



Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

15 June 2015

To the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Secretariat,

I am pleased to write on behalf of World Vision Australia's senior leadership to affirm our full support for the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015*.

World Vision recognises and affirms the equal worth, dignity and rights of women, men, girls and boys and the significant role each one plays in promoting sustainable, transformational development. We believe that sustainable progress can only take place through transformation that increases opportunities, resources and choices, so that women and men have equal power and resources to shape their own lives and contribute to their families and communities. World Vision promotes gender equality as a prerequisite for the sustained well-being of children within their families and communities.

We recognise that transformative changes to gender norms cannot occur through siloed approaches alone, and that efforts to achieve gender equality must be embedded in our full range of programming; from launching a 'gender and water' handbook through a WASH program in Sri Lanka to supporting the delivery of gender and Islam training for imams in Afghanistan in order to foster more inclusive political participation. We understand that sustainable community development outcomes and the transformation of many gender norms are inherently intertwined.

The Pacific region, particularly within the cultural contexts of Melanesian and Polynesian states, is often characterised by patriarchal structures and systems of belief which reinforce the dominance of men and boys over women and girls in all aspects of public and private life. The need to reduce gender inequality in the Australian aid program's primary sphere of interest is both clear and pressing. While the Australian aid program has recognised this need through the policy commitments made in *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*, progress in the Pacific has remained off-track. In this region, only 67 per cent of aid investments have been assessed as effectively addressing gender issues in their implementation. This is below the whole-of-aid-program performance of 74 per cent, and a far cry from the intended target of 80 per cent. The need for greater action is clear, and both the symbolic value and practical Parliamentary reporting requirements of the proposed Bill provide a significant step forward.

As a leading humanitarian and emergency response agency, World Vision also supports the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015*'s recognition of the significance of gender-related differences in the context of humanitarian need. It is increasingly understood that thinking clearly about how gender relates to disaster is not a luxury; it is a vital aspect of emergency relief and the strengthening of community resilience to disaster. To date, reporting against gender equality priorities in Australia's humanitarian responses has been unclear. The proposed Bill's Parliamentary oversight of progress and expenditure will elevate the importance of gender equality goals, while improving transparency and accountability within Australia's humanitarian and emergency responses.

Following the Royal Assent of the UK's similar *International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014*, Prime Minister David Cameron responded with 'an absolute yes' when asked as to whether the Act would establish a statutory benchmark for other countries. It is time for Australia, in recognition of this important

step towards pursuing shared aid policy priorities, to demonstrate leadership and adopt its own legislative measure to promote gender equality within our region.

As the Parliament of Australia considers the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015*, World Vision Australia recommends:

- That civil society be consulted and engaged in the implementation of and annual reporting against the Bill;
- That, in the implementation of the Bill, Commonwealth aid officials recognise the unique vulnerabilities and gender-related concerns of girls and boys; and
- That the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade give consideration to the proposed Bill's reporting requirements in the drafting of Australia's new humanitarian strategy.

World Vision Australia would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the proposed Bill with the Committee Secretariat or other relevant stakeholders as the Bill is considered.

Yours sincerely,

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Director, Government and Multilaterals
World Vision Australia