

Review of Australia's Aid Strategy

Plan International Australia's Youth Activist Submission

My name is Varsha Krithivasan, I am 19 years old and being part of Plan International Australia's Youth Activist Series has allowed my passion for gender justice, community development and global citizenry to be channelled into meaningful opportunities and avenues.

Plan International is a global development and humanitarian organisation working in 51 countries to tackle injustices, inequality and poverty faced by marginalised children and young girls.

The Youth Activist Series within Plan International is an opportunity for young people to train in gender equality literacy, government relations and communications in order to advocate for issues they are passionate about in the wider world.

I wanted to contribute to this review because I am passionate about the impact of Australia's global interactions as well as creating change and opportunities for communities that have so much to offer to the world. I surveyed my group of youth activists and they identified two priorities that they believe should be in Australia's new international development policy – gender equality for adolescent girls and climate change.

Context and Priorities

A review of Australia's new international development policy opens doors to the potential global role Australia can play in creating long term and generational change to contemporary large-scale issues. The opportunity to contribute as a young person is extremely significant and will inform the priorities, the recommendations and the foundations of this submission in order to push for long-lasting difference.

Australia's significance in the global stage is and should continue to be characterised by its investment into supporting neighbouring countries and marginalised communities in need. Targeted investment into human aspects of aid will build a global generation of equality, economic strength and sustainable rebuilding and therefore this submission aims to put gender equality in adolescents and climate justice at the centre of its contribution.

Gender Equality for Adolescent Girls

Putting gender equality as a central priority and target for Australian aid to its neighbouring countries would fundamentally develop economic growth, inclusion and increased productivity of the workforce. As the Foreign Policy White Paper recognises "Gender inequality undermines global prosperity, stability and security. It contributes to and often exacerbates a range of challenges, including poverty, weak governance and conflict and violent extremism."

The reason why adolescent girls in particular are the driving force behind this investment is because a focus on girls aged 10-19 in the developing world means that gender equality can be enjoyed by future generations of women. Plan International's report, 'Half A Billion Reasons: How investing in adolescent girls can change the world' found that Australia's aid and development policy and DFAT's 2016 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, overlooks the potential of adolescent girls. However, the need for full participation of women economically, socially and culturally requires Australian Aid strategies to first recognise the challenges and vulnerabilities girls face and quantitatively target gender inclusive progress.

The 2018 report by the McKinsey Global Institute – 'The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific' found that "advancing women's equality in the countries of Asia Pacific could add \$4.5 trillion to their collective GDP annually in 2025, a 12 percent increase over a business-as-usual GDP trajectory. By underinvesting in the participation of women and young girls, the strength and potential of a nation cannot be reached. In order to fulfil this potential, enabling factors of participation such as access to quality secondary education, safety from violence, access to quality sexual and reproductive health and services, economic empowerment, and ending early marriage is critical to the full inclusion of women in the workforce.

We recommend that the Australian Aid review allows for a strategic investment in adolescent girls which will, in the long term, strengthen governance and economies of our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific.

Climate Justice

Creating a future focused agenda for the international development policy also requires global and national initiative and action being taken on climate justice and the health of our planet. There is no greater intergenerational threat than the impact of climate change and pollution on increasingly marginalised communities and vulnerable groups such as children and young people. Climate vulnerability is an intersectional issue as the distribution of costs and impacts of climate change are not equal, therefore exacerbating existing marginalisation such as geographical location, poverty, class, race and gender.

As the Foreign Policy White Paper recognises "[t]he challenge posed by climate change will deepen over the next 10 years....Climate change will sometimes impede economic development, drive additional displacement of people and, if left unchecked, add to global stresses on the supply of food and water. Many countries in Australia's immediate region, especially small island states and those with large delta cities, will be increasingly affected."

Climate strategy requires the building of skills in crisis leadership, the development of adaptation processes as well as both community and global minded sustainability advocates who can understand the role and responsibility of a nation in global environmental crises

and emergencies. The access and potential of young people in this space, who's marginalisation exclude them from necessary climate contribution and innovation, is one of the pivotal ways that systemic resilience and development can be made.

We recommend that Australia's aid program recognises the urgency of achieving climate justice and the role that young people play in addressing the issues of climate change in their countries.

Conclusion:

Australia stands on the international stage as a global leader in many contemporary political landscapes. We have a responsibility as both global citizens and to our own nation to prioritise investments into human development, progressive social change and urgent environmental crises in order to avoid politically short-term policy.

Focusing on the significance of young people and their participation is vital when thinking about how a nation can rebuild and progress its economy into future generations. Furthermore, recognising the vulnerability of certain groups such as adolescent girls and enabling an environment of inclusion is investing in minds that will create change, innovation and advancement of their own environments., This submission aims to encourage this agenda and mindset when reviewing Australia's International development policy.