

# Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry

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WaterAid welcomes the International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 (The Bill). WaterAid works globally in the poorest countries to address the water, sanitation and hygiene crisis, an issue which disproportionately affects women and girls. WaterAid is deeply committed to enhancing gender equality and is supportive of legislation that not only promotes gender equality as a policy commitment in Australia's foreign aid program, but also presents a mechanism by which to do so.

## **Framework for accountability: An opportunity to link policy commitments to practice**

The Bill presents an opportunity to link Australia's foreign policy commitments with practice. The Bill supports the Australian Government's focus on empowerment of women and girls, particularly to achieve the Target under the new Aid Performance Framework, which calls for 80% of budget to be allocated to women's empowerment.

The Bill provides a structure through which to measure performance and to make gender a more visible issue. There is an overwhelming need to link commitment with action; to link policy with programs; and to link practice with resources. The Closing the Gender Gap report<sup>1</sup> highlighted the issue of 'policy evaporation'. Citing a review of nine OECD bilateral donors' gender equality strategies in 2005, the report found significant 'policy evaporation' in the transition from commitment to implementation and resourcing, as well as policy 'slippage' throughout Australia's aid program. Furthermore, the 2010 annual effectiveness report found that AusAID's gender policy commitment 'has yet to be translated effectively into performance results'.

WaterAid welcomes The Bill, which provides parliamentary oversight of spending and progress toward gender equality goals. With regard to Part 2 (5), an annual report detailing how Australia's Official Development Assistance spending has contributed to reducing gender inequality will improve transparency and accountability within Australia's aid program. This provision could address the current difficulties with tracking how much of the aid budget goes to gender equality and women's empowerment. Currently only 1% of

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<sup>1</sup> Kilby, P. and Crawford, J. (2011). *Closing the gender gap: Gender and Australian NGOs*. ACFID.

expenditure on reducing gender inequality is captured in the latest PNG performance report<sup>2</sup>. Better tracking of how the aid budget is spent will make it possible to see where investments to reduce gender inequality are going.

### **A call for bipartisan support for promoting gender equality in foreign aid**

WaterAid calls on all parliamentarians to provide multi-party support of The Bill. The UK Government saw bipartisan support to pass similar legislation in 2014, which has led to the protection of the UK's foreign aid policy focus on empowerment of women and girls by tracking expenditure and reporting on gender-informed programming.

In less than 100 days the international community will reach agreement on a blueprint for sustainable development for the next 15 years. Gender Equality will be an explicit goal of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) framework, as will water, sanitation and hygiene. The SDG's will rightly call for increased levels of integration between goals, and therefore between sectors. In the case of realising gender equality, for example, it is clear that this cannot be achieved without monitoring both gender equality outcome indicators and contributing indicators, such as the number of women and girls who defecate in the open, the percentage of the population that have access to basic WASH at home; safe, secure and accessible WASH at schools and health centres disaggregated by gender, and menstrual hygiene management information, supplies and practices. Adopting legislation of the kind outlined in The Bill will help demonstrate Australia's commitment and leadership in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### ***The link between WASH and reducing gender inequality***

WaterAid is deeply committed to reducing gender inequality within our region and globally. Access to safe, clean drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is critical to achieving gender equality. Women and girls perform most of the unpaid labour in households and communities, particularly true of water collection. Walking long distances to collect water puts women, girls and boys at risk of harassment, sexual assault and rape. Ensuring access to water and toilets in schools can make a significant contribution to addressing girls' school attendance - enrolment rates among girls can climb by more than 15% when safe water and toilets are available at school.<sup>1</sup> Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities is a crucial part of infection prevention for mothers and their babies.

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<sup>2</sup> International Women's Development Agency, (2014). *Inquiry into the human rights issues facing women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific Region submission*. IWDA.