

A young girl with short dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt and a bright green skirt, stands with her hands on her hips, smiling at the camera. She is outdoors in a bright, sunny environment with trees and a white wall in the background.

HALF A BILLION REASONS

How investing in
adolescent girls can
change the world

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are close to 600 million adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 living in the world today with 500 million in developing countries.¹

Importantly, more than half the global population of adolescent girls are on our doorstep, growing up in the countries that we provide aid and development to, trade and engage with on foreign policy.

Our neighbours in South Asia host a staggering 340 million adolescent girls and boys, and East Asia and the Pacific are home to 277 million adolescents.² In the Sub-Saharan region, where we provide the most in humanitarian aid, 10 to 19 year olds make up almost one quarter of the region's population.

This means that half a billion adolescent girls in the developing world are our next generation of leaders, workers and mothers.

What opportunities they have, what barriers they face and what they achieve today will set them on a life course that will not only determine their futures, but the future of their families, their communities and their nations.

The evidence is now clear.

When we create the conditions for adolescent girls to fulfil their right to gender equality, to be healthy, educated, safe and economically empowered, they have the power to lift their families out of poverty and transform economies.

The United Nations Population Fund has recognised girls aged 10 as the key group whose potential, if unlocked, will create the economic and social conditions needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yet the potential of adolescent girls to thrive is limited because they are girls.

All over the world girls are at risk because of their young age and their gender. They are at risk of being married before the age of 18. They are at risk of rape, violence and harassment from men and boys in every space they occupy, including their home, their school, their refugee camp and their city. They are at risk of being denied the opportunity to access a secondary education, to gain the skills and training they need to work and to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive health.

The picture is even bleaker for girls that are the most disadvantaged and discriminated against, such as girls that have a disability, those who are the poorest or live in the most remote communities, girls that are sex workers, girls that belong to a minority indigenous, ethnic or religious group, those who are young mothers, girls who are refugees or migrants or girls who identify as lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Despite the grim reality for millions of adolescent girls globally, there is a solution.

Australia has an opportunity at a political and government level to make adolescent girls visible, for the first time ever, in Australia's agenda on foreign policy, trade, overseas aid and development.

At this moment in time, adolescent girls are virtually invisible.

They barely rate a mention in Australia's new Foreign Policy White Paper. They are an add on "and girls" in the *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy 2015* and the 80 per cent investment target to achieve gender equality shows little benefit to adolescent girls as a beneficiary group.³

We need a concerted effort at a political and government level to catch up.

The United States released its *Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls in 2016*, setting out an ambitious road map for tackling the barriers that keep adolescent girls from reaching their full potential.⁴ The Global Strategy includes an implementation plan for each of the departments responsible for helping girls around the world achieve their full potential.

Now it's Australia's turn.

We can unlock the potential of adolescent girls and fulfil the ambitious agenda of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by developing a stand-alone action plan that sets out Australia's commitment to gender equality for adolescent girls with a clear implementation plan and investment targets.

Only with a clear roadmap for how we will invest in adolescent girls and champion their rights internationally will Australia be able to play a leadership role in unlocking the potential of the half a billion adolescent girls in the developing world.

Adolescent girls can change the world.

However, they can only do so if they are able to fully enjoy their rights, participate as active citizens and leaders and stay safe from harm.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Half a billion reasons paints a picture of the lives of adolescent girls globally. It makes the case for why we need to do more and why we need to act now. It poses a challenge to governments, donors, organisations, communities and individuals to break down the barriers and create the conditions that will bring about transformative change in the lives of girls, their families and their nations.

WHY ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

It is now widely recognised that adolescence is a crucial time in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The expectations, opportunities, risks and needs for girls and boys diverge considerably during adolescence.

Where adolescent boys are offered opportunities to continue their education with the expectation of employment and income, the opportunities for adolescent girls to progress through secondary education (especially upper secondary school) rapidly diminishes, denying future economic opportunities and financial independence. Where the burden of household chores eases for boys as they get older, it only increases for adolescent girls as they take on adult roles of domestic work and caring for family. Where adolescent boys are assuming leadership roles in their families and communities, adolescent girls' freedoms are being curtailed and decisions are made by their families that determine the course of their lives.

Adolescence is a time of rapid and life changing physical and emotional development that has its own unique challenges for adolescent girls. Puberty and evolving sexual maturity places girls at heightened risk of sexual and physical violence in the home, in their relationships and at school. The challenges associated with menstruation; the taboos, lack of sanitary products and toilets at schools can limit girls' freedoms and access to education.

Gendered social and cultural norms and behaviours begin to play a significant role in shaping adolescent girls experiences and can result in child marriage, intimate partner violence and early pregnancy. It can also limit adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services necessary to maintain good health and avoid unintended pregnancies. When adolescent girls experience pregnancy, they are at high risk of maternal and birth related complications – much more so than women over the age of 18.

But with these challenges come enormous opportunities.

Investing in adolescent girls is one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and inequality. If we, as individuals, donors and governments can create the conditions for adolescent girls to learn, lead, decide and thrive, then we are driving gender equality for generations of women and girls.

Girls aged 10 to 14

Early adolescence is a period of major developmental and social change for girls aged 10 to 14. Focussing on girls aged 10 to 14 presents an opportunity to build on previous investments made in child health, nutrition and primary education. Early adolescence is a time to work with families and communities to challenge harmful gender norms and expectations, address barriers to accessing secondary education and provide sexual and reproductive health information and services designed for that age group. It is also a crucial time to work with girls to build confidence, leadership skills and to equip them with the tools and power to navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Girls aged 15 to 19

Late adolescence is a time when girls transition into adulthood. Girls aged 15 to 19 are at a crossroads in terms of the trajectory of their lives. It is often a time when families make decisions regarding girls' education, marriage and other rights and freedoms. It is also a crucial period in a girls' life where the right interventions and opportunities will equip girls to navigate the complexities of relationships, school and work life. With access to high quality, effective and timely sexual and reproductive health information and services, girls will have control and choice over pregnancy and can prevent sexually transmitted infections. Opportunities to complete higher secondary education and/or vocational training will provide adolescent girls with the bridge that they need to enter the workforce and become economically empowered. Giving girls aged 15 to 19 a platform to be leaders and change makers within their families, communities, schools and workplaces will give girls power and autonomy and help to transform harmful gender norms and behaviours.

Hayat, 14, dreams of becoming a maths teacher and returning home to Syria

THE WAY FORWARD

Gender equality for the world's adolescent girls is achievable but it requires a concerted effort on the part of all governments and donors. Australia, through its foreign affairs, trade, aid and development agenda can take a global leadership role in transforming the lives of adolescent girls across the world.

Political commitments

Change for adolescent girls cannot be achieved without strong political leadership, without parliamentarians from all sides of politics standing alongside girls and committing to championing their rights. The lives of adolescent girls can only be transformed if political parties and parliamentarians recognise that empowering adolescent girls is critical to achieving gender equality and ending inter-generational poverty across the world. A policy platform that includes a clear commitment to achieving gender equality for adolescent girls, as a distinct group, is an important step in positioning Australia as a champion for adolescent girls globally.

Government commitments

There is enormous potential for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to build on its commitment to achieving gender equality globally by developing a stand-alone action plan for adolescent girls, similar to the US Government's 2016 Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. A Departmental action plan provides a clear road map for the future, identifying the key challenges and the evidence based programs and foreign policy interventions that will directly benefit adolescent girls in the countries that Australia engages with and invests in.

The action plan would be a clear statement on how the Australian Government will address the specific challenges facing adolescent girls in order to reduce gender-based violence, promote their sexual and reproductive health, encourage their economic empowerment, ensure access to inclusive and equitable education, enable girls' leadership, and protect adolescent girls during disasters and emergencies.

POLITICAL RECOMMENDATION:
ALL POLITICAL PARTIES COMMIT TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN PARTY POLICY PLATFORMS.

GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION:
THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE DEVELOP A STAND-ALONE ACTION PLAN ON ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGH AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY, TRADE, AID AND DEVELOPMENT.

Budget commitments

The Government's budget commitment to aid and development is Australia's greatest tool for advancing the rights of adolescent girls globally, providing the foundations of our diplomatic leadership on this agenda. There are clear and specific budget investments that can create real benefit to adolescent girls globally.

Overall, Australia can demonstrate its commitment to ending poverty and advancing gender equality by increasing its overall investment in aid. The renewed global focus, as articulated in the new Foreign Policy White Paper and Australia's seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, places a strong onus on the Government to build its international standing and global reputation on overseas aid and development assistance. To fail to do so will undermine Australia's influence both in the Indo-Pacific region and globally.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy 2016 identifies a number of economic measures to strengthen gender equality and women's economic empowerment in aid and development including the Gender Equality Fund, reporting on aid expenditure where gender is a 'significant' or 'principal' objective and a policy commitment to ensuring that 80 per cent of all aid investments address gender issues. Currently, expenditure falls well short of the stated commitment. According to the Performance of Australian Aid Report 2015-16, only 6 per cent of spending in 2015-16 was committed to investments where gender equality was the 'principal' objective. We recommend a target of at least 20 per cent of the overall aid budget by 2030 be spent on programs that identify gender equality as the 'principal' objective.

Additionally, there is little evidence that Australia's 80 per cent target on gender equality has benefited adolescent girls as a group with unique needs and challenges. The Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17 for the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) identifies the benefits of investments for women however, adolescent girls as a beneficiary group are entirely absent from this reporting.

We believe that in order to ensure that Australia's overseas aid and development assistance contributes to gender equality for the next generation of women, there must be a stand-alone target for adolescent girls to ensure their visibility in aid expenditure and strengthen transparency in reporting. We recommend a target of 15 per cent by 2030 for all investment with a principal or significant objective to achieve gender equality designed with adolescent girls as a primary beneficiary.

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS:
SET A TARGET THAT AT LEAST 15 PER CENT OF ALL INVESTMENTS WITH THE PRINCIPAL OR SIGNIFICANT OBJECTIVE OF ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY, IDENTIFY ADOLESCENT GIRLS AS THE PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES BY 2030.
INCREASE OVERALL INVESTMENT IN INITIATIVES WHERE THE 'PRINCIPAL' OBJECTIVE IS GENDER EQUALITY, FROM 6 PER CENT TO 20 PER CENT BY 2030.
REBUILD THE OVERSEAS AID AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET BY INCREASING INVESTMENT IN AID EXPENDITURE TO 0.7 PER CENT OF GNI BY 2030.

HOW CAN WE TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

Over half a billion adolescent girls live in the developing world.⁵

Protect every adolescent girl's right to be free from gender based violence and harmful practices in their home, in school, online and in public places.

Every 2 seconds a girl becomes a child bride somewhere in the world.⁶

Over 120 million adolescent girls have been subject to sexual violence including rape.⁷

Fight poverty by giving adolescent girls access to high quality, inclusive & equitable secondary education.

Only 18% of adolescent girls in Papua New Guinea attend upper secondary school.¹⁰

In Asia, 1 in 3 girls who experience violence at school will never report the incident.¹¹

In parts of Vanuatu, 75% of girls miss up to three days of school each month because they have their period.¹²

Empower and protect adolescent girls during disasters and emergencies

In conflict-affected countries nearly 90% of adolescent girls are more likely to be out of secondary school than girls in countries not affected by conflict.¹⁵

Every day 507 women and adolescent girls die from pregnancy related causes in countries that are fragile states affected by conflict or disaster.¹⁶

Promote adolescent girls' health, well-being and rights with high quality and age appropriate sexual and reproductive health services & information

Pregnancy related complications are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls aged 15 to 19.⁸

3 in 4 new HIV infections in adolescents aged 15 to 19 are girls in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹

Grow a country's economic prosperity by economically empowering adolescent girls through transformative vocational and entrepreneurship training

Adolescent girls and young women make up 76% of young people around the world who are not in school, training or employment.¹³

23% of young people aged 15 to 24 are employed on less than \$1.25 US a day.¹⁴

Create the conditions for adolescent girls to be change agents and leaders

Globally, only 23% of all national parliamentarians are women.¹⁷

Across 3,000 global companies, women hold only 14% of board seats.¹⁸

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF HALF A BILLION

A university educated young woman is two times more likely to enter the labour market than a less educated (primary level) woman.²⁰

The World Bank has shown that for every year an adolescent girl remains in school after age 11, her risk of unplanned pregnancy declines by 6% throughout secondary school.

When women and girls over 16 earn an income they reinvest 90% of it in their families, compared to men who reinvest only 30% to 40%.

If all the 10-year-old girls who drop out of school or do not attend school in developing countries completed secondary education, they would contribute \$21 billion a year to their economies.¹⁹

If all the unmet contraceptive needs of women and girls were met, unplanned pregnancies and births would fall by 75%.²¹

If women were to participate in the economy at a level comparable to men, global GDP would grow by 26% or \$USD 28 trillion, by 2025.²²

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- ² Ibid.
- ³ Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy* (February 2016).
- ⁴ United States Government, US Department of State, *Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* (2016).
- ⁵ UNICEF Data, *Some 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10-19 years today make up 16 per cent of the world's population* (June 2016) <https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/adolescent-demographics/#>
- ⁶ Girls not Brides, 'About Child Marriage' <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>
- ⁷ UNICEF, *A Statistical Snapshot of Violence against Adolescent Girls*, New York (2014) p.11.
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- ¹⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Gross enrolment statistics for lower and secondary education - females* (2012) as found in World Bank Data.
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- ¹² Oxfam Study 2016 as cited in CARE, *Helping Girls Manage Menstruation*, Thematic Brief (May 2017) https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MHM-profile_May2017-FINAL.pdf
- ¹³ Elder S & Kring S. *Young and female - a double strike? Gender analysis of school-to-work transition surveys in 32 developing countries*, ILO (2016) p 4-5.
- ¹⁴ International Labour Office 'The Youth Employment Crisis: Time For Action' International Labour Conference, 101st session (2012)
- ¹⁵ UNESCO, 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report' Policy Paper 21 (June 2015) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002335/233557E.pdf>
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- ¹⁷ Women in National Parliaments, World Average, as of 1 December 2017 <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.
- ¹⁸ Credit Suisse, *The CS Gender 3000: The Reward for Change* (2016), p. 4
- ¹⁹ UNFPA, *The State of World Population 2016*, New York (2016) p.50
- ²⁰ The World Bank, *Age at first child: Does education delay fertility timing?* The World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, Washington D.C.
- ²¹ Guttmacher Institute, *Fact Sheet: Adding IT Up: Investing Contraception and Maternal and Newborn Health* (June 2017)
- ²² McKinsey Global Institute, *The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add 12 trillion to global growth*, (September 2015)
- ²³ Plan International, *Voices of Hope: Adolescent Girls and Boys Contributing to Individual and Collective Change to Advance Gender Equality in Uganda* (October 2017) p 20.
- ²⁴ Plan International, *Hear Our Voices, Do Adolescent Girls' Issues Really Matter?* (September 2014) p.14.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Plan International, *Let Me Decide and Thrive: Global discrimination and exclusion of girls and young women with disabilities* (December 2017) p.9.
- ²⁷ Plan International, Blog: 'Women and Girls Speak Up Against Draft Family Planning Policy' (10 August 2017) <https://plan-international.org/news/2017-08-10-women-and-girls-speak-against-draft-family-planning-policy>
- ²⁸ Plan International, *Voices of Hope*, p 20.
- ²⁹ Ibid. p 51.