



Reimagining the Indo-Pacific: Using an Inclusive Lens

Policy Brief 2: Implementing a 'Feminist Reflex'
in Indo-Pacific Climate Policy

The Federal Foreign Office of Germany and Kubernein Initiative have taken the joint initiative to consolidate past and current perspectives and understand the extent of gender mainstreaming in the Indo-Pacific region, with a focus on climate, trade and economic security, human and non-traditional security. We consider the centrality of human security in the Indo-Pacific and aim to explore ways forward for shaping more inclusive policies within the region, as well as learn from best practices that may be particularly relevant to Indo-German engagement. The policy brief is part of a series of publications under Kubernein Initiative and the Federal Foreign Office's joint project. Our perspective is rooted in Germany's 'Feminist Foreign Policy' vision, and Kubernein Initiative's work on inclusive foreign policy from an Indian context.

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Introduction

In the Indo-Pacific region, ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ security issues are converging. The Indo-Pacific is the most climate-vulnerable region in the world. While much of the global attention in the region is on China’s economic and military rise, climate change is threatening the region’s security and stability. For a number of regional states, juggling the security challenges posed by a rising China is the priority, whereas the security implications of climate change are a policy afterthought.

As the Indo-Pacific is home to many of the most climate-vulnerable states, it is estimated that, by 2050, there could be 89 million migrants in or from this region¹. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change and are more at-risk during natural disasters. For example, in some Indonesian villages, up to 80% of the deaths from the 2004 Tsunami were women². Further, climate change and related disasters see an increase in gender-based violence³. Policies and programmes targeting climate change action in the Indo-Pacific should, therefore, mainstream a ‘feminist reflex’, as utilised in Germany’s Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)⁴. The German FFP ‘feminist reflex’ centres on the “three Rs + D” – rights, representation and resources for women, girls, and marginalised groups and diversity⁵. The ‘feminist reflex’ cultivates an internal ‘cultural shift’ in Germany’s foreign office and policymaking, creating a more inclusive environment and policies.

Germany might not seem a natural partner for the Indo-Pacific, even though it introduced its own Indo-Pacific policy guidelines in 2020⁶. For many European states, trade and competition with China are the key issues in the region. In the Indo-Pacific, Germany is an extra-regional state and former regional colonial power. Germany’s foreign policy is understandably focused on events in Europe, including Russia’s war with Ukraine. Germany’s FFP features little references to the Indo-Pacific, despite being the most climate-affected region, and the FFP’s focus on climate change.

Thus, to bring in the Indo-Pacific into Germany's FFP and to promote a 'feminist reflex' across the Indo-Pacific, Germany, Australia and India should work together to promote gender mainstreaming in climate change policymaking in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia and India can work with Germany in the Indo-Pacific, familiarising and embedding Berlin in localised climate change and gender programmes. There are lessons in Germany's FFP for India and Australia on creating more inclusive and sustainable policies in the Indo-Pacific. Further, as a leader in international climate programmes, Germany can add valuable insight and expertise to Australian and Indian programmes.

We argue that rather than creating new programmes, existing programmes may be improved through more inclusive and sustainable gender-climate cooperation between Australia, India, and Germany, as well as other countries interested in negotiating the interconnected security challenges involving gender, climate and security in the Indo-Pacific.

Gender, Feminist Foreign Policies and Climate Change

In March 2023, Germany released its 'Guidelines for Feminist Foreign Policy: a foreign policy for all'⁷. It joined the ranks of twelve other states that have institutionalised a feminist foreign policy⁸. None of these twelve states are in the Indo-Pacific (although France, a colonial power in the Pacific, has adopted Feminist Diplomacy, and Mongolia has joined the UN Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group).⁹

Climate change is a core issue in both Germany's Indo-Pacific and Feminist Strategy's. Germany's FFP recognises that "inequalities and vulnerabilities exacerbated by the climate crisis...Women and diverse societal groups are important stakeholders and leading players in our climate and energy diplomacy"¹⁰. Despite the Indo-Pacific being one of the most affected regions by climate change, it features little in the FFP. The FFP does not mention the Indo-Pacific explicitly but highlights Germany's work with the Nepalese NGO Nagarik Aawaz on sexual violence counselling. Receiving funding support from Germany in 2022, Nagarik Aawaz provided counselling to women who experienced sexual violence during the Nepalese Civil War¹¹. There is room for Germany to more closely link its FFP with its Indo-Pacific strategy in the area of climate change, and closer collaboration with India and Australia may help achieve this.

In Australia, both conversations on gender and climate change have been fraught with politicisation. This makes efforts for a feminist climate policy difficult. For now, the Albanese Government's foreign policy focus is on implementing a First Nations Foreign Policy, led by Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong and Ambassador for Indigenous Peoples Justin Mohammed¹². As Stephenson and Blackwell have suggested, Australia can work towards a feminist First Nations Foreign Policy¹³. Implementing First Nations Foreign Policy will help better address climate change. Blackwell and Ballangarry highlight that "**First Nations expertise around caring for Country is something Australia and the global community can benefit from in the face of climate change.**"¹⁴

In 2021, Australia released the ‘National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security’, however, the plan is notably defence-focused in its execution, concentrating on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, gender-based violence, crisis response and justice and internal leadership and accountability.¹⁵

On climate change, the National Action Plan notes that climate change is one of many “transboundary security challenges” that contribute to “fragility and conflict”.¹⁶

To better understand the link between gender and climate change, Australia and India should look to the German Feminist Foreign Policy.

India on the other hand, is more reluctant to formalise a gender-focused foreign policy. However, as Baruah and Bhide note, “there is considerable evidence on gender being a consideration in certain areas of its external actions”.¹⁷ India’s climate change diplomacy has seen it embed itself with multilateral institutions, including the BRICS and G20, facilitating a “proactive and cooperative internationalist approach”.¹⁸

At the 2023 India-Australia Annual Summit, the states committed to “mainstreaming gender equality and advancing women’s empowerment and inclusive leadership”, noting the “importance of ensuring efforts to address climate change are inclusive and gender-responsive.”¹⁹ Climate change, particularly renewable energy, is a growing focus of the bilateral relationship. To action this, Australia and India can look to Germany’s FFP for how to implement a ‘feminist reflex’ in their policymaking by considering the three R’s in policymaking and their institutions.

Current Policy Approaches to Climate Change and Gender in the Indo-Pacific

Australia

Australia is a climate-development leader in the region, particularly the Pacific.²⁰ Whilst Australia’s domestic climate policy stalled for two decades due to a political impasse, its international development programmes and aid have been largely consistent for over 25 years.²¹ Under the new Labor Government, Australian climate diplomacy has been reinvigorated with new funding, particularly for the Pacific and Indonesia.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) 2020-2025 Climate Change Action Strategy does not explicitly focus on gender. However, it notes that Australia supports “the goals of the Paris Agreement to address climate change and strengthen socially inclusive, gender-responsive sustainable development in our region”.²² More recently, DFAT released a new International Development Strategy.²³ The strategy continues previous priorities on gender and disability and emphasises climate change as a key focus of Australia’s

development policy. The government is continuing its commitment to 80% gender equality in investments and will ensure that at least half of investments will have a climate change objective. However, the strategy did not announce any new funding for gender or climate programmes. The new policy emphasises the importance of development as a tool of statecraft, locally-led development, and adequate financing.

One of the gender and climate programmes Australia has supported is the Gender Response Alternative for Climate Change, with ActionAid Australia, Monash University and the Huarirou Commission, a women-led grassroots social movement that supports rural and Indigenous communities.²⁴ The programme focused on Kenya, Vanuatu and Cambodia, ended in 2019 and supported “diverse women’s engagement in relevant policy, planning and decision-making processes”.²⁵ We recommend that Australia, India and Germany cooperate to re-establish this programme with new regional partners in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, as the regions most affected by climate change.

Germany

Together with Australia and New Zealand, Germany and the EU fund the Regional Pacific NDC Hub, which has helped to finance and implement 14 Pacific Island nationally determined contributions (NDCs)²⁶. Germany has contributed a further EUR 1.7 million to the Hub since July 2022²⁷. On climate security, Germany and Nauru are co-chairs of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security at the United Nations²⁸. We recommend that Australia and India join this UN group to help support climate change security in the region and ensure that a ‘feminist reflex’ is implemented in the Group.

As Sakaki highlights, Germany could be seen as a more credible “partner in climate issues” than other partners, including Australia, as Germany “has pursued a comparatively more ambitious climate policy for years”²⁹.

The addition of Germany to Indian and Australian climate cooperation will help to legitimatise their Indo-Pacific climate policies, as well as learn from Germany’s expertise.

India

One of the hallmark Indian climate programmes is the International Solar Alliance (ISA), of which Australia and Germany are members. The Alliance is focused on “increased deployment of solar energy technologies as a means for bringing energy access, ensuring energy security, and driving energy transition” in member countries and developing states³⁰. We argue for a gender action plan for the ISA, to ensure women are included in the energy transition. India and other member countries can look to Germany and their FFP for how to implement a ‘feminist reflex’ in renewable energy programmes.

One example of gender-focused energy transition is what has come to be known as the ‘solar mamas’³¹. Barefoot College trains women from rural communities “in solar technology installation and maintenance”³². This empowers women in their local communities to take control of their energy supplies, reduces carbon emissions and financially supports the women and communities. Germany, Australia, and India could collaborate to expand training in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

It is important that women are included in all areas of climate policymaking, not just during disaster response and management. A 'feminist reflex' should be reflected in renewable energy programmes. As G20 President this year, India has an opportunity to ensure that gender is a focus of climate change and energy discussions extending well beyond its Presidency

Recommendations

Due to the Indo-Pacific region already overcrowded with extra-regional partners and programmes, this paper cautions against creating new programmes but encourages the three states to work collaboratively on existing programmes and improve them. Creating new programs will potentially oversaturate a region with multiple, overlapping and sometimes diverging development programmes.

- ➔ Mainstreaming gender in climate policies through a 'feminist reflex' in Australian, German and Indian Indo-Pacific programmes.
- ➔ Australia and India to join the German-Nauru UN Group of Friends on Climate Change and Security.
- ➔ Germany, India and Australia to fund the Gender Responsive Alternative for Climate Change project with Indo-Pacific States.
- ➔ Germany, Australia and India to lead a Gender action plan for the International Solar Alliance.
- ➔ Germany and Australia to provide more funding assistance to the Barefoot College training programme, to support more women in the region becoming solar engineers.

Conclusion

There are limits to Germany's active participation in the Indo-Pacific. This has been demonstrated with their 2023 National Security Strategy, which, despite the 2020 Indo-Pacific Strategy launch, features one mention of the Indo-Pacific³³. Germany's stage of primary concern is Europe, whereas Australia and India's is the Indo-Pacific. Australia and India should be ready partners when Germany is engaging with the Indo-Pacific. This will help to create a network of partners in the region who are ready to engage with extra-regional partners when there is interest.

India and Australia cannot rely on extra-regional powers to contribute to the stability in the Indo-Pacific, however, they can take inspiration from their policies. Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy provides a model for gender mainstreaming that Australia and India can draw from. Whilst it is unlikely that Australia and India will adopt their own feminist foreign policy, there are important lessons to be gleaned for Indo-Pacific countries who may want to embark on similar pathways to inclusive policymaking.

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About Kubernein Initiative:

Kubernein Initiative is an independent, female led, geopolitical advisory firm based in Mumbai, India, working to mainstream issues that need greater intellectual capacity and focus. Our vision is to build an organisation that considers critical questions with a perspective that balances traditionally 'western' thought in the field of international relations and diplomacy with new and emerging ideas from the global south.