

AVI

inviting change

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
International Gender Equality Strategy

AVI Submission 2023

Contact: Melanie Gow, AVI CEO

E: mgow@avi.org.au

P: 0419 103 898

160 Johnston Street
(PO Box 350) Fitzroy,
Victoria 3065, Australia
ABN: 88 004 613 067

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AVI advances gender equality through targeted support and engagement with locally led women's rights and gender equality organisations, primarily through the Australian Volunteers Program managed on behalf of DFAT. All approaches to achieving gender equality are locally led and owned.

AVI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise the continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to their lands and waters, and we pay our respects to Elders and communities past, present, and emerging. We would like to specifically pay our respects to the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our head office is located.

AVI stands in **solidarity with indigenous women** and recognises that First Nation's knowledge and perspectives are essential to achieving gender justice.

Progress towards gender equality across our region will be achieved through change that is **locally owned and led**. In the new International Gender Equality Strategy, Australia has the opportunity to acknowledge and respond to the power structures that underpin global gender inequality.

AVI approaches **partnerships with mutual respect** and stands with gender equality and women's rights organisations to advance feminism and gender equity through their own ways of working. AVI calls on the Australian government to prioritise local knowledge and genuine equitable partnerships.

Priorities

Gender Based Violence remains pervasive, women in our region face twice the global average rates of violence [1]. **Women's political leadership and representation** in the Asia-Pacific region falls below the global average [2]. **Women's economic justice** has stalled globally [3]. AVI affirms that the priorities in the current Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy remain relevant. Australia's commitment and advocacy to these priorities are vital for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region.

Climate justice and gender equality are inseparable. The climate crisis disproportionately affects women and girls, women with disabilities, indigenous women, and people with diverse SOGIESC. Australia's approach to women's human rights and gender equality must be underpinned by feminist principles and climate justice.

AVI is concerned about the global backlash to **sexual reproductive health rights** and the **rights of people with diverse SOGIESC**. We welcome Australia's international engagement to stand in solidarity with human rights defenders.

Approaches

Genuine local leadership is critical to a **transformative approach** to gender equality. Legacies of colonialism, discriminatory laws, and cultural norms perpetuate gender inequality. AVI is committed to positive change that is locally owned and led and supports systemic change that prioritises local knowledge and equitable partnerships.

Flexible and accessible resourcing for local gender equality and women's rights organisations enhance leadership and decision-making by recognising local knowledge and catalysing grass-roots women's movements. AVI is committed to building relationships of mutual trust and respect and suggests that flexible and unbound funding demonstrates Australia's intent to 'seek relationships based on respect'.

Recognising religion, family, and culture as positive drivers of gender equality can help engage men, boys and stakeholders typically absent from women's rights work without imposing values. The root causes of gender equality cannot be addressed without engaging powerholders as allies. AVI is committed to a strengths-based, culturally appropriate and inclusive approach and recognises the power culture can have as a mechanism for change.

A twin-track approach encourages mainstreaming and a focus on gender equality. Australia can enhance gender equality outcomes by incorporating gender into the design of investments and by prioritising gender equality and climate change in Development Partnership Plans. AVI is committed to supporting the development process and welcomes Australia's commitment to 80 per cent of investments addressing gender equality effectively, and the inclusion of gender equality objectives in all new investments.

Strategy Recommendations

Champion locally led responses to Gender Based Violence

- Transformative change is only possible through initiatives that are locally owned and based on feminist principles.

Prioritise and communicate long-term, strategic, and coherent expectations regarding gender equality and climate action

- Communicate clear expectations and requirements to address gender equality in global investments.
- The intersection of Gender Based Violence and the climate crisis means GBV in disaster or humanitarian contexts cannot be siloed.
- Gender equality and climate action are elevated as a central priority of Development Partnership Plans.
- Gender equality and climate action is incorporated into all programs and projects.

- A percentage of each investment budget allocated to gender equality activities and resourcing.
- Gender equality is included in the design phase of all investments.
- Domestic and family violence leave is available for personnel in all investments.

Commit to flexible and long-term funding to gender equality and women's rights

- Directly fund the women's rights movement and civil society coalitions for change.
- A percentage of each investment budget allocated to funding or working with women's rights organisations.
- Discretionary funding available at Post to support innovative gender equality activities.

Prioritise practices that support locally led approaches to gender equality

- Development Partnership Plans are consulted on widely and influenced by partner governments and local organisations.
- Local women's rights organisations are given significant opportunity to input into and advise on the new International Gender Equality Strategy.
- Reflect a clear strategy for locally led approaches to gender equality, shaped by partner governments and communities.
- Targets for local leadership in the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs.
- Develop timeframes that would see all development investment programs having local leadership and reframe Australian adviser's contributions as 'useful outsiders'.
- Performance management frameworks incentivise local leadership.

Increase investment in collecting and sharing gender data and evidence

- Make context-specific gender analysis available to all stakeholders in Australia's development program to allow global investments to support targeted and mainstream approaches.
- Ensure gender analysis evidence and data is available to local partners including women's rights organisations.
- Gender analysis is foundational to Development Partnership Plans and provides a framework for stakeholders, like AVI, to act.
- Support evidence sharing of local solutions and ideas to respond to gender inequality and Gender Based Violence.
- Recognise that accurate sex-disaggregated data is integral to responding to and preventing Gender Based Violence.

Kiribati Men's Behaviour Change

The Kiribati Men's Behaviour Change (KMBC) program is coordinated by the Women's Development Division within the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs. KMBC supports male perpetrators of violence to become advocates, champions, and role models to end violence against women and girls. Through the flexible and accessible funding of the Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund, designated for partner's gender equality activities, the KMBC program empowered men through training and in-depth group discussion on gender, human rights, negative social norms, and the impact of abuse on themselves and their families.

“ Participants were able to share their marriage life experiences where we found that most of them are perpetrators by misusing their powers over their family members especially to their wife. At the conclusion of the training, the participants expressed remorse for the way they had treated their wife and actively began [to] change their behaviour towards her and put [learnings] into practice. ”

Indigenous Pathways

Aunty Rose is a Kaurareg Traditional Owner and Kala Lagaw Ya speaker, from Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait. She recently travelled overseas for the first time to share her jewellery making skills with iTaukei women from the Cakaudrove province, using techniques that have been passed down from her mother and grandmother.

iTaukei women's organisation, Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei Cakaudrove (SVTC), aims to enhance the status of iTaukei women and preserve and strengthen traditional values, cultural practices, and arts throughout their province. They were excited to host a series of workshops for their members, with Aunty Rose sharing her skills with over 50 women from rural locations across the islands of Vanua Levu and Taveuni. This activity was supported by Indigenous Pathways, a component of the Australian Volunteers Program that aims to connect Indigenous Australians, with Indigenous organisations and communities internationally.

GBV Learning Exchange

Locally led transformative approaches are key to responding to Gender Based Violence. Australian Volunteers Program partner organisations in South Africa, Lesotho, and Eswatini participated in a tripartite learning exchange to explore approaches to GBV prevention and response and enhance their continued programming.

Refugee Social Services hosted staff from Kwakha Indvodza to explore the complexities of GBV programming with asylum seekers and refugees including managing culture shock and barriers to services. Kwakha Indvodza shared learnings on the importance of including men and boys in GBV programming. Upon returning to Eswatini, Kwakha Indvodza participants shared learnings and best practices within their organisation allowing them to identify useful strategies and implement them locally.

Kick4Life hosted Refugee Social Services and shared their experiences of using sport to support GBV programming, in particular overcoming societal gender stereotypes and cultural obstacles in involving girls in sport.

The learning exchange contributed to more than a transfer of technical skills. The organisations were able to share knowledge on operational areas key to the survival of civil society organisations working in gender equality; partnerships, due diligence and risk, resource mobilisation, and evidence-based data management. Convening opportunities allow partner organisations to build relationships with likeminded organisations and reflect on how to enhance their own GBV programs to support different or diverse stakeholders.

References

1. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/06/pacific-partnership-country-summaries-2023>
2. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/in-focus/csw/snapshot-of-womens-leadership-in-asia-and-the-pacific>
3. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>