

Australia

Examples of actions to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment in rural communities

1. Improving the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural women and supporting their full and equal participation in decision making at all levels and economic opportunities in both the formal and informal economy

- The Australian Government is supporting more Indigenous women into employment and leadership roles, both in their communities and the workplace. Indigenous women are also central to the *Empowered Communities* initiative, which is a new way for Indigenous communities and governments to work together to set priorities, improve services, and apply funding effectively at a regional level. *Empowered Communities* aims to increase Indigenous ownership of decisions and give Indigenous people a greater say in decisions that affect them. Seven of the 8 Empowered Communities are based in regional or remote areas. More information is found here: <https://empoweredcommunities.org.au>.

2. Promoting consultation with and the participation of rural women and, as appropriate, girls, including those who are indigenous, those with disabilities and older women on the design and implementation of gender equality programs and strategies

- The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) consultations, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar AO, have explored the challenges faced by Indigenous women and girls and given them an opportunity to voice their aspirations, priorities and needs. Ms Oscar has led a national conversation over the past 18 months with around 2,300 Indigenous women. These consultations were designed to better understand the priorities and challenges of Indigenous women across Australia, including in regional and remote areas. The Commissioner's consultations have explored all aspects of Indigenous women and girls experiences. The final report to government will be received in the second half of 2019 and will include recommendations and actions that elevate women's voices and seek to give traction to identified solutions on how to better support Indigenous women and girls in regional and remote areas. A second stage of this project has been announced which is likely to have a focus on implementation of regional solutions. More information can be accessed here: <https://wiyiyaniuthangani.humanrights.gov.au>.
- The Australian Government's gender diversity target for government boards seeks to better represent the contribution of women. The government's target is women holding 50 per cent of government board positions overall, with at least 40 per cent representation for women and 40 percent for men on individual boards.
 - For example, the representation of women on agriculture portfolio boards has increased by 13.7 percentage points over the last few years, with current women currently holding 47% of positions. The focus and achievement of increased participation of women on agriculture portfolio boards recognises the importance of the role of women in rural areas. Flow on effects of achieving the target is improving the profile of women in agriculture and greater participation at all levels.
- The *Susan Grace Benny Award* is a category in the annual National Awards for Local Government program. This category recognises local governments that have demonstrated a commitment to boost the participation of women in local government and community decision making and management. Local Government initiatives eligible for consideration may include:

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Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

- supporting women in representing their communities
- organising flexible working arrangements, employee consultation, preventing sexual harassment and targets to improve gender representation outcomes
- building partnerships to provide training for women in local government.
- The *AgriFutures Rural Women's Award* is Australia's leading award that supports and acknowledges the essential role women play in rural industries, businesses and communities. The Award identifies and supports emerging female leaders who have the desire, commitment and leadership potential to make a greater contribution to their industries and communities. AgriFutures is a government statutory agency.
- Country to Canberra is a not-for-profit organisation that provides education, leadership and mentorship opportunities to regional, rural and remote teenage girls. Programs include an annual "Power Trip" competition where winners meet inspiring politicians/CEOs, receive leadership and public speaking training and mentorship; Project Empower workshops held in rural and remote high schools to discuss self-esteem, respectful relationships, intersectionality and girls' futures; an online mentoring program and facilitating a blogger team of teenage girls. More information is at www.countrytocanberra.com.au.

3. Integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of and follow-up to policies plans and programs, to ensure the needs of rural women and girls are included

- The Office for Women in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is committed to improving decision-making across government by encouraging and supporting gender analysis. Throughout the policy making process, the Office for Women provides additional sex-disaggregated data where available, encourages departments to undertake gender analysis of proposed policies, and notes where a policy might disproportionately impact women.

4. Strengthening measures, including resource generation, to improve women's health, including maternal health, by addressing the specific health, nutrition and basic needs of rural women

The [National Women's Health Strategy](#) (the Strategy), outlines the national approach to improving health outcomes for all women and girls, particularly those at greatest risk of poor health. The Strategy recognises that women and girls in rural and remote areas have poorer health outcomes than those in urban areas, with greater health risk factors and poorer access to, and use of, health services. The Strategy Outlines 5 priority areas including: maternal, sexual and reproductive health; healthy ageing; chronic conditions and preventive health; mental health; and health impacts of violence against women and girls.

Within these priorities, the Strategy recommends specific actions for women living in rural and remote areas, including but not limited to:

- Increasing access to government-funded health services that offer sexual and reproductive health services for women in regional, rural and remote areas;
- Better managing the needs of an ageing population by investing in and improving access to services, and promoting health promotion and social support initiatives, for older women in rural and remote areas.
- Enhancing access to the use of mobile cancer screening services for women in rural and remote areas; and
- Prioritising investment into mental health services in rural and remote areas: Including culturally and linguistically safe services tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

5. *Taking appropriate measures to ensure that women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, as well as contributions to on-farm and off-farm production, is recognized, and to promote policies and initiatives supporting the reconciliation of work and family life and the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women*

- In 2019-20 the Australian Government will be reinstating and enhancing the Time Use Survey (TUS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to gather better data on women's performance of unpaid work. The TUS is intended to help the Australian Government design policies that better integrate with people's lives, especially where childbirth has disrupted work patterns. The TUS collects sex-disaggregated data on time use, including unpaid work, as well as geographic detail and industry for urban and rural Australians. Data on land tenure is collected at the household level.

6. *Investing in and strengthening efforts to meet the basic needs of rural women, including needs relating to their food security and nutrition and that of their families, and to promote adequate standards of living*

- The Australian Government assists to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities by administering the Northern Territory Stores Licensing Scheme and through funding to Outback Stores. The licensing scheme sets standards that stores need to meet to help make sure they have fresh and healthy food available and operate effectively. There are more than 100 licensed stores currently operating. Outback Stores improve access to affordable, healthy food for Indigenous communities, particularly in remote areas, as well as employment for local communities

7. *Fully engaging men and boys, including community leaders, as strategic partners and allies in achieving gender equality*

- As part of the *Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, the Australian Government funds MensLine, the national telephone, online support and referral service for men experiencing domestic violence or perpetrators aiming to not reoffend. MensLine helps men to stop using violence in their families and relationships by supporting men to set goals, change behaviours, and access services.
- The national 'Stop it at the Start' campaign aims to generate long-term change by changing community social drivers and attitudes that can lead to domestic, family and sexual violence. It targets the 'influencers' of young people – people like parents, friends, teachers and sports coaches – to help them understand how their actions and attitudes can break the cycle of violence against women. The second phase of the campaign was launched on 3 October 2018.
- The Australian Government supports the employment of dedicated men's social support workers in the Family Advocacy and Support Services program, to work with male victims and alleged perpetrators of family violence involved in family law matters. This aims to improve men's engagement with the court system, enhance victim safety, and support alleged and convicted perpetrators to change behaviours.

8. *Eliminating all forms of violence against rural women and girls in public and private spaces through multisectoral and coordinated approaches to prevent and respond to violence against rural women and girls*

- The Australian Government invests in 1800RESPECT, the national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling service, which provides telephone counselling and support to

victims, perpetrators and people affected by violence. This includes the mobile phone app, Daisy, which connects people experiencing violence or abuse to services in their state and local area.

- Through the Fourth Action Plan, the Government is establishing the National Prevention Hub, which will bring together governments, experts, the community sector and corporate partners to oversee and coordinate prevention efforts. The Hub's national reach will ensure that resources, best practice learnings, and coordinated approaches to prevention activities will also work to prevent violence against women and girls in rural settings.
- Indigenous women continue to experience family violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Indigenous women. In 2014-15 Indigenous women were 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than non-Indigenous women. This is why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children are one of the six National Priority Areas in the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022. Going forward, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children will be a focus for the Fourth National Action Plan, which is expected to be agreed by governments in mid-2019. Third Action Plan initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities focus on practical actions that seek to prevent violence whilst also ensuring victims receive the support that they need.

9. Valuing and supporting the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women in rural areas, in the conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity

- [Indigenous ranger](#) projects support Indigenous people to combine traditional knowledge with conservation training to protect and manage their land, sea and culture. The Indigenous Rangers program promotes the rights of future generations to connect with land while providing a catalyst for economic and employment opportunities. Women hold around one-third of ranger jobs.

10. Promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities in rural areas, including by ensuring access on an equal basis to productive employment and decent work, economic and financial resources and disability-sensitive infrastructure and services

- Indigenous Australians are more likely to have a disability than non-Indigenous Australians and one quarter of Indigenous Australians report being a carer for a person with a disability, a long term health condition, or the elderly. The National Disability Insurance Scheme has a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy which focuses on engagement with Indigenous Australians with a disability, their families, carers and communities to ensure culturally appropriate care. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy focuses on enabling quality engagement, service delivery and leadership to ensure the successful delivery of the NDIS in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. The strategy was developed drawing on the knowledge and experience of the NDIS trial sites and the expertise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group and associated working groups. More information can be found here: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/strategies/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-strategy>.

11. Developing specific assistance programmes and advisory services to promote economic skills of rural women in banking, modern trading and financial procedures

- The Australian Government is investing in preventing women's financial abuse. This program will map existing financial literacy and prevention of financial abuse initiatives, engage the financial services and community sector to expand best practice, and develop resources for frontline service

providers and a social media campaign to drive behaviour change and foster women's economic independence.

This initiative will specifically engage women from diverse cohorts, including rurally located women, to develop resources most effective to their circumstances and build women's financial security and literacy, to prevent financial abuse.

- Barriers remain for Indigenous women entering the job market, particularly given that Indigenous women and girls often have caring responsibilities at an earlier age than non-Indigenous women. Accessing jobs from remote locations can add an additional level of complexity to employment opportunities for Indigenous women and girls. The Australian Government is working to address this challenge by promoting Indigenous female participation in business and delivering programs that support quality employment opportunities for Indigenous women. To support more Indigenous women engage in the workforce, the Government supports a range of Indigenous-specific employment programs aimed to address the barriers to employment faced by Indigenous women and men, such as the Vocational, Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) and the Employment Parity Initiative. The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy is increasing Indigenous entrepreneurship with a focus on supporting Indigenous women and youth into business, and the Government is also giving Indigenous businesses greater opportunity to increase their share of Government procurement through the Indigenous Procurement Policy.

12. Supporting women entrepreneurs and women smallholder farmers, women in small and medium enterprises, including access to finance

- The Australian Government is supporting girls and young women to become entrepreneurs through the new Future Female Entrepreneurs program across Australia. The program will engage around 55,000 girls and young women nationwide, particularly those in rural and regional communities, through a digital platform and in-person workshops. Girls and young women across Australia need to have the knowledge and skills to start their own small businesses and create employment opportunities for themselves and for others. The digital economy and technological change have transformed the Australian economy and young women need to be well placed to take advantage of these opportunities.
- The Australian Government recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are central to the development, growth and diversity of the Indigenous business sector and the Australian economy. As such, it continues to invest in innovative strategies to ensure Indigenous women can pursue opportunities for themselves and their families to support lasting social and economic change. The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy, released in February 2018, includes a specific focus to support more Indigenous women into their own business, including in rural and remote areas. More information can be found here: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/indigenous-business-sector-strategy>

13. Taking appropriate measures to raise public awareness among rural women and girls about the risks of trafficking in persons

- The Australian Government funds the Support for Trafficked People Program, which provides case management, counselling, referrals to legal and migration services, medical treatment and accommodation to all victims of human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices, including forced marriage and forced labour. Whilst the program does not have specific awareness raising activities, its national scope means that women and girls in rural locations are eligible for support.

14. Improving data relating to rural women and girls, including sex disaggregated data on time use, unpaid work, land tenure, energy, water and sanitation

- See: response to question 5.

15. Eliminating gender disparities in the realization of the right to education and ensuring full and equal participation in and completion of inclusive quality education

- The Curious Minds program encourages girls to have the skills and education for the jobs of the future. This program offers high school students, who have had limited opportunities because of where they live or their socio-economic background, the opportunity to engage in hands on summer schools and mentoring.
- The Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) is a community-focused strategy employing local people to work with schools, families, parents, and community organisations to ensure all children go to school every day. RSAS operates in 84 schools across the country and includes specific strategies to improve the school attendance levels of young women and girls.
- Through the IAS, funding is provided to a range of educational activities for girls such as the Girl Academy (run by Cape York Institute), a boarding school designed for young Indigenous mothers and their babies to support them to complete their secondary schooling

16. Promoting education, training and relevant information programmes for rural and farming women through the use of affordable and appropriate technologies and the mass media

- The *Towards 2025: An Australian Government Strategy to Boost Women's Workforce Participation* strategy and the measures under the Women's Economic Security Statement include initiatives to promote women in non-traditional industries. As an example, the Government will provide regional employers with professional assistance to review their business and identify and remove the barriers preventing them from attracting and retaining women returning to work after a career break. Starting as a pilot in regional Australia, the Career Revive initiative will initially partner with 30 medium-to-large regional employers and learnings from the pilot will inform further measures to support women's workforce participation in regional areas. The Career Revive initiative will also deliver an employer toolkit that will provide best practice, practical resources and learnings that will be available to all business.
- The Australian Government funds six National Women's Alliances to bring together women's organisations and individuals from across Australia to share information, identify issues that affect them, and identify solutions; and to engage actively with the Australian Government on policy issues as part of a better more informed and representative dialogue between women and government. The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) provides a collaborative national voice for women living in rural, regional and remote Australia. The NRWC's wide reaching networks support the growth of vibrant rural, remote and regional Communities throughout Australia. The NRWC delivers its core activities of advocacy for women; influencing policy and decision-making; building capacity within women's organisations and for rural, remote and regional women; reflecting the diversity of the women's sector; and delivering innovative leadership projects, using innovative communication strategies.