Oxfam welcomes the Australian aid program's \$17.7 million Elimination of Violence Against Women Program in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> As part of this Program, Australia is training police at national level and police, judges, prosecutors and lawyers in eight target provinces to support improved enforcement of Afghanistan's Eliminating Violence Against Women Law; better reporting, registration and investigation of incidents of violence against women; and establishment of a referral mechanism for survivors of violence.
- 5.2.12 In Afghanistan, Oxfam is also working with Afghan organisations to promote support for female police in communities by explaining to local leaders how the police should protect and serve them, and the role that policewomen can play, including more effective support for female victims of violence. Oxfam has also carried out national and international level advocacy to encourage reform, and supported police training to better understand the needs of women and their experiences of violence. In 2013 Oxfam launched the *Women and the Afghan Police* report,<sup>23</sup> which made a number of recommendations to address the barriers to female participation in the Afghan National Police. Along with the efforts of others, this advocacy has helped contribute to an increase in the number of female police recruits, a new strategy on women police, and engagement of the head of the Ministry of Interior's gender department in these issues. While it is too early to assess the impact of these interventions, they are gaining attention nationally and globally.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Recommendation 5:**

Gender-based violence programs need to take a holistic approach which includes the provision of assistance to survivors of violence as well as preventative and law enforcement measures to protect the rights of all citizens, including the rights of women and girls.

- 5.2.13 Robust, gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation of programs is crucial to monitor trends, and identify the most effective strategies for addressing gender-based violence. Further evidence of the economic and social benefits of reducing gender-based violence would be of particular value. Monitoring for unintended negative impacts is also critical, particularly in programs that have the potential to increase the risk of violence against women, such as economic development programs designed without adequate consideration of gender. In addition, participatory monitoring and evaluation that engages women and men in the

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<sup>21</sup> Oxfam International, *Women and the Afghan Police: Why a law enforcement agency that respects and protects females is critical for progress*, 10 September 2013. See also Tonita Murray, 'Report on the status of women in the Afghan National Police', Gender Advisor, Ministry of Interior, Afghanistan, executive summary.

<sup>22</sup> <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/elimination-violence-against-women.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> Oxfam International, *Women and the Afghan Police: Why a law enforcement agency that respects and protects females is critical for progress*, 10 September 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, 'Afghanistan policewomen numbers need to rise sharply, says Oxfam', *The Guardian*, 10 September 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/10/afghanistan-police-women-numbers-oxfam>; Kate Arnott, 'Landmark law fails to stop violence against women in Afghanistan', *ABC, Australia Network News*, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-24/landmark-law-fails-to-stop-violence-against-women/4979074>

learning process is not only an effective way to demonstrate the impacts of programs but is also an effective way to support program objectives such as enhanced community understanding of gender-based violence and discrimination, and the rights of women and girls.

### 5.3 Women's leadership

5.3.1 In many countries and communities where Oxfam works, women and girls are significantly under-represented in decision-making from the household level up to national parliament. For example:

- Vanuatu is one of four countries in the world without any female Parliamentarians<sup>25</sup>
- In Myanmar, while women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict, women participated only at the fringes of the 2010 Myanmar elections (with the final Parliament comprising only 3.9% women members), and
- In the Philippines women were largely invisible in the drafting of the Philippines' Bangsamoro Framework Agreement in 2012.

5.3.2 While there are clear structural barriers to the participation of women and girls in decisions that affect their lives, capacity gaps where women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources required to become effective leaders also play a role.<sup>26</sup> Women and girls' limited access to education and resultant lower literacy is a significant barrier to women's empowerment and leadership.

5.3.3 Oxfam works with a range of civil society organisations and networks to better integrate gender considerations across issues including community resilience, peace processes, humanitarian response, and political engagement and representation. In addition to working to remove the structural barriers to women's leadership, these networks support women to gain the skills, knowledge, confidence and peer support to participate in decision-making processes.

5.3.4 One example of the success of this approach has been Oxfam's investment in Vanuatu in networks for collective action with opportunities for women civil society leaders to engage directly with government and other power holders on women's priorities. In 2013 this contributed to a gender balanced national delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) and Vanuatu's first ever female representatives. All female members of the delegation were supported with training, consultations and public events in the lead up to COP19 to further increase their knowledge, confidence and awareness of the different priorities of women, men, and young people in Vanuatu. The inputs by these women leaders led to gender equality being prioritised by the delegation and Vanuatu's first submission to the UNFCCC on gender equality and women's participation in UNFCCC processes.

5.3.5 In Zimbabwe, Oxfam works with partners that support women to be elected to parliament, strengthen their skills once they have been elected and encourage and support women parliamentarians to work together across political parties to advance their shared objectives. The impact of this work has been stunning, with women parliamentarians and organisations working together to enshrine gender equality in the new Constitution of Zimbabwe, including in its electoral provisions. This has resulted in a rapid increase of the number of women in the parliament of Zimbabwe, following the 2013 election.

5.3.6 These strategies to increase women's presence and influence at decision-making forums and provide opportunities for direct interaction with government are also features of Oxfam's

<sup>25</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012: [http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2345\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2345_E.htm)

<sup>26</sup> UN Resolution 66/130 on Women and political participation, December 2011.

Straight Talk program in Australia (set out in the box below), a model which, with contextual modification, could be replicated throughout the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region.

#### **Case Study: Straight Talk program in Australia**

Straight Talk aims to strengthen the capacity and access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to participate in the political process. A highlight of the program is the four day national summit in Canberra every 12-18 months, which is complemented by regional gatherings around the country throughout the year. Now in its sixth year, around 430 women have been part of coming together to learn from each other, and share new tools and skills to be more effective in making change, while also putting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's issues on the political agenda.

Programs include meetings with parliamentarians and decision makers in the community and have proven to be effective in breaking down barriers to access, facilitating two-way learning, encouraging parliamentarians to hear what is happening on the ground, and enabling women to have an experience of politicians as approachable. It is also a unique opportunity to explore ways of working together to advance reconciliation and achieve justice and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Feedback from participants suggests that the majority have come away from Straight Talk with a clearer understanding of how the political system works and, therefore, a greater capacity to engage with government institutions, decision-making and change processes. Many women also talk about an increased confidence to speak up, voice their opinion, and be clear about the change they are seeking. Others report that learning how to develop a strategy and plan for making change has enabled them to be more effective.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

The Australian aid program should invest in supporting women and young women's leadership and political participation.

- 5.3.7 Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of women's leadership programs is also required. In particular, the Australian aid program should invest in assessing the extent to which programs are enabling the least powerful and most marginalised groups, including women and girls, to be heard, exercise choice, be engaged in the development process, and be empowered to hold to account those who exercise power. As women's leadership programs lead to an increase in the number of women and girls at the decision-making table, the impact of their presence on the decisions made and the consequent implications for social and economic development should also be rigorously evaluated to inform future programs.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

The Australian aid program should ensure the measurement of outcomes and impacts for women's leadership programs. (For example, outcomes such as the extent to which programs enable women and girls to engage in decisions that affect their lives and the impacts of these decisions on consequent social and economic development.)

## **5.4 Economic opportunities for women and girls**

- 5.4.1 Investment in women small-scale producers is a particularly effective strategy for poverty reduction. The Food and Agriculture Organisation has estimated that providing women farmers with the same resources, such as agricultural inputs, credits and services, currently used by men could increase their production by up to 30 percent, resulting in a 12 to 17 % reduction in global hunger and the capacity to feed an additional 100 to 150 million hungry people.<sup>27</sup>
- 5.4.2 In Sri Lanka, Oxfam works with poor and vulnerable communities, particularly women-headed households, single women and widows, to rebuild their livelihoods after decades of war. Barriers faced by these women include lack of access to resources including markets, and limited technical capacity to produce and sell products at a market price. Oxfam's program focuses on diversifying livelihoods opportunities for women by undertaking vocational and business management training, analysing market chains and facilitating women's access to marketing channels, and providing low interest loans. This has contributed to significant improvements in income security, both in terms of an increase in monthly income, and a more consistent income throughout the year. Women's ownership of assets such as land, machinery and animals has also increased. The broader impact of this increase in income has included improvements to housing, sanitation and access to utilities, increased diversity of food intake, and greater investment in education and essential medicines for the whole family.
- 5.4.3 The private sector also has a role to play in providing economic opportunities for women and girls. The most significant contribution that the private sector can make to reducing poverty is to ensure that business conducts itself in accordance with internationally recognised human rights and labour standards. This must include paying women decent salaries, ensuring that their rights, safety and wellbeing are protected at work, and that their rights to access and control land and water are protected. Further, the private sector can provide clear pathways for the recruitment, training and promotion of women within the workplace, particularly in traditionally "male-dominated" industries.

### **Women's economic empowerment and labour rights**

- 5.4.4 Women in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region are particularly vulnerable to exploitative labour conditions. Women earn less than men for doing the same or comparable work. Further, women do not necessarily control the income they earn as it is often expected that they will return most of their wages to the family income, which is usually controlled by men.
- 5.4.5 Barriers to women's achievement of labour rights also takes place in a context where formal sector workers' power to organise has been significantly weakened as union membership diminishes in many countries. However, even in sectors where women comprise a large proportion of union members, union leadership remains overwhelmingly male, with decision-making processes rarely taking into account women's double burden of factory and domestic work.
- 5.4.6 For example, in Indonesia there has been an increasing trend to shift manufacturing work from factories to home-based contract outwork. While this could be characterised as a form of micro-enterprise, and therefore a source of income for poor women, in reality outwork usually replaces former factory-based work at a lower labour cost. In addition, these mostly female workers rarely have union protection, have little opportunity for mutual support and organising, and are unable to access credit for enterprise development. As a result, outwork

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<sup>27</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation (2011) *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture*. FAO.

has led to a decrease in income for poor women, and less power to be able to address this issue through collective negotiation.

5.4.7 Oxfam has a long history of working to improve the conditions of workers in Indonesia, with a focus on the sportswear sector. Since 2009, Oxfam has been at the forefront of establishing a process in which the manufacturing brands negotiate directly with trade unions representing workers in the sportswear sector, resulting in the ground-breaking and innovative 'protocol process'. The protocol process is the means by which leading sportswear brands and unions came together and agreed to negotiate three protocols (freedom of association, work security, and wages) to protect workers. As women constitute about 80 percent of workers in this sector of five million people, and have long been subject to violations of workplace standards and poor working conditions (ranging from unpaid overtime to long hours, lack of decent bathroom facilities, lack of menstrual provisions, sexual harassment, and difficulty taking maternity leave) the protocol process has had a critical impact on the rights of women at work.<sup>28</sup>

5.4.8 Oxfam has also contributed to supporting the increasing number of women union leaders in Indonesia. Through a partnership with a local women's organisation, Oxfam has supported union officials to negotiate a gender sensitive Collective Bargaining Agreement that accommodates women's rights. While the promotion of women's leadership as a supportive component to the protocol process has seen less immediate results, women union members do report changes in power relations (such as role responsibilities) between women and men, albeit at a small scale.

#### **Recommendation 8:**

The Australian aid program should support initiatives between workers, civil society, unions, and employers that focus on wage levels and factory working conditions and address workforce models that contribute to gender inequality and poverty.

### **Women's economic empowerment and natural resource management**

5.4.9 Extractive industries and large infrastructure projects can have significant social, environmental and economic impacts on local communities that affect women and men differently. For example, while the majority of income and employment benefits from these projects are received by men, women often experience negative economic impacts such as the loss of their livelihood due to the expropriation of land they have been using to produce food and earn an income. This is exacerbated by the fact that land rights typically vest in men, and so women are unable to access the money or benefits paid to compensate for the loss of their land. Further disadvantage can result if the family is resettled on lesser quality land where they cannot sustain a living, leading to girls being removed from school to contribute to household income.

5.4.10 Women may also experience an increase in their work burden as the result of extractive industry projects. In many communities, women are responsible for providing water for their families. Mining is a major user of water, effectively competing with communities who need clean water for domestic use and subsistence agriculture. As a result, less water is available to communities and their livestock, and what is available may be polluted by mining activities, leading to women needing to travel further to access clean water. In addition, when household members fall sick as a result of using polluted water, it is overwhelmingly women who take on the caring role.

<sup>28</sup> Jeremy Gross (2013) Oxfam's Labour Program in Indonesia, Assessment.

- 5.4.11 Attempts to increase female participation in the mining sector have not always been accompanied by initiatives to make mine sites safe spaces where women can work free from sexual harassment and violence. Mining companies and mine worker unions both have a role to play to change the culture of aggressive masculinity that characterises the sector<sup>29</sup> and is often also adopted by security forces employed by extractives companies. There is also evidence that large migrating male populations resulting from extractives projects, and the cultural and economic changes that are triggered by resettlement and compensation, increase the rates of gender-based violence in affected communities.<sup>30</sup>
- 5.4.12 Extractive areas and locations of large infrastructure projects such as the construction of dams and roads attract large numbers of men as workers. This, and the loss of their traditional livelihoods, can force some women and girls to engage in transactional sex to earn an income, increasing their risk of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and violence. In some countries the speed and scale of extractives development has resulted in a parallel increase in the sex industry and trafficking of women into mining areas.
- 5.4.13 Yet despite the real risks to women's human rights that can result from extractive industry and large infrastructure projects, women and girls are often excluded from community consultation and decision-making processes. The barriers to women participating in these processes include practices in which traditional leaders and community decision-making processes do not include women, and the tendency of extractives companies to only invite men to consultation forums for fear of violating local customs or because they erroneously believe that men speak for women's needs as well as their own. In addition, many mining companies see the community as a community of men only.<sup>31</sup> Many women's limited literacy, lack of formal education, and the burden of their household responsibilities are further barriers to participation that need to be addressed.
- 5.4.14 These barriers limit women's engagement in decisions around how new resources are spent, what services are required for resettlement sites, and what local community projects a company may establish (if a company chooses to make such investments). This acts to further entrench the economic marginalisation of women and girls, as well as their lack of access to education and health services, and their right to personal security.
- 5.4.15 Oxfam has long argued that the impacts of mining are 'gendered' and has advocated that the mining sector needs to pay much greater attention to understand and address its impact on women. Oxfam Australia's *Tunnel Vision: Women, Mining and Communities* report<sup>32</sup> put the issue of gender and mining on the agenda back in 2002 and, since then, Oxfam has been considered by both the mining sector and civil society as the 'go to' agency on issues of gender and mining.

#### **Recommendation 9:**

The Australian aid program should increase its focus on understanding and responding to the impacts of mining and large scale infrastructure development on women and girls.

<sup>29</sup> Sisonke Msimang (2013), Who killed Pinky Mosiane? <http://ewn.co.za/2013/08/01/OPINION-Who-killed-Pinky-Mosiane>

<sup>30</sup> Global Rights Alert (2013) *Towards Balancing Women's Participation in Uganda's oil sector: case of rural women in four sub-counties of Hoima and Buliisa district*.

<sup>31</sup> The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (2012) *Mining and local-level development: examining the gender dimensions of agreement making and benefit sharing*. Phase 1 report: practitioner perspectives.

<sup>32</sup> <http://resources.oxfam.org.au/pages/view.php?ref=76&k=>



### Case Study: Gender and Mining

Oxfam's gender and mining program has two main areas of focus - to support mine affected women, their communities and broader networks, and support the mining sector to better understand and respond to its impacts on women. Examples of each include:

#### Women and Community:

- Research projects including the 'PNG LNG Listening Project'<sup>1</sup> which focused on women's participation and voice, and the Indonesia gender and mining project which focused on the impact of artisanal and small scale mining on gender relations.
- Development of a 'Trainer's Manual on Free, Prior and Informed Consent' (forthcoming) which has a strong focus on women's participation in training programs and community decision-making processes.
- Working in partnership with women's rights networks including Publish What You Pay International's extracting equality initiative and WoMin, an emerging women, gender and extractives network in Africa.

#### Mining Sector:

- Development of guidance for the mining sector including the publication 'Women, communities and mining: The gender impacts of mining and the role of gender impact assessment'<sup>2</sup>.
- Participation in mining sector initiatives including in the Mineral Council of Australia's gender and communities dialogue, and as an advisor to Rio Tinto during the development of its 'Why Gender Matters Guide'<sup>3</sup>.
- Presentation with the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining of a paper on gender-based violence and mining at a recent conference at La Trobe University<sup>4</sup>.

Through these activities, Oxfam has influenced the response of some in the mining sector to its impact on women and girls.

#### Refs:

1. <http://resources.oxfam.org.au/pages/view.php?ref=655&k=>
2. <http://resources.oxfam.org.au/pages/view.php?ref=460&k=>
3. [http://www.riotinto.com/documents/reportspublications/rio\\_tinto\\_gender\\_guide\\_pdf](http://www.riotinto.com/documents/reportspublications/rio_tinto_gender_guide_pdf)
4. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/business/cr3-conference/program>

5.4.16 Oxfam's water governance program in the Mekong region also includes a focus on gender. The program's strategy is to create and support initiatives that support women's leadership and ensure that women are informed about and able to participate in decision-making processes on water governance issues. As part of the program, Oxfam has developed a gender impact assessment for hydropower guide<sup>33</sup> for the private sector and has engaged women's organisations to work with corporations as they implement the gender tools in the manual.

<sup>33</sup> Balancing the Scales - Using gender impact assessment in hydropower development (2014), <http://resources.oxfam.org.au/pages/view.php?ref=1210&k=>



### **Recommendation 10:**

The Australian aid program should support women to meaningfully participate in decisions regarding the management of their natural resources and resultant revenues. Where resettlement is unavoidable, the Australian aid program should support them to be resettled in appropriate ways that support their livelihoods and fulfil their rights to personal security and access to education and health services.

## **5.5 Women's engagement in peace-building**

- 5.5.1 Oxfam supports Australia's strong commitment to promoting women's roles in peace-building, as outlined in the whole of government National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security<sup>34</sup>. Strategy 4.5 of this National Action Plan outlines the commitment to 'Ensure peace processes in which Australia plays a prominent role promote the meaningful participation of women, and consider local women's needs, rights and capacity'.<sup>35</sup> This recognises that reducing women's vulnerability and inequality requires not only better government policies and improved services, but also reformed institutions of governance. This need is particularly acute in the context of post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building.
- 5.5.2 The appointment of women into the formal peace negotiations team in the Philippines, and training for women to be involved in the expected ceasefire accord in Myanmar are good examples of women's successful participation in transition and legislative processes. Nonetheless, support for women's engagement in peace processes or economic packages during reconstruction continues to be only five to ten per cent of total allocations.<sup>36</sup>
- 5.5.3 In conflict affected areas such as Kachin State in Myanmar and the Mindanao region in the Philippines, women are the heads of the majority of displaced households and are more vulnerable to violence, sexual harassment and neglect in these contexts where regional, village or camp level decision-making is dominated by men. Civil society support to conflict affected communities has generally focused on food security, water and sanitation, and livelihoods regeneration. While these programs mainstream women's participation, they rarely address the underlying social and cultural barriers which prevent inclusive leadership in peace processes. This means that women and girls are often excluded from decisions that affect their lives such as the delivery of education, health and social protection services, the content of guiding peace principles and policies, the powers of any new political entity, revenue generation and sourcing for reconstruction, and the focus and competence of the justice system.
- 5.5.4 The result of this exclusion is that issues of particular importance to ensuring the rights of women and girls are upheld are often not included in discussions and decisions. For example, women's education, reproductive role, vulnerability to violence, economic burden, and domestic responsibilities, and the support they need to address these, are often invisible and undervalued leading to poor women and girls having few, if any, social and economic safety nets.
- 5.5.5 The invisibility of women also acts as a barrier to them accessing credit and resources to participate in reconstruction packages designed to promote development after periods of conflict. Greater women's leadership in conflict response and recovery processes, including

<sup>34</sup> Australian Government, Office for Women (2012). *Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018*. [http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/aus\\_nap\\_on\\_women\\_2012\\_2018.pdf](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/aus_nap_on_women_2012_2018.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, page 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Women Count: Security Council Resolution 1325, Civil Society Monitoring Report 2012* – The Philippines.

in Kachin state and Mindanao, is therefore integral to challenging unequal power relations that negatively impact on the rights and economic empowerment of women and girls.

- 5.5.6 Oxfam integrates elements of women's leadership in peace processes into its programs in both Myanmar and the Philippines. In Kachin state, the majority of displaced people are women and girls<sup>37</sup> and Oxfam and its partners have built women's leadership into camp committee management processes to ensure greater equality of decision-making in relation to camp operations. Women's voices have resulted in greater emphasis being placed on cash transfers and livelihood activities geared towards women's needs. To increase the level of exposure of senior government officials to women's needs and potential contributions during the conflict and peace negotiations, Oxfam has also undertaken gender and protection training with the Regional Relief and Resettlement Department. A key success of the program has been the recruitment of female staff into visible management positions in civil society organisations in order to extend messaging and outreach work to affected women.
- 5.5.7 In Myanmar, Oxfam also welcomes the Australian Civilian Corps deployment of a Gender Based Violence Coordinator working with UN Population Fund. We believe this support can be further built on by ensuring that women's participation, and strategies to address the needs and rights of women, are included in all of Australia's work in the peace process in Myanmar.
- 5.5.8 In the Philippines, in response to the signing of the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro, Oxfam focused on building community awareness and support for the agreement and transition and ensuring that women had opportunities to participate in the peace-building consultation processes. Oxfam's strategies including media programming, community engagement, and connecting women's organisations and networks reached at least 4248 people including 1,168 women. Oxfam's partner organisations have also conducted consultation dialogues on women and the peace process, occupied strategic posts in the peace panel and Bangsamoro Transition Commission (the body tasked to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law), and helped prepare the draft proposal for the women's agenda in the Bangsamoro Basic Law.
- 5.5.9 While significant steps forward, these efforts must be sustained to ensure that the Bangsamoro Basic Law and its implementation are steered away from reducing women's rights after the new Bangsamoro state is established (as occurred in Aceh, Indonesia). Increased support is needed for the work of women's organisations. These include engaging in policy dialogue and formulation, work with religious and government leaders to challenge prevailing attitudes around the roles of women, and research the effectiveness and monitoring of public monies earmarked for gender-focused programs to ensure women's needs drive the allocation of public economic and social services delivery.
- 5.5.10 Currently there is little data documenting the effectiveness and impact of strategies to increase women's leadership and participation in peace-processes. It is essential to understand the impact of women's collaboration with implementing agencies, to assess women's knowledge of and level and quality of participation in peace processes, and the impact of women's voices on decision-making and outcomes. A number of positive initiatives have been implemented as part of the National Action Plan but the impacts on the lives of women and girls is as yet unknown. Monitoring and evaluation efforts should focus on these impacts.
- 5.5.11 Gathering a comprehensive picture of implementation and impact across all departments and countries is obviously a challenging prospect and as such we suggest that the Interdepartmental Committee on Women, Peace and Security selects a discrete number of

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<sup>37</sup> UNOCHA, Kachin Protection Report, Jan 2013.

priority countries to focus implementation on. Countries could be selected on a number of criteria, including: the breadth and depth of Australian whole-of-government engagement in the country; the extent of the Australian NGO footprint; likely sustainability of Australia's investment; and the extent of gender inequality factors present in the country. On these criteria Afghanistan, in addition to the Philippines and Myanmar, also stands out for National Action Plan implementation focus. Such a focus would enable a more comprehensive monitoring and reporting process as well as support greater intensive collaboration among all stakeholders, including civil society partners.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Australian Government should implement its existing commitments under Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security including to support the full and active participation of women and integration of gender perspectives in peace processes. This should focus on women's roles in formal peace negotiations and mediation at critical junctures both leading up to, and for a significant period after, ratification of peace agreements, accords and treaties.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Australian Government should support and strengthen the capacity of women and girls to contribute to peace processes and ensure their rights are upheld and needs are met in conflict response, recovery and transition.

**Recommendation 13:**

The Australian Government should ensure that National Action Plan implementation is given priority focus in Afghanistan.

**For further information regarding this submission, please contact:**

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