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**INQUIRY INTO STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA'S  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH COUNTRIES IN THE PACIFIC  
REGION**

**SUBMISSION**

**30 APRIL 2020**

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
DEFENCE AND TRADE**

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## INTRODUCTION

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) is the leading Australian agency entirely focussed on women's rights and gender equality in the Asia Pacific Region. We welcome the opportunity to present this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Strong relationships between Australia and our Pacific neighbours are crucial in order to create a peaceful and flourishing region, where people live free from poverty and inequality. Gender equality is a key development challenge for the Pacific region, which, until realised, will render achievement of other regional and national development priorities elusive. Ensuring women's empowerment and gender equality must therefore be central to the Pacific Step Up. This submission highlights the ways that the Australian Government could strengthen its approach to women's empowerment and gender equality, in order to deepen relationships with Pacific countries and improve outcomes of Pacific Step-up activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the global landscape in a way inevitably impacts on Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific Region. The world is facing a shake-up in diplomacy, trade and development practices as a result of closed borders, the suspension of multilateral forums and the global economic downturn. For Pacific countries, the full impact of COVID-19 is yet to be seen; however, many countries are particularly vulnerable to potential health impacts due to a shortage of hospital facilities and water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Economically the consequences are already starting to be felt, with drops in tourism revenue and remittances likely to exacerbate poverty and inequality in ways that, if left unchecked, could reverberate for years, and possibly decades, to come.<sup>2</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable to certain health and economic impacts of COVID-19, representing a high proportion of frontline care workers and insecure workers.<sup>3,4</sup> Australia's investment in relationships with Pacific countries must place equality at the centre of COVID-19 recovery efforts through the Step-up in order to build a better future for our region.

This submission is structured around three overarching recommendations:

1. Ensure activities delivered by the Pacific Step-up reflect the priorities of Pacific partners, including government civil society and diverse communities, including:
  - 1.1 Promoting gender equality;
  - 1.2 Investing in infrastructure; and,
  - 1.3 Addressing climate change.
2. Invest in civil society in the Pacific and Australia in order to promote meaningful people-to-people links.
3. Maintain Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a centrepiece of Australia's support to Pacific countries, and harmonise Step-up interventions with ODA's goals of reducing poverty and inequality.

## 1. ENSURE ACTIVITIES DELIVERED BY THE PACIFIC STEP-UP REFLECT THE PRIORITIES OF PACIFIC PARTNERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

Through the introduction of the Pacific Step-up in 2018, the Australian Government outlined a commitment to deepen Australia's relationships with our Pacific neighbours through a different kind of engagement. This engagement looks to create more equal relationships, whereby Australia supports the realisation of objectives identified and led by Pacific governments and communities.<sup>5</sup> If implemented appropriately, such an approach not only stands to strengthen relationships within our region, but to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

To build more equal bilateral partnerships, the Pacific Step-up must both include and reflect the voices of Pacific people. This requires the Government to embed regular opportunities for meaningful input by local voices at all stages of activities, including priority setting, management, implementation and evaluation. In order to attract quality engagement from Pacific partners, it will be important for the Government to demonstrate how local engagement informs the Step-up. Nimbleness will be key, including ensuring the flexibility to revise direction based on feedback, real-time adaptive learning and evolving contexts.

Consultation processes must engage with people of varied and intersecting identities, including people of different ages, gender identities, ethnicities, locations (rural/regional/urban), migration experiences, faiths, and

disabilities. Civil society groups that represent and are led by the people they serve, such as Women's Rights Organisations, Disabled People's Organisations, LGBTQ+ organisations, and youth-led organisations, are critical partners for the Government to reach marginalised and vulnerable populations. Rooted in local communities, these organisations can offer the legitimacy, agility and access needed to reach and amplify the voices of those who have been denied power and status.

**Recommendation:** Embed opportunities within Step-up activities for meaningful input by diverse local voices, including at priority setting, management, implementation and evaluation stages.

**Recommendation:** Work with and through civil society organisations that represent, and are led by, the people they serve, in order to ensure diverse voices are heard.

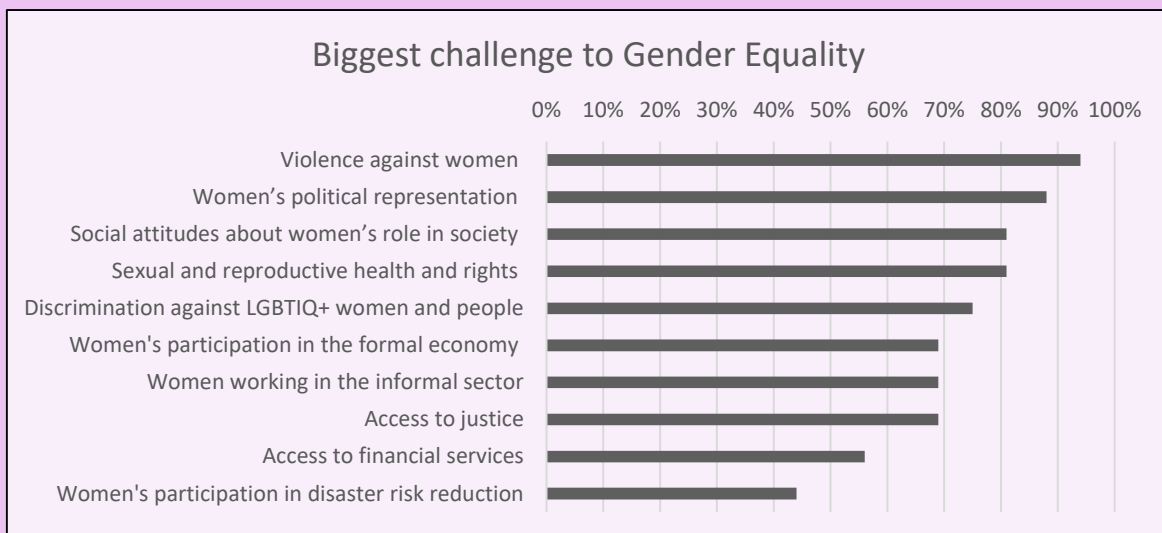
**Box 1: IWDA Pacific partner survey**

IWDA recently surveyed our partner organisations and networks to inform our input into DFAT's review of Australia's international development cooperation program. We received 16 responses from women's rights organisations and actors based in Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, which highlighted key priorities for Pacific partners that the Step-up is well placed to address. This survey also offers an example of a simple tool for engaging and amplifying local voices, leaders and experts.

When asked about the biggest challenges facing their country, the top five issues identified by respondents were:

1. Gender equality (100 per cent)
2. Social protection for marginalised and vulnerable groups (93.8 per cent)
3. Local infrastructure such as local roads, markets and community buildings (81.3 per cent).
4. Climate Change (75 per cent)
5. Poverty (75 per cent)

When asked particularly about challenges to gender equality in their country, respondents identified violence against women (93.8 per cent); women's political representation (87.5 per cent); sexual and reproductive health and rights (81.3 per cent); and social attitudes about women's role in society (81.3 per cent).



However, variations were noted between countries, with access to justice identified as a significant concern by organisations in PNG, and women working in the informal sector a strong challenge for Fiji organisations. This demonstrates how local insights can support effective policy and program design, by providing a more complete picture, nuanced across contexts, experiences and identities.

When asked what they believed the overall purpose of Australia's development program should be, no respondents selected the goal of "promoting Australia's national interest", while the vast majority (87.5 per cent) identified "reducing poverty and inequality". This response indicates that by openly defining Australia's engagement with the Pacific through the prism of national interest, the Government risks reducing the level of influence the Step-up would otherwise provide. In order to remain a partner of choice, Australia must look to build long-term meaningful relationships that demonstrate support for the realisation of Pacific-owned goals.

## 1.1 Promote gender equality

Australia has a strong track record of supporting gender equality in the Pacific through its development program, including the flagship program *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women)* as well as the overall target that 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, effectively address gender issues in their implementation. This leadership on gender equality has extended Australia's credibility and authority on the global stage, bolstering Australia's successful bids for positions on the United Nations Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the Commission for the Status of Women. At the same time, it has supported stability and poverty reduction in our region, leading to increased access to services for women and girls and improved legal frameworks supporting women's rights.<sup>6</sup>

Gender equality will remain a key area of priority for Pacific partners going forward. As seen above, all respondents to IWDA's survey from the Pacific and Timor Leste identified gender equality as one of the biggest challenges facing their country. This concern is supported by global evidence. Poor performance on gender equality has been identified by the Asian Development Bank as a key commonality among 9 of the 14 Pacific nations it classifies as fragile, while states with higher levels of gender equality tend to have a lower likelihood of interstate or intrastate violence, lower levels of perceived or actual corruption and a higher trust in their government.<sup>7;8</sup> According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), women's empowerment in Pacific countries continues to fall behind the wider Asia Pacific region, comprising the five countries with the highest proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in the region.<sup>9</sup> It is clear then, that Australia's leadership in promoting gender equality in the Pacific remains critical, and will become even more so throughout the COVID-19 crisis and recovery period, as the gendered impacts of the health crisis and the resulting lockdown further entrench inequalities between women, men and people of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC).

**Recommendation: Establish gender equality as a standalone priority under the Pacific Step Up, and ensure intersectional gender inclusion is a cross cutting stream across all activities.**

**Recommendation: Ensure the aims of the Pacific Step Up are consistent with relevant international obligations including, but not limited to, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).**

**Recommendation: Adopt a gender-responsive approach to COVID-19 recovery as a flagship focus of the Pacific Step-Up.**

### **Box 2: The gendered impacts of COVID-19**

Analysis of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 is continually emerging. Here we outline just three of the many areas of particular concern for women, selected due to the significant threats they pose to women's rights and wellbeing. In focusing on the gendered impacts of Covid-19, we recognise that initial data indicates that men face higher risk of death from the disease, and note with concern that marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a particular risk during times of crisis and emergencies.<sup>10;11</sup> Collecting individual, multi-dimensional, disaggregated data and undertaking gender-sensitive analysis will be needed throughout the crisis and beyond, in order to fully assess and respond to the gendered implications of COVID-19.

#### **Paid and unpaid care**

Globally, women play a greater role in providing both paid and unpaid care for children and the elderly, and undertake four times more unpaid care work than men in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>12</sup> Data collected using the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) reveals insights into the gendered nature of unpaid work; data from areas of high poverty prevalence in Fiji found that 82 per cent of women regularly do unpaid household work, which may include cooking, cleaning, washing

clothes, looking after children or other household members, fetching water and cooking fuel, compared to just 11 per cent of men.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, women and girls are likely to experience a steep increase in their care responsibilities, as a result of gendered expectations about who will take on the work of caring for the sick. Closures of schools and childcare facilities due to social distancing rules will also significantly increase this unequal burden. This stands to affect the amount of paid work women can do as well as the time that girls can spend studying. Limiting the employment and educational opportunities of women and girls will likely reduce their future opportunities, as well as increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

#### Gender based violence

Levels of domestic violence and sexual exploitation have increased during the COVID-19 crisis, as the increased strain households are experiencing due to health and financial concerns is exacerbating unequal gender norms and power relations. Domestic violence helplines and shelters have reported significant spikes in calls for assistance in China, Argentina, Germany, Spain, France, Cyprus, Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and other states since COVID-19 lock-down measures were imposed in those countries.<sup>14</sup> Restriction on movement is compromising women's ability to leave or distance themselves from violent households. Family violence services find themselves under increasing workloads at the same time as their avenues to support victim/survivors are significantly restricted.<sup>15</sup>

#### Access to health care

Research by the IDM study in Fiji found that women are already less likely than men to seek and receive healthcare when it is required, across every age group.<sup>16</sup> As health systems face increased pressures, women's ability to access safe care for non-COVID-19 related problems will be further reduced, including maternal and neonatal care, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and mental health and psychosocial support services. This diminished access to healthcare will affect women's bodily autonomy during the crisis, as well as creating long-term impacts on otherwise preventable health concerns for populations.

## 1.2 Invest in infrastructure

With the launch of the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific in 2019, it is clear that infrastructure will remain a priority area of cooperation between Australia and the Pacific for the medium-long term. The results of IWDA's survey highlight the significant need for increased investment in infrastructure that is designed with the needs of local people in mind, with 81.3 per cent of respondents from the Pacific and Timor-Leste identifying local infrastructure as a clear challenge for their countries (as distinct from 'major infrastructure'), and 93.8 per cent highlighting social infrastructure a priority, calling for the provision of social protections for marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Infrastructure can have a positive impact on reducing poverty and gender equality. "Pro-poor" infrastructure enables people to better participate in and benefit from economic growth by increasing access to markets, reducing risk and vulnerability, and improving health and education outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Infrastructure can reduce the time women spend on unpaid care and household work, by improving access to clean water, cooking fuel and electricity.<sup>18</sup> This can lead to economic benefits in terms of freeing up women's time to engage in paid work, as well as more time for rest, leisure and family.<sup>19</sup> There are additional benefits to be found in infrastructure investments that consider the needs of different groups of women. For example, infrastructure that is accessible for people with disabilities can enable more women with disabilities to participate in education or paid work, and decrease the workload of carers (often women) for people with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

In designing infrastructure projects it is important to centre the needs of local people and communities. Risks to human rights of infrastructure construction must be considered and mitigated, such as water pollution, forced displacement, threats to women's safety, and loss of agricultural land and income. Gender analysis across the infrastructure lifecycle can assist in identifying projects with the greatest potential to transform society for all. Prioritising donor interests over the needs of local populations and focussing on physical assets over long-term service delivery limit the effectiveness of infrastructure on poverty-reduction.<sup>21</sup>

However, investing in infrastructure alone does not guarantee an improvement in living standards. Pro-poor, gender sensitive infrastructure must also be backed up by investment in other areas of development to ensure progress towards overall development gains and gender equality. Pairing built infrastructure with social infrastructure – such as education, health and social protections – as well as development programs aimed at shifting harmful gender norms can support infrastructure investments to improve gender outcomes, rather than perpetuating or worsening existing inequalities.<sup>22</sup>

The AIFFP was intended as a blended finance initiative, combining grants and loans with varying concessionality. However, as the impacts of COVID-19 begin to be felt by Pacific nations, the Government should re-consider its decision to offer debt-based financing. Many Pacific economies are reliant on tourism for a significant portion of their GDP, with up to 40 per cent of GDP dependent on the tourism industry in some contexts.<sup>23</sup> The travel restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 will have a significant impact on these countries' economies, on top of impacts in health, education, and other sectors. Historically, the pressure to service debt repayments has led countries to cut or privatise essential services. These impacts, like economic austerity policy more generally, are felt more strongly by women; for example, research in the UK found that since 2010 women had borne 86 per cent of the cost of austerity policies imposed by the British Government in the wake of the global financial crisis.<sup>24,25</sup> In this context, IWDA recommends the Government prioritise grant based financing for infrastructure.

As a member of the G20, Australia is part of an agreement to pause debt repayments for Lower Income Countries (LIC) and International Development Association (IDA) countries until the end of 2020.<sup>26</sup> This is an important step to ensure that these countries are not forced to implement austerity policies in order to meet their debt repayments. However given the scale of the crisis, at a minimum this pause should be extended beyond 2020, and in due course Australia should permanently cancel the debt owed by LIC and IDA countries in order to free up national resources to tackling the COVID-19 crisis and its ongoing implications.

**Recommendation: When determining infrastructure investments, prioritise the development needs of local populations, as established through consultations with local communities and locally led WROs.**

**Recommendation: Prioritise pro-poor gender sensitive infrastructure investments by conducting intersectional human rights impact assessments.**

**Recommendation: Accompany infrastructure projects with investments in social infrastructure, such as education, health and social protections for marginalised and vulnerable groups.**

**Recommendation: Prioritise grant-based financing for infrastructure in the Pacific, extend the G20 moratorium on debt repayments and cancel the debt repayments of LIC and IDA countries.**

### 1.3 Address climate change

At the forefront of our Pacific neighbours' priorities is preventing and mitigating the consequences of climate change. The 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, signed by Australia alongside other Pacific Island Forum States, identified climate change as "the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific."<sup>27</sup> A clear majority of respondents to IWDA's survey (75 per cent) highlighted climate change among the top challenges to development progress in their country. Pacific countries have been found to be among the most vulnerable in the world to climate change, according to the University of Notre Dame's Global Adaptation Initiative annual survey, which ranks the world's countries on their vulnerability and readiness to adapt to climate change.<sup>28</sup> The Pacific Region is facing higher frequency, severity and unpredictability of storms, increasing salination of the groundwater, rising temperatures and severe air pollution, as a result of changes in the climate for which it is minimally responsible.<sup>29</sup>

IWDA welcomes the Pacific Step-up's focus on strengthening climate and disaster resilience, as well as the launch of DFAT's Climate Change Action Strategy as important initial steps. However, ongoing discrepancies between Australia's international and domestic climate policies are undermining our credibility and influence with our Pacific neighbours. Diplomatic tensions at the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum, where Australia was singled out for its lacklustre attempts to reduce domestic emissions, make it clear that Pacific island countries expect Australia to demonstrate concerted efforts to both prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change.<sup>30</sup> To

nurture deep relationships with Pacific countries, Australia must take responsibility for its role in climate change by adopting domestic and foreign climate change policies that target prevention, as well as mitigation, efforts. In particular, Australia should commit to meeting our 2030 target under the Paris Agreement without using carry over credits, and to moving to a carbon neutral economy by 2050, in line with international obligations.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to include women, men and people of diverse SOGIESC at all stages of climate change policy development, as capable change agents with diverse perspectives and experiences. The impacts of climate change are gendered, meaning that men, women and people of diverse SOGIESC face different vulnerabilities as a result of traditional gender norms.<sup>32</sup> For example, as water, fuel, fish and other food sources become scarcer, women and girls are likely to spend more time on these aspects of unpaid domestic labour, increasing their exposure to environmental and interpersonal hazards and reducing the time they have available for economic or leisure pursuits.<sup>33</sup> Further, increased violence against women, non-binary people, and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations in the aftermath of natural disasters is well documented.<sup>34</sup> Gender-responsive climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation requires promoting underrepresented voices in traditional and formal arenas, giving due consideration to indigenous knowledge and explicitly including the concerns of women. DFAT's Climate Change Action Strategy provides a good example of placing a gender-responsive policy at the centre of climate change prevention, mitigation and resilience-building interventions, with a central aim to "support...the goals of the Paris Agreement to address climate change and strengthen...socially inclusive, gender-responsive sustainable development in our region". We recommend this aim be elevated to a standalone priority for the Pacific Step-up.

**Recommendation: Better align domestic and foreign policy objectives by committing to meaningful action in Australia and the Pacific on climate change mitigation, as well as resilience and adaptation.**

**Recommendation: Elevate the aim of DFAT's Climate Change Strategy "Australian development assistance supports the goals of the Paris Agreement to address climate change and strengthens socially inclusive, gender-responsive sustainable development in our region" to be a standalone priority of the Pacific Step-up, and embed gender analysis of all climate investments across design, implementation monitoring and evaluation.**

## **2. INVEST IN CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA IN ORDER TO PROMOTE MEANINGFUL PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE LINKS.**

In order to support the development of authentic and enduring relationships between nations in our region, Australia should look to nurture people-to-people links. Key to this is investing in civil society organisations (CSOs), as networks which build meaningful relationships across borders. Strengthening the resilience and capacity of CSOs is more important than ever in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, as civil society spaces close further and fragility increases across our region.

In order to strengthen civil society partnerships in the Pacific, the Step-up should provide increased flexible funding to locally-led WROs, while also utilising values-aligned intermediaries and partnerships to reach to a greater range of organisations across the funding ecosystem. As already outlined, civil society groups that represent and are led by the people they serve, such as WROs, are critical partners in building connections with hard-to-reach communities and in amplifying the voices of vulnerable groups. Currently, an over reliance on project based funding and funding with strict conditions reduces WROs' ability to react to emerging needs or to think about long-term strategy. WROs receive less than 0.36 per cent of development cooperation assistance worldwide, and have a median annual income of just USD 20,000.<sup>35,36</sup> Additionally, there is a need to ensure more funding goes directly to Pacific organisations, including WROs; since 2012, just 15 per cent of *Pacific Women* funds have gone directly to Pacific NGOs and regional organisations.<sup>37</sup> By increasing Australia's contribution of funds directly accessible to WROs to just 5 per cent of total bilateral allocable ODA, the Government could unlock an additional \$130 million per year in funding for WROs.<sup>38</sup>

People from Pacific backgrounds living in Australia offer strong potential to enrichen people-to-people connections between Australia and the Pacific Region. Domestic policy settings can complement the goals of the Pacific Step-up, by ensuring people from Pacific backgrounds are able to fully participate in Australian society. In particular, the Government should look to invest in CSOs that promote the leadership potential of young Pacific women in order to create future regional leaders and deepen connections across cultures. This can be achieved through investment in existing domestic structures such as the National Women's Alliances, in

particular Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for change, as well as grassroots organisations led by and working for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation:** Unlock an additional \$130 million for women's rights organisations annually by committing 5 per cent of Australia's development cooperation towards flexible funding for women's rights organisations.

**Recommendation:** Align domestic policy settings with the goals of the Pacific Step-up, by supporting people from Pacific backgrounds living in Australia to fully participate in society via continued support to the Harmony Alliance, the National Women's Alliance for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and grassroots organisations led by and working for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### **3. MAINTAIN ODA AS A CENTREPIECE OF AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT TO PACIFIC COUNTRIES, AND HARMONISE STEP-UP INTERVENTIONS WITH ODA'S GOALS OF REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY.**

The Step-up looks 'beyond aid' to build a whole-of-government approach to Australia's engagement with our Pacific neighbours. With UNESCAP finding last year that the Asia Pacific is not on track to meet any of the SDGs, it is timely for Australia to be exploring financing options beyond ODA in order to maximise the resources available to tackle poverty and inequality.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, as the largest development assistance partner for the region, Australia's ODA funding will and must continue to be a centrepiece for our engagement in the Pacific.<sup>40</sup> ODA has special characteristics that other flows of money cannot replicate. ODA is particularly important for least developed countries, such as Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, which may otherwise have difficulty attracting other sources of finance.<sup>41</sup> ODA can provide budget security for developing countries, allowing governments to better plan for the future, as well as unlocking additional financing such as blended or pooled options. Development focused investments can also secure changes to the operating context that are required to attract additional sources of finance, including private sector investment.<sup>42</sup>

Australia's significant investment in ODA to the region, as a tool focussed on poverty reduction and sustainable development, has demonstrated our commitment to Pacific countries, and nurtured our position as a 'partner of choice'. Australia's ODA commitments are creating enabling environments to facilitate long-term sustainable growth in Pacific countries.<sup>43</sup> In particular, *Pacific Women* has assisted: "12,512 women to take on leadership roles at the community, provincial and national levels; 17,960 women to access financial literacy training and financial services; 64,262 women and children to access crisis support services, including counselling, health and justice service; and 6,613 men to undertake male advocacy training".<sup>44</sup> In order to build on these successes, and to solidify Australia's reputation in the region, Pacific Step-up activities across government portfolios should be harmonised in accordance with the poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts of ODA flows. Further, a stable and sizeable pool of overall ODA is required to ensure that Australian can maintain this investment of ODA to the Pacific without needing to cut support to other regions, jeopardising our bilateral relationships in Asia and beyond.

**Recommendation:** Establish a timeline of five years maximum, for increasing Australia's ODA to 0.5 per cent of GNI, and ten years for an increase to 0.7 per cent, in line with internationally agreed standards.



## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### **ENSURE ACTIVITIES DELIVERED BY THE PACIFIC STEP-UP REFLECT THE PRIORITIES OF PACIFIC PARTNERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.**

**Recommendation 1:** Embed opportunities within Step-up activities for meaningful input by diverse local voices, including at priority setting, management, implementation and evaluation stages.

**Recommendation 2:** Work with and through civil society organisations that represent, and are led by, the people they serve, in order to ensure diverse voices are heard.

**Recommendation 3:** Establish gender equality as a standalone priority under the Pacific Step Up, and ensure intersectional gender inclusion is a cross cutting stream across all activities.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure the aims of the Pacific Step Up are consistent with relevant international obligations including, but not limited to, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

**Recommendation 5:** Adopt a gender-responsive approach to COVID-19 recovery as a flagship focus of the Pacific Step-Up.

**Recommendation 6:** When determining infrastructure investments, prioritise the development needs of local populations, as established through consultations with local communities and locally-led WROs.

**Recommendation 7:** Prioritise pro-poor gender sensitive infrastructure investments by conducting intersectional human rights impact assessments.

**Recommendation 8:** Accompany infrastructure projects with investments in social infrastructure, such as education, health and social protections for marginalised and vulnerable groups.

**Recommendation 9:** Prioritise grant-based financing for infrastructure in the Pacific, extend the G20 moratorium on debt repayments and cancel the debt repayments of LIC and IDA countries.

**Recommendation 10:** Better align domestic and foreign policy objectives by committing to meaningful action in Australia and the Pacific on climate change mitigation, as well as resilience and adaptation.

**Recommendation 11:** Elevate the aim of DFAT's Climate Change Strategy "Australian development assistance supports the goals of the Paris Agreement to address climate change and strengthens socially inclusive, gender-responsive sustainable development in our region" to be a standalone priority of the Pacific Step-up, and embed gender analysis of all climate investments across design, implementation monitoring and evaluation.

### **INVEST IN CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA IN ORDER TO PROMOTE MEANINGFUL PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE LINKS.**

**Recommendation 12:** Unlock an additional \$130 million for women's rights organisations annually by committing 5 per cent of Australia's development cooperation towards flexible funding for women's rights organisations.

**Recommendation 13:** Align domestic policy settings with the goals of the Pacific Step-up, by supporting people from Pacific backgrounds living in Australia to fully participate in society via continued support to the Harmony Alliance, the National Women's Alliance for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and grassroots organisations led by and working for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### **MAINTAIN ODA AS A CENTREPIECE OF AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT TO PACIFIC COUNTRIES, AND HARMONISE STEP-UP INTERVENTIONS WITH ODA'S GOALS OF REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY.**

**Recommendation 14:** Establish a timeline of five years maximum, for increasing Australia's ODA to 0.5 per cent of GNI, and ten years for an increase to 0.7 per cent, in line with internationally agreed standards.

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