

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
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Monday 15 June 2015

Dear Committee Members

On behalf of ActionAid Australia, I wish to make a submission in relation to the Senate Inquiry on The International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 that is before the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee.

ActionAid would like to express its full support for the International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 that has been proposed by Senator Lee Rhiannon and calls upon all major parties to work towards its adoption into legislation. Our organisation strongly believes that poverty reduction cannot be achieved unless women are empowered and their full rights are recognised and respected, and this Bill makes an important contribution towards these aims and ensuring women are visible in all economic and social domains.

The Australian Government has made a strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment under the Australian Aid Program as one of its six priority areas. It has also set a performance benchmark that 80% of aid investments, regardless of their objectives, will effectively address gender issues in their implementation. The proposed Bill is an important mechanism for accountability to these commitments, by ensuring Commonwealth aid officials give due consideration to the impact of official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian assistance on gender equality, as well as requiring the Minister for Foreign Affairs to report annually to the Parliament on the use of Australian Aid towards achieving gender equality.

Important progress has been made towards the goal of women's empowerment and gender equality through Australian Aid, however implementation of this commitment and measurement processes need to be strengthened. This is particularly important in light of the strong focus on economic growth within the new directions of the Australian Aid Program. Several studies have concluded that economic growth does not automatically lead to women's empowerment but that women's empowerment will lead to economic growth. Therefore, it is vital that there be greater parliamentary and public scrutiny of how international aid is being used to promote gender equality and from ActionAid's perspective, the Bill will serve to promote improved transparency in this area.

The recent ODE assessment of women's economic empowerment under the Aid Program has made several recommendations which could further strengthen implementation of the Government's stated commitment to gender equality and the intent of the Bill. ActionAid encourages the Senate Committee to review these recommendations in light of the proposed Bill and specifically supports the call for:

- Maintaining, empowering and training gender focal points within the Australian Aid Program;

- Consideration of all aid investments on women's unpaid care work, social protection for economic shocks and women's legal rights to property, as well as analysis of the impact of structural adjustment programmes, private sector engagement, climate change and access to the commons on gender equality;
- Supporting genuine in-depth baseline and endline measurements of women's empowerment in all programmes and transparent reporting on these results;
- Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation systems for aid investments are designed to track changes in women's lives and gender equality, drawing upon emerging tools designed to measure impact on women's lives directly rather than focusing on household level measurements.
- Ensuring that measurement is applied consistently to all projects even when partners claim that they have their own mechanisms and capacity;
- Ensuring that quality at implementation reports provide strong examples around gender equality; and
- Engaging with all partners in policy dialogue on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

With the Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 with an ambitious agenda for achieving gender equality and women's rights, ActionAid believes this Bill is an important mechanism for the Australian Parliament to assess progress towards gender equality under the SDGs. Our organisation believes the Bill could be further strengthened by also requiring the Minister to report on allocations for gender equality in order to better track resource commitments in this area within the context of the broader aid budget.

ActionAid Australia encourages the Australian Parliament, through cross-party collaboration to use this Bill to express its long term commitment and engagement on gender equality and women's empowerment, recognising the widespread inequalities that women face globally and women's historical exclusion from economic and social structures. We further encourage consideration of introducing a similar Bill to improve the tracking and reporting of efforts to advance gender equality domestically, and not just through overseas development and humanitarian assistance. Reintroducing the women's affairs budget papers in Australia would further serve to strengthen transparency in this area. Furthermore, ActionAid encourages consideration of extending some scope of this Bill to assess the impact of other Australian Government investments, including through Defence and other parts of the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio such as trade, research and intelligence, to ensure that they do not negatively impact on gender equality.

Once again, ActionAid Australia reiterates its support for this Bill as an important tool for ensuring gender equality considerations are embedded into every aspect of Australia's aid effort. This Bill is an important expression of the Australian Parliament's long term commitment to advancing gender equality through official development and humanitarian assistance and for greater accountability and transparency towards this aim.

Should you have any questions, please contact me on 02 9565 9105 or via email on [archie.law@actionaid.org](mailto:archie.law@actionaid.org).

Yours sincerely

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