

SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia's international development policy. Australia's global leadership is more important than ever and we believe that the new agenda for development has the potential to create a clear roadmap for addressing the challenges of our time such as growing global inequality and the impacts of climate change, as well as embracing new and emerging opportunities.

Our submission sets out the principles that should underpin the new international development policy as well as a clear development agenda that centres on strengthening gender equality, state-society relationships and partnerships with children and young people, as well as meeting the challenge of climate change.

We welcome the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) commitment to developing a ten year budget strategy and communications strategy. An effective communications strategy needs to provide the rationale for Australia's continued investment in supporting our neighbours and communities in need. We encourage DFAT to work with Australian NGOs to share stories of impact with the Australian community.

2. Plan International

Plan International is a global independent development and humanitarian organisation. As one of the oldest, largest and most experienced organisations in our field we work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the injustices facing girls and the most marginalised children.

3. Foundations of a new International Development Policy

Australia's new international development policy must focus on addressing the global challenges of our time: ending poverty and inequality, promoting peaceful and stable democracies and addressing the challenges of climate change, using the Sustainable Development Goals as a guiding framework to measure and track progress over the next ten years. These three objectives are interconnected and one cannot be achieved without the others. Additionally, we believe the principles that underpin the way that we work with our neighbours and partners overseas should reflect Australia's commitment to empowering children and young people, gender equality and inclusion and generational equity.

Recommendations:

The purpose of Australia's new international development policy should be to:

1. End poverty and inequality around the world.
2. Promote peaceful and stable democracies.
3. Address the challenge of climate change.

Australia's new policy should be underpinned by the following principles:

- Children and young people are key partners in delivering transformational and lasting change.
- Investment in people and communities is long term and drives generational change.
- Gender equality and disability inclusion are cross-cutting priorities across the whole of government.

4. A contemporary and ambitious development agenda

The challenges of our time demand an ambitious development agenda that promotes peaceful and stable democracies, strengthens gender equality and invests in partnerships with children and young people to achieve Australia's objectives.

a) Promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development agenda promotes peace and security in the Indo-Pacific by strengthening state - society relationships, with young people as key partners and emerging leaders.

Alongside Australia's strong commitment and focus on promoting effective governance by strengthening democratic institutions sits an urgent need to strengthen the relationship between state and society to improve democratic accountability and transparency.

More than [20% of Australia's ODA](#) is invested in promoting effective governance, however much of this is currently focused on increasing civil service capacity and national policy reform. This alone cannot achieve Australia's strategic objective of supporting peaceful and secure democracies in the region.

A new contemporary approach to international development can address the existing imbalance of investing too heavily in government strengthening and instead rebalance Australia's efforts; recognising that young people are an important part of building strong state-society relationships. Our work with young people in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in Bougainville, demonstrates the importance of building leadership skills, civic engagement, fostering human rights dialogue and supporting a generation of emerging leaders who can actively participate in improving democracies.

Rationale: It is clear from recent performance reports that Australia's significant investment in strengthening institutions and structures of government alone has not achieved the objective of promoting stable democracies. This was most recently highlighted in the Papua New Guinea 2018-19 [Aid Program Performance Report](#). The evaluation found that despite the \$156m investment in promoting effective governance, progress has been "less than expected." It called for a rebalance in the portfolio, "to strengthen state-society relationships and enhance accountability between Papua New Guineans and their governments."

CASE STUDY: YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEADERSHIP IN BOUGAINVILLE

The Bougainville Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) fosters future leaders and strengthens the state-society relationship by increasing young people's ability to exercise their social, political and economic rights. To bring positive, gender equitable and sustainable social transformation, the YEP strengthens young women and men's individual and collective agency to address the underlying causes of inequality. It works with families, communities and government to make space for young women and men's ongoing participation in decision-making and ensures that government is able and accountable to meet the needs of young people (through information, services and support). The program works closely with the Autonomous Bougainville Government's (ABG) Departments of Health, Education, Community Development and Primary Industries, and local community-based organisations.

b) Meeting the challenge of climate change by empowering young people

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development agenda recognises and responds to the impacts of climate change as a foundational and cross-cutting principle.

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development agenda recognises the impacts of climate change on children and young people, especially girls, and empowers young people to be climate change leaders.

Climate change is the most significant intergenerational equity issue of our time.

Children and future generations are bearing, and will continue to bear, the brunt of its impact on a polluted, degraded planet. Climate vulnerability and its consequences not only reflect existing gender inequality; they also reinforce and exacerbate socially constructed relations of power, norms, and practices that constrain progress toward gender equality in both developed and developing countries. When age is added to considerations of gender—that is, if the focus is specifically on girls—there is another layer of vulnerability and impact through which climate change intersects.

A contemporary international development agenda should include a plan for building the knowledge and skills of children and young people in the Indo Pacific to be leaders that can design and develop mitigation and adaptation efforts, who can negotiate on behalf of their communities at a local, state, regional and international levels to address the needs of their communities and who can be advocates for climate action.

Having a generation of young people, particularly young women, who can access green jobs, climate smart technologies and participate in climate smart decision-making has a long lasting impact. This must be an essential element of future resilience, adaptation and financing investments in Australia's aid and development program. It must also be underpinned by the principles of gender transformation and inclusion.

c) Strengthening partnerships with children and young people

Utilising infrastructure & technology

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development agenda builds partnerships with children and young people in the Pacific by enabling them to fully realise the benefits of Australia's investments in infrastructure and technology.

We strongly support Australia's Pacific Step Up as an important part of Australia's new and contemporary international development agenda. We believe that the investment in infrastructure and technology that is central to the Pacific "Step Up" provides opportunities to strengthen Australia's partnerships with the people of the Pacific, particularly with children and young people. The Coral Sea Cable that enables faster and more reliable internet service is a platform that provides new opportunities to forge people-to-people links and connect children in remote Pacific communities with greater access to education and skills training.

CASE STUDY: IUMI STORY – EARLY LEARNING FOR PACIFIC CHILDREN

Quality children’s media provides a valuable stage to promote literacy and numeracy, lifelong connections to culture and circumvents many geographical barriers faced by more conventional education interventions. There is currently a gap in the Pacific children’s media market for culturally relevant, quality children’s content that reflects their unique context. Plan International will be developing TV and radio programming targeting pre-school and early grade school children for broadcast across the Pacific. With greater internet connectivity the potential to reach children in remote communities through online content and streaming is significant, offering early learning opportunities to children throughout the region.

Entrepreneurship and vocational skills training

Recommendation:

Australia’s international development agenda strengthens opportunities for young people’s economic empowerment with a greater focus on gender transformative and inclusive vocational training and entrepreneurship programs.

The growing youth populations in the Indo Pacific region and their transition from education to the labour market has important implications for the region’s future economic growth, development and stability. Investment in addressing youth unemployment and meeting the needs of young people in vocational training and entrepreneurship could reap a “demographic dividend”, accelerating economic growth in these countries. With a strong gender and inclusion lens, programs can support young women in establishing businesses, with access to micro-credit, loan guarantee funds, a diversity of funding sources and control of assets and resources. Alongside this, such programs can remove barriers to participation, for example, by creating grants to cover childcare and transport expenses.

Protecting children in the Pacific

Recommendation:

Australia’s international development agenda builds partnerships with children and young people in the Pacific by improving their safety, both online and offline.

With increased internet access, adolescents and young people, in particular, face greater child protection risks related to cyberbullying and sexual exploitation. In Asia, particularly the Philippines, we have seen the devastating impact of large scale online child exploitation. Now is the time for Australia, together with Pacific governments, to build the protective infrastructure that will keep children and young people in the Pacific safe from the very real risks of cyberbullying and sexual exploitation.

CASE STUDY: ONLINE CYBER SAFETY FOR PACIFIC CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Plan International Australia and Child Fund have partnered with Western Sydney University to increase the online safety literacy and protective behaviours of children, young people and their communities in the Pacific. Together they have produced foundational research from Solomon Islands, Kiribati and PNG, examining the risks to children and young people in the online world, their access points to technology, ways perpetrators are accessing children and young people online and how best to provide education and behaviour change initiatives. This research informs a youth-led intervention pilot project (currently in implementation) that recognizes the interface and interactions between the different levels of the child, family, community and society, and the necessity to work holistically across all dimensions both offline and online to have sustainable impact. It is anticipated that this will complement AFP’s Police-led programming, and assist in the management of the documented risks of increased connectivity – particularly in light of the Australian Government’s construction of the Coral Sea Cable System.

d) Gender Equality: a generational approach

Recommendation:

Gender equality remains a core priority of Australian aid, with Australia’s new development cooperation agenda identifying long term and strategic investments and approaches that address the barriers to achieving gender equality in the Indo-Pacific.

Gender inequality in all its forms is a significant barrier to achieving economic development and economic inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. One of the biggest transformations to developing economies is the increased participation of women in the economy, particularly the paid workforce.

It is important to recognise that women’s economic empowerment alone cannot achieve this goal. Enabling factors including educational attainment, access to quality sexual and reproductive health and services, eliminating gender based violence and ending early marriage, are critical to ensuring that women can participate fully in the economy.

A contemporary international development agenda recognises that creating an enabling environment for women and girls to participate fully in all aspects of social, economic and political life can transform economies and result in strong, stable democratic societies.

Rationale: The 2018 report by the McKinsey Global Institute – [‘The Power of Parity: Advancing Women’s Equality in Asia Pacific’](#) found that “advancing women’s equality in the countries of Asia Pacific could add \$4.5 trillion to their collective GDP annually in 2025, a 12 percent increase over a business-as-usual GDP trajectory.” According to the report, economies that try to grow “without enabling the full potential of women is like fighting with one hand tied behind one’s back.”

CASE STUDY: EMBEDDING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

With the growing recognition globally that gender equality in education requires a strategic shift from gender parity in numbers in education to a broader focus on how the education system as a whole can advance gender equality, Plan International works with government and partners to develop gender responsive education sector plans to strengthen education systems, institutionalize gender analysis and effectively integrate gender issues into planning processes.

A new focus on adolescent girls

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development agenda takes a generational approach to achieving gender equality, with a greater emphasis on educating and empowering adolescent girls.

Recommendation:

A new performance measurement framework improves the overlay of gender and age disaggregation so that the impact of Australia's aid and development on adolescent girls' lives can be effectively measured. Effectiveness should also be measured against the SDG framework.

We believe that Australia's new international development agenda has an opportunity to take a long term, generational approach to ending gender inequality. This requires a greater focus on adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 who number 600 million globally with 500 million in the developing world.¹ Adolescent girls are our next generation of women who, with the right enabling environment, will acquire the education and skills needed to more fully participate in the labour market as well as a country's social and political life and will do so in far greater numbers than the current generation of women.

Rationale: Our report, ['Half A Billion Reasons: How investing in adolescent girls can change the world'](#) found that Australia's aid and development policy and DFAT's 2016 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, overlooks the potential of adolescent girls. Additionally, as identified in our report, ['It's Our Time'](#) Australia's performance framework fails to sufficiently disaggregate data to identify whether girls and young women are benefiting from Australia's aid investments. For example, a youth economic empowerment initiative will provide data on the number of young people assisted but not the number of females and males. This results in adolescent girls being invisible in Australia's aid program.

What is needed to create an enabling environment for adolescent girls to thrive?

- **Greater access to quality secondary education:** Educational attainment is a key enabler of young women's participation in the labour market yet in countries such as the Solomon Islands, only 27% of adolescent girls are enrolled in upper secondary education. Our 2019 report, ['Stronger Together'](#) found that girls struggle to complete

secondary education due to prohibitive school fees, remoteness and lack of safety travelling to school, culture, early marriage and pregnancy.

- **Safety from violence:** Violence against adolescent girls is at epidemic levels in the Pacific with 1 in 4 experiencing physical violence, and 1 in 10 sexual violence². A new approach that makes stronger links between child protection, family violence and prevention strategies working with adolescence and young people is critical.
- **Economic empowerment:** At a national and global level, harnessing the power and productive capacity of girls can accelerate a nation's economic growth. In South Asia, the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa, home to the largest number of young people, building the productive capacity of girls and young women can unlock a nation's 'demographic dividend'.
- **Access to quality sexual and reproductive health:** Girls can only transition to adulthood as healthy and empowered young women when they are able to protect themselves from HIV, choose when they get pregnant and stay safe and healthy during pregnancy and child birth.

e) Humanitarian assistance

Australia's new development agenda is an opportunity to build on the strength of Australia's humanitarian programming and investments to date and to embed these features into a new policy.

Funding reallocation: It is crucial to recognise the important role that Australian NGOs have played in advancing Australia's objectives in delivering humanitarian assistance, working closely with affected communities and local partners as well as the AFP and defence force. The demonstrated value of the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) and the recommendation of the 2016 DFAT AHP Investment Design Document, that humanitarian financing to Australian NGO's be increased from 10% to the OECD DAC average of 20%, must be reflected in the new policy.

Protection: Australia has the potential to become a global leader in the protection space by building on existing good work. We believe that the new policy can achieve this by prioritising funding for protection, gender and inclusion as a component of DFAT's humanitarian expenditure (including support for standalone protection programming, protection mainstreaming, and targeted efforts to prevent and protect from GBV in emergencies) as well as ensuring that gender is mainstreamed across all future funding for humanitarian responses and setting a minimum target of 15 percent for gender responsive humanitarian programming.

Multi-year funding for protracted crises: Recent evaluations of the multi-year funding arrangement for Syria and funding through the AHP for the Rohingya crisis emphasises the value and importance of multi-year funding in protracted crises. In line with Australia's commitment to 'The Grand Bargain', we recommend that Australia build on its existing multi-year funding arrangements for Syria (including in Jordan and Lebanon) and Iraq and extend this to a larger number of protracted crises including the Rohingya crisis.

5. Australian NGOs: The trusted partner to deliver on Australia's international development agenda

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development policy recognises Australian NGOs as the trusted partner to deliver development and humanitarian assistance.

Recommendation:

Australia's new international development policy recognises the effectiveness and value for money of the ANCP program and commits to a new way of working based on a multi-year funding model.

"How we engage is just as important as what we do"
(DFAT, Pacific Step Up)

Australia's reputation as a trusted development partner is greatly advanced by the way in which Australian NGOs deliver development and humanitarian assistance overseas. We forge deep and enduring partnerships with communities as well as local, regional and national decision-makers. These partnerships play an important role in growing Australia's soft power and strategic influence in the region. We work at all levels of society and focus on addressing the root causes and drivers of poverty, violence and gender inequality; a feature that distinguishes our work from other models of delivery, such as private contractors.

Our effectiveness and value for money has been demonstrated time and again. Australian NGO's delivered 18.2% of DFAT's aggregate development results for only 2.7% of overall overseas development assistance. We believe that our effectiveness and impact on the ground could be even greater with more certainty through multi-year funding.

**Contact: Pasanna Mutha-Merenege |
Policy & Government Relations Manager|
pasanna@plan.org.au | 0434 276 048**

Endnotes

1 UNICEF Data, Some 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10-19 years today make up 16 per cent of the world's population (October 2019) <https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/adolescent-demographics/#>.

2 Unseen and Unsafe: Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor Leste