

Comments to DFAT Consultation Meeting ahead of 53rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 8 June 2023

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The Australian Climate Accountability Project would like to make three quick observations about women's human rights in Australia from a climate change and human rights perspective.

We make these in the knowledge that both climate change and human rights, and the rights of women and girls, are key items on the agenda of the 53rd session of the Council, to be held later this month.

First, the Australian Government is to be commended for recent initiatives in relation to gender equality in the energy transition and its support for the '[Equal by 30](#)' campaign. Actively involving women in transition planning and in the opportunities which the transition is opening up is a huge step forward, one which is essential to preventing women from going backwards as a result of the employment changes accompanying the energy transition.

We would like to be assured of equal effort by Australia on two other fronts.

The first of these is that women need to be fully involved in planning for adaptation and emergency responses. On the subject of emergency responses, the most recent [Lancet Countdown](#) noted the absence of a gender sensitivity lens in the [Sendai Framework](#) for Disaster Risk Reduction. A 2020 analysis by [Zaidi and Fordham](#) concluded that,

although the Framework has made headway in promoting the inclusion of women and girls in disaster policy and programming, on the whole it represents a missed opportunity for addressing fundamental gender based issues in disaster risk reduction.

Women's needs in disaster risk reduction in Australia need to be fully represented and appropriately addressed. The Zaidi and Fordham analysis called for a more refined conceptualisation of gender by the Framework, improved inclusion of women and sexual minorities in the Framework's indicators and implementation documents, and greater alignment of the Framework with parallel policy documents. These are improvements which Australia also should take on board.

The second aspect on which we would like to be assured of equal effort is the heightened vulnerability of women to adverse climate impacts. It is uncontroversial that women have multiple vulnerabilities due to socially defined gender differences. For example, most single heads of household are women – and these households tend to have lower incomes and to live in rental accommodation which may not be suitable for the new climate extremes. Affordable accommodation tends to be in areas of cities which, for example, form the worst urban heat islands.

The 2022 Lancet Countdown and many other studies have identified pregnant women as particularly at risk. Women predominate in other categories of climate vulnerability, too:

lacking political power, being socially isolated, being at risk of mental health outcomes, and being vulnerable to food insecurity (with long term consequences).

Our point today, however, is that this issue also needs to be seen in the Australian context. Australia is one of the countries most exposed to the physical impacts of climate change. In fact, 4/5ths of our population live in Queensland, NSW and Victoria, states identified recently as being in the top 4 percent of the world's territories most exposed to physical risk from climate change.

There is much that can be done in Australia through gender-sensitive adaptation planning and action to reduce the special vulnerability of women to climate-related harms but there are also biophysical and costs limitations on adaptation.

The only way to protect women from the worst climate impacts is to mitigate emissions sharply, on both the domestic and exported emissions fronts.

Australia needs to bring down its domestic emissions much faster and more steeply than its current plans embody. A 43 percent reduction on 2005 levels is simply nowhere near enough to protect the human rights of anyone in Australia, including vulnerable groups like women.

Even more importantly, we need to address our huge coal and gas exports – which create emissions triple the size of our domestic emissions. These emissions are driving up global temperatures and exacerbating human rights harms within Australia.

Women's human rights in Australia cannot be protected while we are the world's third largest FF exporter and while we have no plan to phase out these export industries. The accounting system under the Paris Agreement (which asks States to reduce their domestic emissions) in no way defines Australia's human rights responsibilities towards women, especially given that its fossil fuel exports are a matter within Australia's direct control and the exacerbation of human rights harms to women in Australia from its exported emissions is fully foreseeable.