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Australian Volunteers Program Gender Equality Strategy



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Gender equality benefits everyone; men, women, boys, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. It is necessary for peace, economic growth, and an inclusive society where everyone can thrive. Inequality affects women and girls and is compounded for marginalised groups such as LGBTQIA+ people, people with a disability, and those experiencing poverty. It is essential to respond to the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that cause unequal treatment and opportunities based on gender.

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1. Gender equality on the program

Why this strategy matters

Gender equality is a human right and essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Australian Volunteers Program is committed to promoting and protecting gender equality and women's rights across all our work.

Our approach to gender equality is led by our partners.

Partner organisations are the experts on what works in their community. Our support is decided by our partners, and what they need to continue their work.

Partnering with gender equality organisations is how we make our biggest contribution.

This Strategy:

- Guides staff and other stakeholders on how to include gender in their work on the program
- Clearly sets out gender equality expectations, responsibilities, and accountabilities
- Outlines how gender equality contributes to program goals and End of Program Outcomes
- Aligns with Australia's International Development Policy

The Gender Equality Strategy supports the new Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy which guides our direction, policy context, principles, and priorities.



Above: Volunteer assistant Ophnay Rechy (L) and Australian volunteer Gender Development Officer Jaclyn McCosker (R) at Chuuk Women's Council, Federated States of Micronesia.



Who we're speaking to

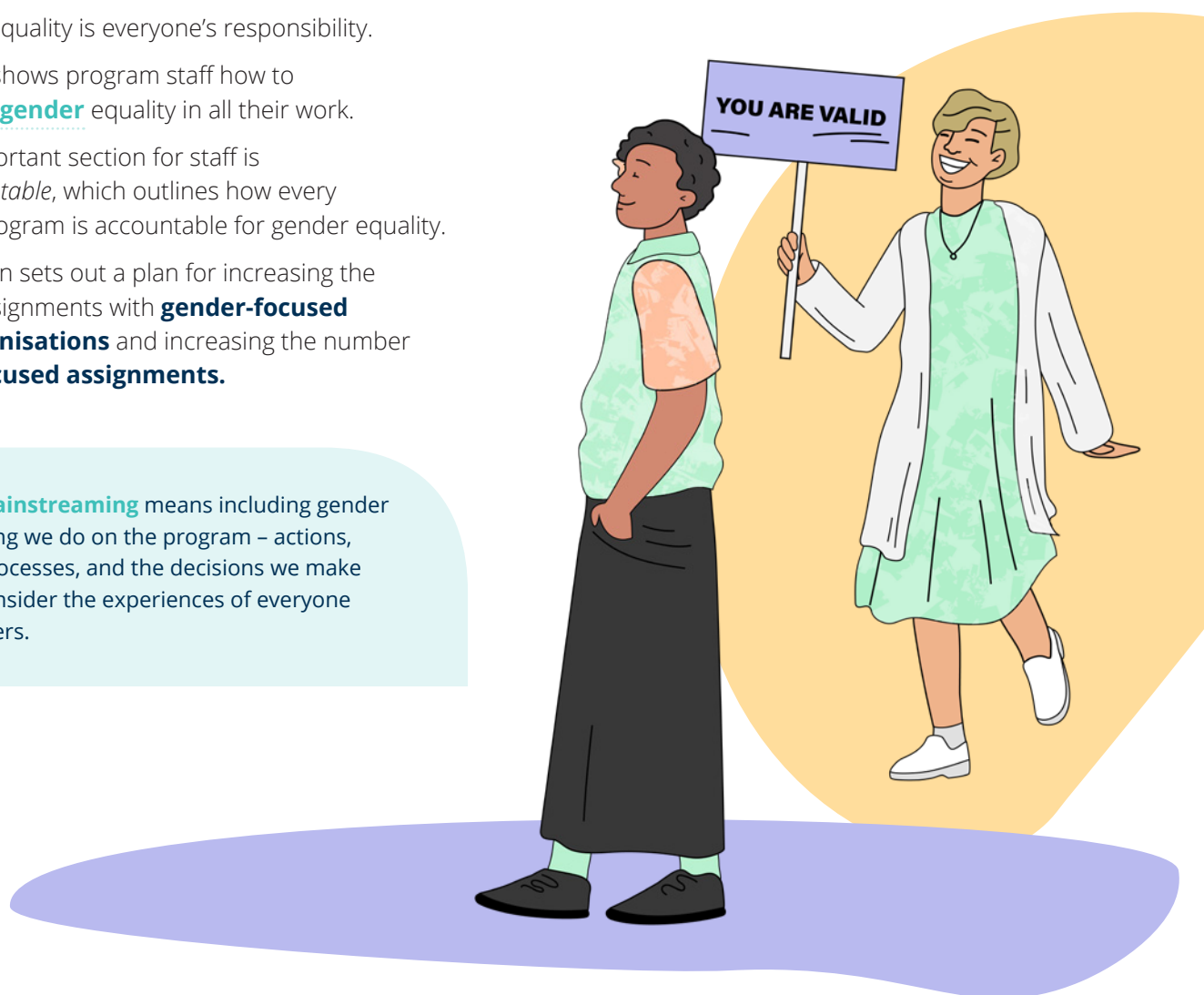
You! Gender equality is everyone's responsibility.

This Strategy shows program staff how to **mainstream gender** equality in all their work.

The most important section for staff is *Staying Accountable*, which outlines how every role on the program is accountable for gender equality.

The Action Plan sets out a plan for increasing the number of assignments with **gender-focused partner organisations** and increasing the number of **gender-focused assignments**.

Gender mainstreaming means including gender in everything we do on the program – actions, policies, processes, and the decisions we make need to consider the experiences of everyone of all genders.



Above left: Staff of Working Women's Centre Dili, Timor-Leste. L-R: Program Coordinator Maria Josefina, Coordinator Ricar Pascoela, Advocacy Officer Beatriz de Costa Fernandes.

Above right: Dorothy Dickson (L) and Joxi John (R) – Farmers and members of Krevanofi Women's Coffee Farmers (KWCF), Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.

2. Understanding the context

Our journey so far

Our commitment to gender equality is led by both international conventions and Australian commitments. We are guided by the Australian Volunteers Program's history and research, and respond flexibly to the expectations of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and partner organisations..

This strategy replaces the Gender Action Plan 2020-2025, the Gender Equality Statement of Intent, and the Diverse SOGIESC Statement of Intent.

What research tells us

The 2019 Gender Equality Analysis found that while volunteers, staff, and DFAT agreed the program should promote gender equality, there needed to be increased focus on gender mainstreaming and specific gender activities. The analysis identified key areas to focus on; leadership, staff and volunteer capacity, partnering with gender organisations, addressing gender-based violence, and MEL. The priorities informed the Gender Action Plan 2020-2025 and the Gender Equality Statement of Intent. These areas remain important and shape *Our Action Plan*.

The 2020 LGBT+ Inclusion and Support Review found that many LGBTQIA+ volunteers did not feel safe on the program. The review recommended increased support for queer volunteers, improved staff knowledge on LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and revised program documents and systems to mainstream LGBTQIA+ experiences. There has been marked improvement in LGBTQIA+ inclusion on the program and the Review contributes to *Our Action Plan*.

The 2021 Gender Equality Research surveyed partner organisations and found that supporting gender focused organisations helps the program achieve gender outcomes. The program also supports partners at the individual, organisational, and networking levels, which contributes to **gender transformative change**.

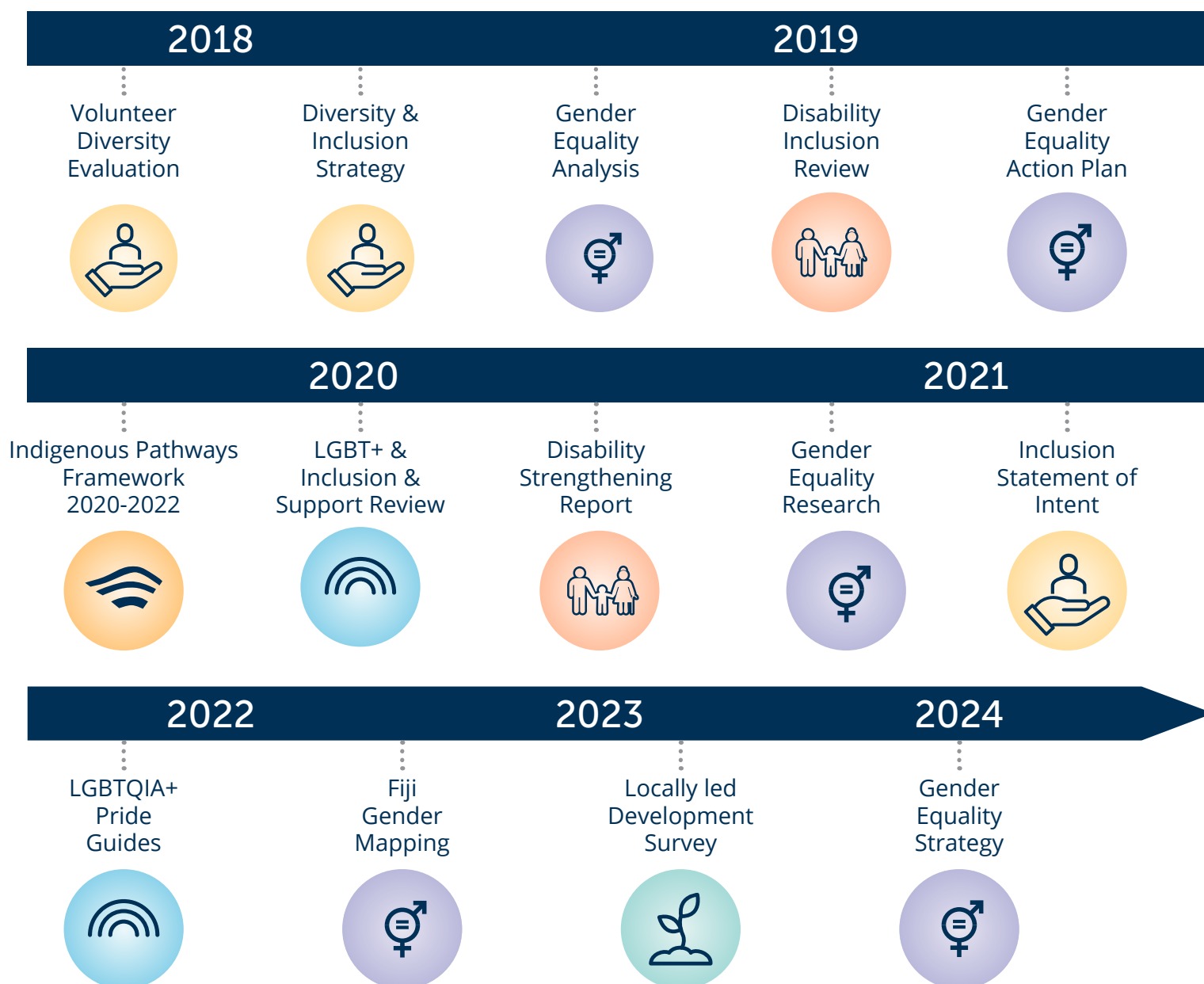
The Research recommends partnering with organisations that have clear gender goals, which guides our **partner led approach to gender equality**.

Gender transformative change means actions that not only respond to inequality but also challenge unfair systems, beliefs, and behaviours that cause inequality. The concept of transformative change is from the Gender Integration Continuum – a scale that maps gender approaches from gender discriminatory (worst) to gender transformative (best).





A glimpse into the past





The bigger picture

Global commitments

Every country the program works in has laws, policies, or strategies that guide how governments and organisations should work towards gender equality. Almost every country we work in has signed on to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹. The program supports partners to work towards their CEDAW commitments.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is adopted by all countries the program works in. The agenda outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Volunteers are recognised as stakeholders to the SDGs² and contribute through people-to-people connections and working towards partners' goals.

Above left: Elga da Silva Maria (left), President of Juventude ba Dezenvolvimentu Násional (JDN), with Alianca Fernandes (above), one of the first few female microlet (minibus) drivers in Timor-Leste, and Jescia Nelinha Da Silva Ximenes, volunteer in Dili, Timor-Leste.

Above right: Staff members of PKBI DIY (L-R): Romna Dwi Utami (Director of Clinic Adhiwarga) and Fransiska Vena Agustiningrum (Executive Director), Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



Australian Government commitments

AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

This strategy aligns with Australia's International Development Policy by:

- Being partner led and recognising partner organisations as the experts³
- Placing gender equality at the centre of development⁴
- Targeted gender equality initiatives and including gender in everything we do⁵

A **twin-track approach** to gender equality means taking two steps at the same time:

- address specific needs through targeted actions (like programs for women's leadership)
- all policies and programs include gender equality as a key focus (through gender mainstreaming)

AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

This strategy is guided by Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy⁶:

- We support locally led development; our work is led by partner organisations and what they need to continue their work
- A **twin-track approach** to gender equality
- We aim for our work to result in gender transformative change
- Through the work of our partner organisations, we aim to address economic equality, gender responsive climate action, locally led women's leadership, gender-based violence, and sexual reproductive health rights
- We acknowledge that LGBTQIA+, disability, First Nations, and climate change can **intersect** with gender and worsen inequality

The program is guided by DFAT's Development Partnership Plans and contributes to the Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) focus areas.

Intersectionality is how a person's experience of inequality or disadvantage is influenced by factors like gender, race, ability, poverty, or sexuality. In gender equality, it means recognising that not everyone experiences gender inequality the same way and solutions must include everyone.

Above left: Widi Sahro (L), a client of PPMK (Empowering Women to Fight Poverty) and its director Sulastri Miharja (R) in Imogiri, Bantul, Jogjakarta, Indonesia.

Above right: (L-R) Social worker Ruci Sekitoga, Australian volunteer Clinical Supervisor Mentor Jessica Evans and counsellor Vika Bete at Empower Pacific Office, Lautoka, Fiji.



Above: Rubina Dalson, mother with her newborn baby and client of Waniati Maternal Waiting Home, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.

A case study from our partners in Kiribati

With support from the Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund, the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS) and Aia Mwaea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK) are advancing the rights of women and girls under CEDAW.

KWCS raised awareness of CEDAW by translating recommendations into local language and holding community consultations with women's groups and stakeholders.

These efforts empowered participants with knowledge about CEDAW, government obligations, and support systems for gender-based violence, while a popular radio campaign extended the message across Kiribati's islands.

'We thank this project and KWCS for translating the CEDAW concluding observation into the local language, we are now able to read and understand the significance of CEDAW for realising the rights of women in Kiribati....'

Building on this progress, AMAK will use an upcoming grant to lead workshops and establish a steering committee to strengthen advocacy on key CEDAW recommendations, further uniting women's organisations and government agencies in Kiribati.

Together, these initiatives continue to advance gender equality and mobilise communities for lasting impact.



Above left: Arote Aran has been involved with the AMAK centre for many years, both learning and teaching skills.

Above right: AMAK sign.

Lower left: Rabunatetaare Tebabure working in the community garden at the AMAK centre, Bikenibue, South Tarawa, Kiribati.

3. Our commitments

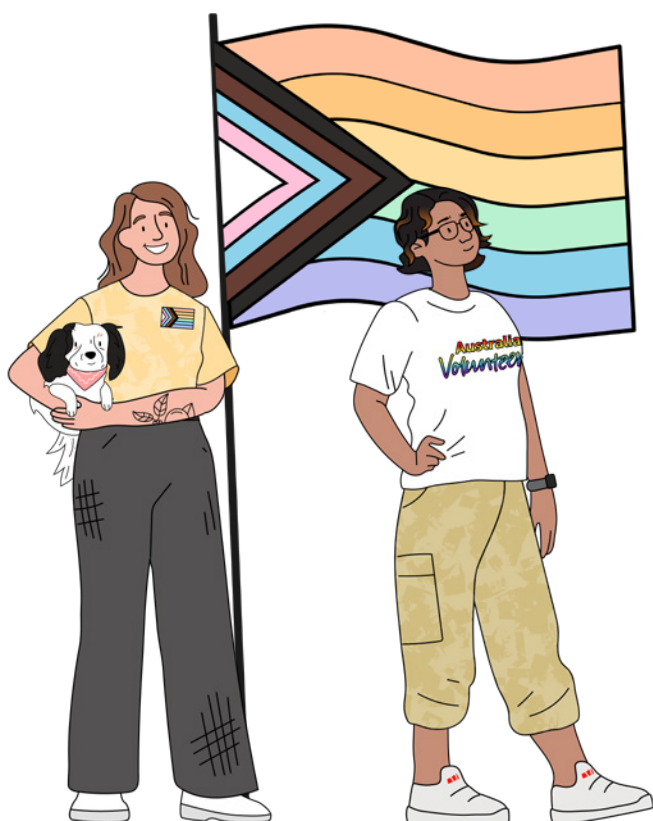
Our gender equality work is guided by our Global Program Strategy (GPS). The GPS prioritises gender equality as a program focus area, along with disability equity and rights and climate action.

The way we work

We follow a 'do no harm' approach to gender equality, making sure our work doesn't worsen existing inequalities or gender-based discrimination.

We recognise that gender equality concepts vary widely across countries and cultures, and our approach may differ to local perspectives. That's why we work closely with partner organisations to ensure gender equality work is culturally sensitive and supports their priorities.

We engage local consultants to deliver gender training, gender focused Impact Fund grants support locally relevant gender outcomes, and partners determine how volunteers will contribute to their gender equality objectives.



Partner organisations

We are led by our partners. Our approach to gender equality aligns with our modality; program outcomes relate to the work and objectives of our partners.

Partner organisations are the experts on what works in their community. Our support is led by our partners, and what they need to continue their work.

We support the gender equality objectives of our partners through gender-focused partner organisations and gender-focused volunteer assignments.

Gender partner organisations: volunteer assignments, in any focus area, with gender-focused partner organisations. For example, a Legal Mentor with a Women and Children Crisis Centre.

Gender volunteer assignments: volunteer assignments, specifically focused on gender, with any partner organisation. For example, a Gender Officer with the Ministry of Health.

To further complement volunteers, we also support partners through Impact Fund grants, professional development workshops, connections with Australian organisations, support to attend conferences, and networking opportunities.

Volunteers

We support volunteers to engage with culturally sensitive gender approaches so they can best support partners to do gender work in ways that are meaningful and effective in their local context.

This includes gender equality Pre-Departure Learning and Briefing to introduce key concepts and explore gender and LGBTQIA+ sensitivity in different cultural settings. Volunteers continue their learning through in-country orientation, online webinars, peer learning, and include an inclusion objective in their Assignment Description to help guide their work.



Our guiding approach

We take a **twin-track partner led approach** to gender equality in order to address barriers and the causes of inequality.

Every country we work in is different; **cultural norms** and social expectations decide which specific gender equality approaches are useful.

TWIN-TRACK

1. **Gender Mainstreaming.** Including gender in everything we do on the program – actions, policies, processes, and the decisions we make consider the experiences of everyone of all genders.
2. **Targeted Activities.** Standalone activities that address specific gender equality needs.

PARTNER LED

Our approach to gender equality is led by our partners. Partner organisations are the experts on what works in their community. Our support is decided by our partners, and what they need to continue their work.

Cultural norms are the shared beliefs, values, and behaviors that a society considers “normal” or acceptable. These norms affect how different genders are expected to behave and what roles they can play. Understanding cultural norms is important to ensure gender equality strategies fit the expectations and values of each society.



Above left: Australian volunteer Nancy Zhou (front right) with a museum tour group at the Vietnamese Women's Museum, Hanoi.

Above right: Marion Liard (L), Head of Partnerships at SHE Investments with Keisha Gani (R), Head of Operations, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Our goals

This strategy contributes to the program goal of 'global volunteering supports locally led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals'.

Our gender equality objectives are:

- Gender equality and women's rights organisations advance their objectives
- Gender equality is mainstreamed into all program functions
- Women and LGBTQIA+ volunteers do not face barriers to participation



Above left: (L-R) Sri Wahyuni Putri, Australian volunteer Jamee Newland, Mukhlis Hidayat Rifa'i and Chintya Anggreina of PKBI (The Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association) Yogyakarta branch, Indonesia.

Above right: (L-R) Vangye Chertoneyvang, Australian volunteer Samuel Lansdown, and Vatsana Sinnavong at the Non-Formal Education Development Center (NFEDC) in Vientiane, Laos.



What success looks like

Gender equality cuts across and supports all program outcomes and objectives. **Our primary measure of success is increased proportions of partners and assignments focused on gender equality.** Partnering with gender equality organisations is how we make our biggest contribution.

Our gender equality work contributes to the end of program outcome 'partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives' and the intermediate outcome 'partnerships with relevant and diverse partner organisations, particularly those focused on gender equality, disability inclusion, and climate action, are established, maintained, and supported by DFAT, the program, and Australian organisations'.

Our gender equality outcomes⁷ are:

- The program has strong partnerships and supports partner organisations to achieve their gender equality objectives and achieve impact
- Gender equality is a cross-cutting program priority
- All volunteers are aware of gender equality and can contribute to their partners' gender equality outcomes
- Staff are confident to work in ways that promote gender equality and women's rights and LGBTQIA+ inclusion
- LGBTQIA+ stakeholders have access to appropriate resources and support

Our Action Plan outlines clear indicators to help track our progress towards these outcomes.

Above: Staff of AusCam Freedom Project with Australian volunteer Brett Ambrose in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Principles that lead the way

Our gender equality work is led by the program's Guiding Principles. Gender equality, women's rights, and broader inclusion efforts align with each principle.



Grow strong relationships & partnerships

Establish respectful and equitable relationships with gender equality and women's rights organisations



Support locally led change

Recognise that women's rights organisations have the knowledge and expertise to decide and progress their objectives



Value volunteering

Value volunteering as a modality to support communities and achieve positive gender equality and women's rights outcomes



Evolve good practice & embrace innovation

Commit to being a leader in global volunteering by prioritising gender equality outcomes and culturally relevant approaches



Embrace diversity & inclusion

Address the barriers and strengthen the participation of women, LGBTQIA+ people, people with a disability, and First Nations Australians within the program



Ensure accountability & value learning

Commit to continuous improvement in our ability to document, analyse, and measure gender equality outcomes

Above left: (L-R) Gegi (Gerelmaa Batchuluun), Suyorsoren Enkhbayar, Australian volunteer Bardie Barclay-Sutton, Oyunsuren Bayarsaikhan, and Misheel Batsaikhan, from the Zorig Foundation, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Above right: Australian volunteer Midwifery Teacher Trainer Maxine Hardinge, in the Labor Ward at Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS) with midwifery students, Nepal.

The power of partner-to-partner learning in Southern Africa

The Southern Africa program has a strong history of supporting the needs of organisations that are at the forefront of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention across the region.

In 2022, Refugee Social Services, Kwakha Indvodza, and Kick4Life were awarded GEDSI Impact Fund Grants to advance activities promoting gender equality. Building on the success of these initiatives, the organisations took part in a collaborative learning exchange in 2023, where they shared innovative approaches to GBV prevention and response, while strengthening their ongoing work.

In 2024, recognising the power of partner-to-partner learning, the Southern Africa program hosted an impactful partner networking event focused on gender equality and GBV.

This gathering facilitated valuable networking opportunities and led to the creation of a Southern Africa gender equality Community of Practice, fostering long-term collaboration.

As a result, the program supported six partners to attend the SVRI Forum - a global event for research and action on Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW), organised by partner organisation the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI). This partnership has now expanded into a global collaboration, with the Southern Africa program and SVRI jointly hosting a webinar series focused on GBV response and prevention.



Above left: Nellie Sihlongonyane, Community Liaison Officer at Gone Rural with a colleague, eSwatini.

Above right: The view from the back of Gone Rural.

Lower left: Australian volunteer Jo Wing Lam Leung (centre), at Cheshire Homes eSwatini, with wheelchair basketball players.

6. Glossary

A note on language. We recognise the importance of empowering language in the queer community. As a DFAT program we primarily use the term LGBTQIA+ however recognise that in some cases Queer or Diverse SOGIESC may be more appropriate.

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Cultural norms are the shared beliefs, values, and behaviors that a society considers “normal” or acceptable. These norms affect how different genders are expected to behave and what roles they play. Understanding cultural norms is important to ensure gender equality strategies fit the expectations and values of each society.

DFAT Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The ‘do no harm’ principle in gender equality work means carefully considering how our actions might affect existing power dynamics and relationships. It’s about ensuring our work doesn’t unintentionally worsen discrimination, create backlash, or cause harm.

GEDSI Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion

Gender mainstreaming means including gender in everything we do on the program – actions, policies, processes, and the decisions we make need to consider the experiences of everyone of all genders.

Gender transformative change means actions that not only respond to inequality but also challenge unfair systems, beliefs, and behaviours that cause inequality. The concept of transformative change is from the Gender Integration Continuum – a scale that maps gender approaches from gender discriminatory (worst) to gender transformative (best).

Footnotes

- 1 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en Tonga has not signed or ratified CEDAW
- 2 <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- 3 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf> p.7, This policy presents a long-term vision for how our development program will meet the critical needs of our partners; while also supporting Australia’s national interests and the interests we share with our region. We seek relationships based on respect and partnerships that create economic and social value for us all.

GPS Global Program Strategy

ICMT In-Country Management Team

Intersectionality is how a person’s experience of inequality or disadvantage is influenced by factors like gender, race, ability, poverty, or sexuality. In gender equality, it means recognising that not everyone experiences gender inequality the same way and solutions must include everyone.

LGBTQIA+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual +

MEL Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

MELF Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework

PSEAH Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Queer is an umbrella term used by people who do not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender (gender assigned at birth). While it has a history of being used negatively, queer has been widely reclaimed as a positive and inclusive term that captures identities that the LGBTQIA+ acronym might leave out.

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

SOGIESC Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics

Twin-track approach to gender equality means taking two steps at the same time; addressing specific needs through targeted actions, and policies and programs include gender equality as a key focus

4 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf> p.14

5 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf> p.14

6 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-international-gender-equality-strategy.pdf>

7 Amended from the 2021 Statements of Intent

8 <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Do-No-Harm-Research-to-Practice-Briefing.pdf>

Photography

Front cover: Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 2: Darren James

Page 3: (both): Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 6 (both): Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 7 (left): Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 7 (right): Darren James

Page 8: Harjono Djoyobisono

Page 9 (all): Darren James

Page 11 (left): Le Bao Minh Hien

Page 11 (right): Cam Suttie

Page 12 (both): Harjono Djoyobisono

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Page 14 (both): Teagan Glenane

Page 15 (all): Matthew Willman

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