

CARE Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Inquiry on the International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015. We recommend that the Committee support this bill.

Our submission focuses on four key points

1. **This bill ensures that gender equality remains a core feature of Australia's aid program.**
Investing in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring that development assistance is delivered most effectively.
2. **This bill will increase transparency around the aid program,** enabling the current and future governments, as well as the aid and development sector, to better track, learn from, and improve upon this work.
3. **This bill presents an opportunity for Australia to cement its leadership role on gender equality in the region.**
4. **Many stakeholders from the development sector play key roles in designing, delivering and measuring programs that promote gender equality and justice on the ground - we have vital knowledge and tools to share to support DFAT's efforts to deliver and measure gender equality outcomes.**

CARE Australia

CARE is a non-religious and non-political international humanitarian aid organisation fighting global poverty, with a special focus on working with women and girls to bring lasting change to their communities. CARE is a confederation comprised of 14 national members, of which CARE Australia is one. CARE Australia undertakes activities in 23 countries in the Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies.

1. This bill ensures that gender equality remains a core feature of Australia's aid program.

CARE Australia supports the Minister for Foreign Affairs' decision to prioritise gender equality within the Australian aid program, and the stipulation that 80 per cent of all of Australia's aid investments effectively address gender issues in their implementation. We believes this bill acts to further strengthen DFAT's policy and the Minister's vision by enshrining gender equality as a key pillar of the aid program for years to come.

CARE considers gender to be at the core of our work globally. We prioritise gender not only because too often, women and girls suffer disproportionate levels of poverty, violence and injustice; not only because this inequality and injustice has persisted for far too long; but also because the overwhelming evidence from our 70 years of experience in development work demonstrates that investing in women and girls is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and leaving lasting, sustainable and self-sustaining change. Tackling gender inequality and supporting women and girls is not only the right thing to do – it is a smart investment in effective development programming.

Appropriate understanding, analysis, and respect for the different needs, roles and expectations of men, women, girls and boys is critical to ensuring that development assistance is delivered most effectively and in a way that does not harm or reinforce unequal power relations, which is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and leaving lasting development outcomes. This bill ensures that aid officials have regard for any gender-related differences in the people they are assisting to ensure that specific needs are accommodated and that gender inequality is addressed.

CARE believes 'gender' is a social construct that defines what it means to be a man or woman, boy or girl in a given society – it carries specific roles, status and expectations within households, communities and culture, and individuals may self-identify differently. CARE is very mindful of how our programs affect people of different gender identities differently, and how development work may harm, reinforce or challenge these gender roles.

Giving adequate consideration to gender does not mean simply ensuring women and girls are not excluded from development assistance, but also how that development assistance affects gender roles or gendered power relations. It is important to consider, for example, whether an investment in training for women exposes her to any risk of intimate partner violence, and if so, to mitigate that. It is also important to consider, for example, how a natural disaster or crisis might disable men from being their family breadwinners, as might be expected of them by society or tradition, and how that might lead to depression, anxiety or violence.

At first, Goretti's husband was reluctant to let her join Umwizero. He remained suspicious of the group until Goretti and 20 other members surprised him by cultivating the family's field. They finished in one day what would have taken her a month. He began to see the benefits to the entire family, and started giving Goretti greater respect and freedom... (See the Annex for Goretti's full story about CARE's economic empowerment initiative)

2. This bill will increase transparency around the aid program

This bill's stipulation that the Minister for Foreign Affairs present a report on how Australia's aid investments promote gender equality will enable this and subsequent governments, as well as the aid and development sector, to better track, learn from, and improve upon this work. Quality monitoring, evaluation and learning is fundamental to improving performance and to achieving better and stronger outcomes with our aid investments.

DFAT collects data on gender from its programs following the OECD Development Assistance Committee guidelines, however we believe there is much that can be improved by setting clear standards for the integration of gender equality in aid investments. According to these guidelines, donors must identify whether gender equality is a 'principal' or 'significant' objective of the activity. These guidelines state that "a 'principal' score is assigned if gender equality is an explicit objective of the activity and fundamental to its design. A 'significant' score is assigned if gender equality is an important, but secondary, objective of the activity." According to the report from DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness, *Smart economics: evaluation of Australian aid support for women's economic empowerment*, even projects which are not focused on gender can get a satisfactory score on gender. Over the 2013-2014 financial year, 73 per cent of projects for which gender was not a focus nevertheless received a satisfactory gender score. The problem this poses is there is insufficient clarity on why these projects received such a score and how these projects considered gender issues or produced gender equality outcomes. A clearer framework with set standards would make the process of assessing gender equality a much stronger method. Furthermore DFAT only collects data about *expenditure* when gender equality and women's empowerment is a specific line item. This makes it hard to determine how much is actually spent to further gender equality initiatives.

Understanding better how Australia's aid investments contribute to gender equality or women's empowerment, both in their intent and in their outcome, would contribute enormously to improving the performance of development work – for all partners involved. It would enable the Australian Government to demonstrate to its stakeholders, partners and its peers in the international community lessons from its effective aid programming.

3. This bill presents an opportunity for Australia to cement its leadership role on gender equality in the region.

Without legislation, priorities are liable to shift with the political mood, and not receive the sustained and long-term investment required to have the most impact. By supporting this bill Australia could cement its leadership on gender equality in the Indian Ocean Asia-Pacific region, where we seek to enhance our diplomatic and commercial leverage and development expertise.

4. Many stakeholders from the development sector play key roles in designing, delivering and measuring programs that tackle gender inequality and injustice on the ground - we have vital knowledge and tools to share to support DFAT's efforts to deliver and measure gender equality.

DFAT's positive engagement on gender programming with key stakeholders will be key to maximising the effectiveness of DFAT's work, as well as ensuring that DFAT's investments in its partners – whether they be from the development sector, foreign governments or private sector organisations, meet the Australian Government's commitments to gender equality.

The Annex includes further information on tools developed by CARE to maximise the gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes of our programs.

ANNEX 1 – Case study: women’s economic empowerment

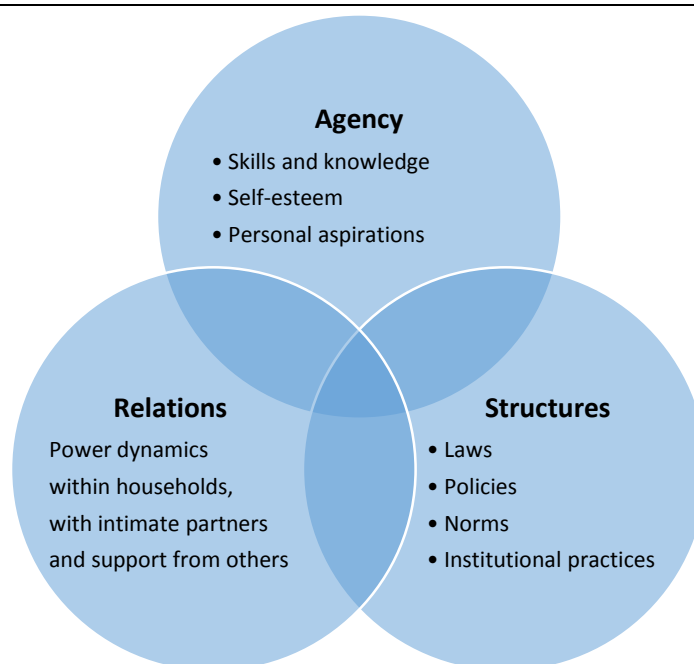
Two dollars’ worth of potato seed and fertilizer, an unused corner of her husband’s field, a successful harvest. These are a few of the factors behind Marie Goretti Nyabenda’s claim: “I am the happiest woman in the world.”

Goretti, a 34-year-old from a remote hillside in northern Burundi, netted \$4.70 from her potato harvest in 2007. She used this money to rent a market stall and stock it with bananas and peanuts. Her profits were enough to buy a goat, which soon had a kid.

The catalyst for these and many more life changes for Goretti was joining a program called Umwizero (Hope for the Future). With support from CARE, Goretti and thousands like her have formed village savings and loan groups. Each group of about 20 women uses only its members’ modest savings to grow a pot of money. The women borrow and then repay their loans with interest. Umwizero also helps women attain new skills and understand and pursue their rights. CARE works with men and local leaders, too, to examine and challenge social norms that marginalise women.

At first, Goretti’s husband was reluctant to let her join Umwizero. He remained suspicious of the group until Goretti and 20 other members surprised him by cultivating the family’s field. They finished in one day what would have taken her a month. He began to see the benefits to the entire family, and started giving Goretti greater respect and freedom. Now, Goretti is finally allowed to leave home without her husband’s permission. Before, she was not permitted to socialise with other women, but now she treasures the support she receives from her group. She is learning to read and write, visits a health clinic and has gained the knowledge and confidence to stand up for her rights. Says Goretti: “I wish that [Umwizero] could touch all the other women who are like I was before, so they can taste my happiness.”

The goal of CARE’s Umwizero project (2006-2013) is: 168,000 women members of savings and loan groups are economically, socially and politically empowered. CARE works with women, their communities and Burundian partner organizations to enable women and girls to increase their economic security and life skills; improve their organisational capacity and reinforce their social networks; and help ensure women’s and girls’ rights are promoted and defended by men, women and local leaders.



To support women and girls’ empowerment and attainment of their human rights, a holistic approach is needed, targeting an individual woman, the context in which she lives, and the relations that influence her.

CARE defines women’s empowerment as the **combined effect of changes** in:

1. **Individual (agency):** A woman’s own knowledge, skills, aspirations and abilities;
2. **Structures:** The societal norms, customs, institutions and policies that shape her choices in life; and
3. **Relations:** The power relationships through which she negotiates her path.

Together, these three domains (individual agency, structure and relations) make up CARE’s Women’s Empowerment Framework, a unique, holistic and clearly defined approach to women’s empowerment. This Framework is based on findings from a systematic, organisation-wide assessment of CARE’s programming aimed at deepening our understanding of the factors contributing to women’s empowerment and gender equality.

For a woman to be empowered, change is needed in the three domains outlined above – individual agency, structure and relations. Progress in one area is usually insufficient for a woman to fully realise her rights and aspirations. For example, a woman who develops her own skills and access to resources through a microfinance program may still be held back because others in her household or community prevent her from deciding how to spend the income she earns, or because her activities outside the home ignite frictions, fear or even domestic violence. CARE has seen that progress in only one realm can lead to fragile or reversible gains. In contrast, initiatives that support changes across all three realms can have a substantial impact.