



Australian High Commission
Kenya

**High Commissioner John Feakes –
Talking points for the launch of the annual
Australia - Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) report,
12th March 2015, Intercontinental Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya**

Asante sana (thank you very much). Habari ya asubuhi (good morning) distinguished guests, diplomatic colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed.

I am honoured to be here today to launch the annual report for AACES.

We are here as a part of International Women's Day celebrations to commemorate the economic, political and social achievements of women, and I think this year's annual report on AACES is well timed to talk about the achievements of the program in promoting women's rights and gender equality.

In 2015, Australia used International Women's Day to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Twenty years ago, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 189 nations promised to remove all obstacles to gender equality and the empowerment of women

- this commitment was made through the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – a visionary roadmap for advancing women's rights and equality between women and men
- since 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been translated into concrete changes
- it remains a powerful source of guidance and inspiration for the work still to be achieved.

Gender equality is central to economic and human development and to supporting women's rights

- equal opportunity for women and men supports economic growth and helps to reduce poverty.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are priorities for the Australian Government, both domestically and internationally

Australia prioritises its work in areas where persistent challenges and progress toward gender equality has been slow, including:

- increasing women's voice in decision-making, leadership and peace-building;
- women's economic empowerment; and
- ending violence against women and girls.

Australia is committed to supporting and partnering with Kenya to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Recently, our government set a target requiring that at least 80 per cent of development investments, regardless of their objectives, effectively address gender issues in their implementation.

Expenditure on initiatives where gender equality is a significant or principal objective is expected to total approximately \$2 billion in 2014-15 of Australia's administered ODA

Achieving this ambitious target will require a sustained effort and a new strategy is being developed to support staff to meet it.

We all know the facts behind the push for gender equality, but they bear repeating:

- Globally, including in Australia, one in three women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and / or sexual violence by their partner.
- Worldwide, women hold just 22 per cent of parliamentary seats in single or lower houses and
- Two thirds of the 774 million illiterate adults worldwide are women – this proportion has remained unchanged for the last 20 years and spans most regions.

In Kenya, the figures tell a similar story:

- We know that by controlling the number of children they have, women's lives are longer and safer, yet fewer than half of all births here are attended by a skilled provider, a quarter of women have no access to birth control, and over a quarter are married by 18.
- 27% of Kenyan women have been cut and almost half of Kenyan women have experienced spousal abuse.
- Only 19% of seats in national parliament are held by women, similar to Australia's figure of 26%.

Kenya has come a long way towards meeting the goals of 2015, but we are not meeting those goals relating to gender equality and women's rights.

Progress against the MDG target on universal access to reproductive health) has slowed and family planning is a proven, highly cost-effective strategy for reducing maternal deaths.

Family planning gives women personal choices that have health, social and economic benefits

- all women have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so.

So that is why we are here today. AACES has been an extraordinary story of success. Our partners have worked with over 730,000 women and men across Africa, including Kenya to improve maternal and child health and improve women's access to economic success and community leadership.

In Kenya, more than 2000 women are members of farmer's association due to AACES and they are having a huge impact on local markets and agricultural policies. My team work closely with all of our partners to help over 100,000 women and men access maternal and

child health services. Over 130,000 women now have access to safe water thank to AACES, and more than 28,000 children received life-saving vaccines.

Women in the program have become leaders in their families and their communities and are making a better life for themselves and for Kenya as a whole.

We are extraordinarily proud of this program and the work of everyone in this room today. Without your efforts, AACES would certainly have not had the expansive impact that it has. I look forward to hearing more success stories from the program, and trust that your work here will continue to inspire and improve the lives of Kenyans well into the future.