



PLAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

2020-21 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

1. About 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.

2. Context and focus of this submission

Australia is a global leader in championing children's rights and gender equality and our submission identifies investments that will protect and promote the rights of women and children. The programs outlined in our submission advance Australia's Pacific 'step up' and its 'soft power' influence across the region and globally.

We believe that Australia's influence both in the region and globally must be broader than investment in roads and internet access. Economic security and stability can only be achieved with investment in programs that promote a safe, healthy and prosperous civil society.

Our submission focusses on the following programs and priorities:

- Cyber safety for children and young people in the Pacific
- Ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste
- Building early learning through children's media in the Pacific
- Strengthening humanitarian intervention with multi-year funding for protracted crises
- Advancing gender equality for women and girls

3. Strengthening Cyber Safety in the Pacific

The new Coral Sea Cable System presents both opportunities and risks as it improves internet access and connectivity across the Pacific. With increased internet access, adolescents and young people, in particular, face greater child protection risks related to cyberbullying and sexual exploitation. Now is the time to develop interventions that will mitigate these risks and ensure that children and young people in the Pacific remain safe as they take advantage of the opportunities that arise from greater connectivity.

Plan International Australia and ChildFund have partnered with the Australian Federal Police and Cyber Safety Pasifika to research new evidence and interventions to help ensure children's experiences online are safe, productive and rewarding. The research informs the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) cyber safety program, which is managed by AFP but is implemented in large measure by local Pacific and regional jurisdictions.

Through this work, the Cyber Safety Pasifika team have recognised that there is a lack of baseline data beyond known policing issues, and that whilst the current Cyber Safety Pasifika's awareness program raises knowledge, there is a gap in terms of behaviour change, particularly in regards to adolescents and young people. The research will fill this gap and produce the following:

- A public report in March 2020 which will raise our knowledge and understanding of Pacific young people's, families', and other stakeholders' ideas about and exposure to online risks and protective factors related to cyberbullying and sexual exploitation, and map current agencies, programs and frameworks operating in the cyber safety domain.
- A private report for the AFP-Cyber Safety Pasifika that provides targeted recommendations for the AFP in how they implement their Cyber Safety Pasifika program with Pacific police forces.
- **Evidence to contextually design, and then pilot, a youth-led intervention that aligns to the socio-ecological approach used to End Violence Against Children.** This approach recognizes the interface and interactions between the different levels of the child, family, community, society and the necessity to work holistically across all dimensions both offline and online to have sustainable impact. This pilot will be completed by July 2020.

We recommend that DFAT support PIA's engagement in Cyber Safety Pasifika to continue the youth-led behaviour change intervention pilot. This will compliment the 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.

Recommendations:

The Australian Government invest \$800,000 annually to expand PIA and Cyber Safety Pasifika's youth-led behaviour change program in three Pacific countries over three years.

4. Ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste

Violence against children is at endemic levels in the Pacific. The landmark report '[Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence Against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste](#)' published in July 2019, revealed deeply troubling levels of domestic violence, child sexual abuse and neglect in the region. The research found that:

- 1 in 4 adolescent girls experienced physical violence, and 1 in 10 sexual violence;
- In Papua New Guinea, more than half of all sexual violence cases referred to medical clinics in Port Moresby and Tari were against children; and

- In Papua New Guinea, 27 per cent of parents or carers reported beating their children “over and over as hard as they could”.¹

The report also highlights that successive donors and governments have so far failed to properly address the child protection crisis in the Pacific and Timor-Leste - just \$1.1 million or 0.1 per cent of all Australian foreign aid to the Pacific and Timor-Leste in 2017 was directed to programs specifically addressing violence against children.

Despite the complex and inter-generational drivers of violence in the region, the report demonstrates that targeted programs that are systemic and transformative through an approach that is embedded in a socio-ecological, child-centred framework are making a difference.

Recommendations:

The Australian Government increase investment in programs targeted at addressing violence against children to \$55 million (1.5% of regional ODA) over three years.

5. Early childhood learning in the Pacific

Australian children’s media initiatives such as Playschool have delivered exceptional learning outcomes for children, while also embedding the value of early learning and play in our national culture and psyche over many generations. We have an opportunity now to expand Australia’s expertise and influence in this area, through a unique partnership between ABC International Development and Plan International to deliver a high quality, culturally relevant children’s media program across the Pacific.

ABC International Development and Plan International undertook a scoping study in children’s media in Solomon Islands in November 2018. The study highlighted that despite an increased demand, a gap remains in the Pacific children’s media market for culturally relevant, quality children’s content that reflects their unique context.

In order to fill this gap, Plan International will be developing and producing *lumi Stori: Pacific Children’s media concept* (working title) as children’s TV and radio programming targeting pre-school and early grade school children for broadcast across the Pacific. The objectives of the concept are:

To educate and encourage childhood learning; empower parents to actively engage in children’s learning, and to preserve traditions through recording and sharing cultural knowledge.

The program will take an ecosystem approach to the design, development and evaluation and ensure that children and families in the Pacific have increased access to quality early childhood

¹ Unseen, unsafe: The underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, Save the Children, ChildFund Australia, Plan International, World Vision

development media services and education. The primary outputs produced as part of the program will include:

- Regional Children’s TV series (Potential broadcast partners ABC Australia and Pasifika TV);
- Localized Radio series broadcast in four “anchor” countries: Solomon Islands, PNG, Tonga and Samoa;
- Online Platforms for sharing content regionally and outside of the Pacific tapping into the diaspora market;
- Community Led Play Hubs that provide opportunities to extend the learning from both TV and radio and provide parents and children with direct experience of play-based learning.

Pacific Children’s TV series will be designed for broadest appeal across the Pacific region and produced as a 13-episode series annually. From the four “anchor” countries local talent will be identified and will take on capacity building and mentorships, participating in all components of a children’s TV production shoot over a six- week period. These media mentorships will bring Pacific talent into direct contact with leaders in the children’s media industry in Australia and New Zealand; providing a one-off opportunity for professional development. The Pacific Children’s TV series would be produced in English to remain broadly accessible across different audience segments in the region; Local languages will be showcased through songs and stories within programs. Audio-visuals will include regional character, songs and regular updates on Facebook about the program to engage parents and children.

Localized Radio series will provide a country specific children’s media experience across the four “anchor” countries; the radio component will be developed in-country by local children’s media collectives with a specific focus on the production of cost effective, locally driven content, showcasing and celebrating the diverse language, cultures and environments. The radio component will take into consideration the emerging needs of the early learning sector within each country and will tailor messages and approaches accordingly; and link to early learning centres and schools where appropriate.

Online platforms will be used to further leverage the outputs from the TV and radio series and reach regional audiences and the Pacific diaspora beyond the Oceania region. It will provide an opportunity for the diaspora to stay connected and share their identity and culture in the next generation while living remotely far from their island homes.

Play Hubs will promote the importance of learning through play at the community level in our target countries; these will be coordinated through existing social infrastructure such as parenting groups, church groups, mothers’ groups etc. We would develop and pilot the Play Hubs, a model for integrating learning through play into the lives of young children. The project will include the design of safe and sustainable “play boxes” which would include low-cost materials for children from birth to eight years old that complement and extend the learning and effectiveness of TV and Radio outputs.

All programs will be designed with a focus on equity, gender equality and inclusiveness adopting a culturally sensitive approach and promoting the concept of ‘unity in diversity’.

Recommendations:

The Australia Government invest \$4.2million in the design and implementation of *Iumi Stori: Pacific Children's media concept* in the Pacific.

6. Open CRVS

Birth registration is a fundamental right, yet over 230 million children under the age of 5 remain unregistered. Through 20 years of birth registration experience, Plan International identified lack of suitable software as a key bottleneck to universal birth registration. Existing Civil Registration software systems are subject to vendor lock in, inaccessible in low resource settings, difficult to use, and not interoperable with wider e-Government systems.

Even though civil registration is critical to citizen participation and effective governance, 44% of countries do not have functioning CRVS systems. Foundational systems such as civil registration are the bedrock of sustainable development and central to the gender data revolution.

Birth registration is the first step in securing legal identity and the foundation for accessing basic human rights; ensuring children are vaccinated, educated, and protected from exploitation.

Incubated in Plan International, OpenCRVS is an open-source digital CRVS solution that's free to use, adaptable to country contexts, interoperable with government systems (e.g. health and ID), and rights-based to ensure it protects those most vulnerable. The needs of women and girls have been core to the user-centric design of OpenCRVS, and data captured is disaggregated by age, gender, and location which informs gender aware policies.

OpenCRVS is now ready to be put in the hands of local registration agents and community health workers worldwide. As a global digital good, OpenCRVS will be freely available to all countries.

Plan International challenged the current gap in the market, bore initial risks, and now has an investment ready product.

Through lean and agile methodology, and partners Jembi Health Systems, Vital Strategies and Futurice we prototyped what was possible; conducted a successful Proof of Concept in Bangladesh; and are now commencing a pilot in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh for birth and death registration in two sub-districts (2020). With nearly 19 million children under five years old and an estimated 3,000,000 children born each year across Bangladesh, the beneficiary count will be significant.

Recommendations:

The Australian Government invest \$1 million to implement OpenCRVS globally and as a digital public good.

7. Improving the impact of Australia's humanitarian and disaster response

In 2016, Australia committed to a plan of action, 'The Grand Bargain', to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian response. It included a commitment to introduce multi-year, collaborative planning and funding instruments in recognition that this approach lowers administrative costs and catalyses more responsive programming. Recent evaluations of the multi-year funding arrangement for Syria and funding through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) for the Rohingya crisis emphasises the value and importance of multi-year funding.

The Syria funding evaluation found that multi-year funding increase program efficiency and effectiveness and increased Australia's influence with partners. The Rohingya evaluation report recommended framing new AHP activation as multi-year to promote longer term planning and approaches.

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.**

Recommendations:

The Australian Government build on and extend multi-year funding arrangements in protracted crises.

8. Ensuring education access for adolescent girls

Australia's aid program has historically had a strong emphasis on, and investment in, education. However, within this thematic area, the funding and focus is on primary education and post-secondary education. In 2016-17, approximately \$10m was allocated to secondary education compared with \$126m for primary education, \$22m for higher education and \$315m in scholarships.

This gap is even more striking when you consider the staggeringly low rates of enrolment for adolescent girls in upper secondary education, particularly in the Pacific. In our ground-breaking report on girls' access to education in the Solomon Islands, [Our Education, Our Future](#) multiple barriers to education were identified by adolescent girls in the Solomon Islands including prohibitively high school fees, travel to and from school, the poor quality of education and lack of inclusive infrastructure (including disability inclusive infrastructure).

The success of achieving gender parity and high rates of enrolment at a primary level is of little value if girls are not able to continue their secondary education. Education, vocational training and youth employment initiatives must be seen as a continuum of investment that provides long term and durable solutions for providing girls aged 10 to 19 with the opportunities that they need to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

We call on the Government to **increase funding to programs that address the barriers that stop the most disadvantaged girls completing secondary education**. This could include by shifting investment from the Australia Awards, which benefit a small number of people, to broader secondary education initiatives that benefit more girls.

Recommendations:

Increase funding to programs that address the barriers that stop the most disadvantaged girls completing secondary education.

9. Advancing gender equality for women and girls

Increasing expenditure on gender equality initiatives:

Plan International Australia believes that, as one of the six key priorities of the aid program, gender equality should be resourced at comparable levels to other aid priorities. In 2016-17, 8% of DFAT aid expenditure was committed to investments where gender equality was the ‘principal’ objective, and 54% of expenditure to investments with a significant, or secondary objective.² NGO programming fares a bit better, with 14% of Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funding going to programs with a ‘principal’ objective.

We recommend a target of **at least 20% of the overall aid budget by 2030 be spent on programs that identify gender equality as the principal objective**.

Increasing expenditure on gender equality for adolescent girls:

The developing world is home to half a billion adolescent girls yet they are invisible in Australia’s *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy*, with no clear commitments to invest in targeted, evidence based programs that will address the unique challenges that adolescent girls face as a result of their vulnerability due to their age and gender. Programs have traditionally focussed on “women” or “children” as beneficiaries resulting in little direct impact on achieving gender equality for adolescent girls aged 10 to 19.

There is clear evidence that Australia’s overseas aid and development assistance must urgently prioritise adolescent girls. Adolescent girls carry a disproportionate burden of household chores, are less likely to complete formal schooling, have poorer health outcomes, have more difficulty gaining formal employment, have fewer legal rights and are more likely to face child marriage and early pregnancy before they reach the age of 19.³ For adolescent girls who are discriminated against due to their disability, HIV status, caste or other ethnic, religious, cultural or sexual identity, the burden is even greater.

² DFAT, 2018, *Performance of Australian Aid Report 2016-17*, accessed at <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/performance-of-australian-aid-2016-17.pdf>

³ United Nations Population Fund, *The State of World Population 2016*, New York, p.15

Importantly, there is growing evidence that the key to unlocking a country's future prosperity and stability sits with adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 years of age. For Australia, this means reorientating our overseas aid and development priorities to ensure that adolescent girls are not forgotten in investments designed to achieve gender equality. Currently, there is little evidence that Australia's 80% target on gender equality has benefited adolescent girls as a group with unique needs and challenges. The ANCP's Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17 identifies the benefits of investments for women, however, adolescent girls as a beneficiary group are entirely absent from this reporting. ⁴

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 that 15% of all investments with a principal or significant objective to achieve gender equality, are designed with adolescent girls as a primary beneficiary.**

Recommendations:

Increase overall investment in initiatives where gender equality is the principal objective from 8% to 20% by 2030.

Ensure that 15% of all investments with the principal or significant objective of advancing gender equality, are designed with adolescent girls as the primary beneficiaries.

10. Conclusion

With Australia's growing influence and investment in the Pacific, there are opportunities for the Australian Government to invest in programs that will improve the lives of women and children who are the most vulnerable to inequality, violence and poverty. The programs that we have outlined above strengthen civil society and advance the human rights of women and children in our region.

We wish you well in finalising the 2020-21 Budget. Should you wish to discuss this further with us, please contact our Policy & Government Relations Manager, Pasanna Mutha-Merennnege, pasanna@plan.org.au.