

Australian Agency for International Development



GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

**AUSTRALIA'S
AID
COMMITMENT**

**Policy Statement announced by
The Hon Alexander Downer MP,
the Minister for Foreign Affairs**

March 1997



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BACKGROUND

Australia’s aid program aims to assist developing countries meet the basic needs of their people. To date, men and women have not shared equally in the benefits of development, and there remain wide disparities in opportunities available to women and men in economic, social and political spheres. A strong emphasis on full and equitable partnership between men and women is required for the advancement of women, to reduce poverty, and promote sustainable development.

Raising the status of women in developing countries is a priority in Australia’s overseas development cooperation. Since 1976 AusAID’s women in development (WID) policy has been refined and developed with a special emphasis on improving the quality of program design. Training of staff and contractors, development of WID strategies within programs and projects, provision of special funding for innovative women-specific projects, and monitoring progress against WID objectives have been features of AusAID’s approach.

Australia played an active role in the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, acting as regional lead donor for the Pacific. In accordance with the Platform for Action agreed at the conference, Australia’s new gender and development policy is committed to actions that will meet women’s immediate needs and address the underlying causes of women failing to benefit equally from development.

All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

...Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

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POLICY

GOAL

Australia’s aid program aims to promote equal opportunities for women and men as participants and beneficiaries of development.

Australia recognises equality of men and women as an important development goal. Sustainable development can only be achieved with the active participation of all members of the community. Providing equal rights and access to resources and opportunities to women and girls is crucial to reducing poverty, illiteracy and disease. Achieving gender equality requires a focus on both men’s and women’s roles.

The policy acknowledges that the goals and priorities for tackling gender equity will vary from country to country and should be sensitive to the specific needs and priorities of developing country partners. The policy has several dimensions. Some are of a practical nature, such as providing support for programs that seek to ensure equal access to education and health services. Just as important is support for initiatives that enable women and men to participate equally in economic, political and cultural life. These can include programs that seek legal and constitutional reform and promote change through training programs and information dissemination.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the gender policy reflect the need for an approach that is both practical and forward looking. They are:

To improve women’s access to education and health care

by supporting initiatives which provide basic education, particularly literacy programs for women and girls, as well as vocational, technical and tertiary education; and which provide basic health care services, particularly maternal and child health, primary health care and disease control.

To improve women’s access to economic resources

by supporting programs which promote women’s equal access to capital, including land, forests, marine and other natural resources, as well as credit and savings programs; and which improve the financial, technical and professional skills of women.

To promote women’s participation and leadership in decision making at all levels

by supporting programs which encourage and support the participation and representation of women in public positions; by supporting and strengthening networks and organisations which give women a more effective voice; and assisting in training women for leadership.

To promote the human rights of women and assist efforts to eliminate discrimination against women

by supporting legal reform programs for the advancement of women; providing training and information to overcome discrimination against women under the law and in the wider community; supporting community and institutional initiatives which address violence against women; and providing the basic needs of women in crisis situations.

To incorporate a gender perspective in Australia’s aid activities

by strengthening the capacity of AusAID to incorporate a gender perspective in the development and implementation of policies, programs and projects through training and monitoring at all levels.

Ending Violence against Women

Violence against women is a global problem that cuts across lines of income, class and culture, and takes place in both public and private life. It occurs in all societies to a greater or lesser degree and includes violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering. Violence is a key factor preventing women from exercising their rights and achieving social and economic equality.

In both Fiji and Vanuatu, AusAID is providing support for women’s crisis centres. The Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre in Suva has received support from Australia since 1990. The Centre assists women and children who are victims of violence, providing counselling, shelter and support services. It has developed close links with the police, the judiciary and the media in an effort to raise public awareness of the damage caused by violence and to lobby for laws that recognise and protect women’s rights.

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RATIONALE

The Status of Women

- Of 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70 per cent are women.
- Among the world’s 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men two to one.
- Adult women suffer more than men from malnutrition. Of adults suffering iron deficiency 458 million are women and 238 million are men; of those stunted by protein energy malnutrition, 450 million are women and 400 million are men.
- Each year at least half a million women die from complications due to pregnancy. In most poor countries pregnancy complications are the largest single cause of death among women in their reproductive years.
- Although women now represent 41 per cent of all workers in developing countries, their wages are 30-40 per cent less than those of men for comparable work.
- Women constitute less than one seventh of administrators and managers in developing countries.
- Women hold only 10 per cent of the seats in the world’s parliaments and 6 per cent in national cabinets.

UNDP - Human Development Report 1995

An examination of the current status of women reveals the importance of focussing the gender and development objectives of the aid program on promoting equality of opportunity for women.

Over the last three decades there has been considerable progress in producing more comprehensive approaches and concrete strategies to meet the needs of women in developing countries. During this time, with the assistance of bilateral, multilateral and national agencies, female life expectancy has increased and gender gaps in education and health have narrowed. Many women in developing countries have entered the work force in occupations previously reserved for men. Women have made significant advances towards achieving better working conditions and improved pay. Women’s networks and organisations have flourished and enabled women to voice their concerns in domestic and international forums.

However, women today constitute nearly 70 per cent of the world’s poor. Almost two thirds of all illiterate people in the world are women. Girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases than boys. The extent of violence against women, from the domestic and civic spheres to situations of war, is

becoming better recognised. Women and their dependants constitute 80 per cent of the world’s 18 million refugees. Women are still largely absent from decision-making positions and the power structures that shape society.

Equality of men and women is an integral part of universal human rights. This means that women and men are given equal access to quality education, health and nutrition. It also means that the barriers to equal participation in political and economic life are removed so that women are able to share equally with men the opportunities and benefits of development.

The active participation and cooperation of all members of the community is at the heart of sustainable development. Such participation should build on people’s skills, knowledge and potential and enable them to be involved in activities which are meaningful to them. In short, the goal and objectives of the gender and development policy recognise that development programs cannot succeed if the people - men and women - affected do not participate in and support them.

Promoting Women’s Participation in Decision Making

A key objective of Australia’s gender policy is to promote and support women’s equal participation in decision making at all levels. This requires a range of initiatives, including fostering and strengthening women’s networks and organisations (particularly in situations where women’s participation is tentative and difficult) and institutional strengthening projects which integrate women’s perspectives in legislation, policies and programs.

A joint AusAID/UNIFEM project in Mongolia will establish an independent women’s information and research centre. The centre will make information on women’s social and economic status available to Mongolian women and will collect data for use by the government to support policy changes which can encourage more women to participate in national development programs.

Mainstreaming Gender - Promoting Equal Access to Education

Education is an essential tool for achieving equality and development. Education, above all, enables people to take change into their own hands and shape their own destiny. Access to educational opportunities is a human right.

It is well recognised that education for girls and women has a catalytic effect on every dimension of development: lower child and maternal mortality rates; reduced fertility rates; increased educational attainment by daughters and sons; higher productivity; and improved environmental management. Together these can mean faster economic growth and wider distribution of the benefits of growth.

In Papua New Guinea AusAID will provide in excess of \$14 million to support the development of elementary vernacular education. The project will assist in the development of curriculum, teaching materials, infrastructure and training of approximately 5 500 teachers, in order to strengthen PNG’s capacity to provide quality education in the first three years of schooling. The project aims to have women as at least 50 per cent of teacher recruits, and will provide regionally based training and village employment, so that security and distance will not be barriers to women’s participation. Gender expertise has been used in the project design and a gender specialist will advise the project team and the teacher trainers on curriculum and training. Access to education for girls will be increased by the establishment of a broad based layer of elementary education in villages. Additionally, with increasing numbers of women elementary teachers girls will be exposed to alternative female role models in paid employment.

APPROACH: FROM WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT TO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Early approaches to women in development recognised that development had ignored the important role played by women in their communities and, as a result, largely excluded them from the design and implementation of development programs. The **women in development (WID)** approach recognises that more efficient and effective development requires the active participation of women as well as men. Seeking to remedy women’s exclusion from the development process, the WID approach focuses mainly upon women.

Since the mid 1980s there has been a growing consensus that sustainable development requires an understanding of both women’s and men’s roles and responsibilities within the community and their relationship to each other. Improving the status of women is no longer seen as just a women’s issue but as a goal that requires the active participation of men and women. This has come to be known as the **gender and development (GAD)** approach.

The GAD approach, through gender analysis, seeks to understand the roles, responsibilities, resources and priorities of women and men within a specific context, examining the social, economic and environmental factors which influence their roles and decision-making capacity. The collection of sex disaggregated data throughout the program and project cycle is therefore an important part of the GAD approach.

The nature of Australia’s assistance will vary according to the needs of men and women, and where appropriate, will include separate programs, projects and components for women, which may assist with mainstreaming women’s interests, or be essential for advancing their status and promoting their human rights.

Incorporating a Gender Perspective - Water Supply & Sanitation

Incorporating a gender perspective into aid activities involves understanding the different roles of women and men within a specific context. Gender analysis, an essential part of social analysis, is the means by which such an understanding is acquired. A crucial part of gender analysis is the collection of socio-economic data disaggregated by sex. It is important that women and men in the communities themselves participate in data collection, as well as in the design and implementation of the activities.

An example of the gender and development approach can be found in Flores, Indonesia, where AusAID is undertaking a water supply and sanitation project. The five year, \$22.5 million project commenced in June 1994, and focused initially on reconstructing water supply and sanitation facilities in selected rural and urban areas which had been hit by an earthquake in 1992.

In Flores women and their children are the major water collectors and users and women are also the major caretakers of children and the sick. As a result, women have a significant vested interest in any water and sanitation efforts and hygiene activities undertaken in their communities. Involving women in planning, operating and maintaining the improved water and sanitation facilities is critical to their effective use and sustainability.

On the basis of a report prepared by a gender and health specialist, several steps have been taken to incorporate a gender perspective. The project employs a full time, local GAD adviser who is responsible for making the participatory training workshops and other project elements sensitive to gender. Through separate training and discussion groups, conducted by male and female community facilitators, the project encourages the input of women and men into decision making and ensures that women’s specific needs are known and respected. Gender awareness workshops are held at the district level for project and Indonesian counterpart staff and for community members. In addition, the project funds people to participate in a provincial level Gender Advisory Group which serves as a resource base and is made up of Indonesian officials, non government organisations, and international donors.

IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the aid program means ensuring that the needs, priorities and interests of women as well as men are considered at all levels and stages of development activities. Responsibility for achieving gender equity is shared by all actors - men and women, policy analysts, planners, managers and program staff.

In the management of the aid program AusAID will ensure that gender is considered in:

- the development of sectoral and other policies; so that there is consistency in the consideration of gender throughout the aid program;
- high level consultations; so that partner countries are aware of Australia’s policy, and the priorities and goals of our partners are considered in AusAID’s gender planning;
- the development of and priority setting for country programs as well as regional, multilateral, humanitarian and NGO programs; and
- the management of projects; with terms of reference, contracting, monitoring and evaluation ensuring that gender concerns are addressed effectively at all phases of the project cycle.

The Beijing Platform for Action

In recent years gender equality has become the focus of the GAD approach, a focus which is reflected in the Platform for Action of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. The Platform for Action places particular emphasis on twelve critical areas of concern:

- enabling women to overcome poverty
- ensuring women’s equal access to quality education and training
- ensuring women’s equal access to health care
- eliminating violence against women
- protecting women from armed and other conflicts
- promoting women’s economic self-reliance
- promoting women’s participation in decision-making
- integrating gender equality dimensions into policy and planning
- promoting women’s human rights
- enhancing the media’s role in promoting gender equality
- integrating women in the ecologically sustainable development process
- eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl child