

# IT'S OUR TIME

Achieving gender equality  
for adolescent girls through  
Australia's aid program



Madi is a participant of the Equal Playing Fields program in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.



Girls are busting social norms by playing cricket in India

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**“AS GIRLS, WE WANT TO BE EDUCATED, AND EVENTUALLY FROM THAT EDUCATION GO OUT AND FURTHER OUR STUDIES, AND THEN WORK TO DEVELOP OUR COMMUNITIES”**

- Yuri, 17, Bougainville PNG

Adolescent girls, aged 10 to 19, are our next generation of women, our future leaders, workers and mothers. The opportunities for adolescent girls globally; to be educated, to lead, to enter the workforce and to be treated as equal at all levels of society, will determine whether families can break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and whether countries' economies prosper and grow.

In so many ways empowering girls is the key to transforming families, communities and countries.

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.

Today, there are close to 600 million adolescent girls living in the world with 500 million in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> 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, and trade and engage with on foreign policy.

Plan International Australia's recent report *Half A Billion Reasons: How investing in adolescent girls can change the world* paints a picture of the unique challenges that girls aged 10 to 19 face around the world because of both their young age and gender. The report highlights the importance of a more strategic approach in Australia's aid and development portfolio to ensure that girls benefit from Australia's commitments to advancing gender equality.

*It's Our Time* builds on this important research, taking a deeper dive into Australia's commitments to achieving gender equality for the next generation of women, looking at Australia's high level strategies, Aid Investment Plans and regional and multilateral commitments to measure how visible girls aged 10 to 19 are in Australia's aid program.



# 2. HOW VISIBLE ARE ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN AID AND DEVELOPMENT?

Gender equality is a key pillar of Australia's foreign policy, trade and aid and development agenda, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) approach set out in the *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy 2015* ("the Gender Equality Strategy"). Though this commitment to gender equality is most welcome, does this commitment extend to achieving gender equality for our next generation of women?

**1 Does Australia have a plan for how it will work with girls aged 10 to 19 to ensure that they have the opportunities to be educated and empowered as they transition to adulthood?**

**2 Will Australia's significant investment in gender equality today create long term, sustainable results in 10, 20, 30 years time?**

For this report, Plan International Australia undertook a deeper analysis of Australia's high level aid and development policies, its bilateral aid and multilateral aid programs to answer the question of whether Australia's investment in gender equality is having an impact for our next generation of women.

We looked at all current and recently ended bilateral and regional Aid Investment Plans (31 in total) across the Pacific, South East Asia, South West Asia, Africa and the Middle East as well as the humanitarian investment plans for Syria and Iraq. We also considered 13 of Australia's high level development policies and strategy documents across education, health, governance, trade and gender equality. Additionally, we looked at Australia's investment in 12 multilateral partners and their strategic priorities, including the Asian Development Bank, UN organisations and global funds.<sup>6</sup>

Our analysis mapped the six key areas most relevant to adolescent girls aged 10 to 19:

- Secondary education
- Adolescent girl focussed investments in sexual and reproductive health
- Gender based violence addressing adolescent girls needs
- Economic empowerment for girls and young women (15 to 24)
- Girls' leadership and
- Adolescent girl focussed humanitarian responses

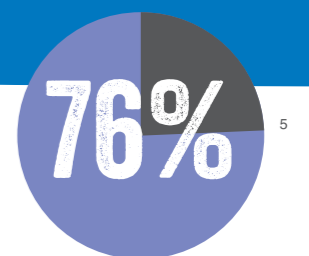
to identify whether the language of policy documents, reporting frameworks and investment plans clearly articulated a plan for transforming the lives of adolescent girls.

# MAIN CONCLUSIONS FROM OUR FINDINGS

The Australian Government's commitment to achieving gender equality for adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 is not well articulated in Australia's strategic priorities, investments and performance benchmarks.

The Australian Government cannot strengthen its focus on adolescent girls and cannot tell the story of its success in educating and empowering adolescent girls without a clear and strategic approach to gender equality for girls, visible at a policy and practice level.

If Australia's commitment to gender equality is to have a long term, sustainable impact, Australia's approach must recognise and meet the needs of girls and women across all age demographics and across all intersectional issues that further marginalise them. If Australia's approach to advancing gender equality through the aid program is not intersectional and inter-generational, it will continue to struggle to achieve its objectives.



ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD WHO ARE NOT IN SCHOOL, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT

### 3. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Strategic policies

**Adolescent girls are largely invisible in Australia’s key strategic policy documents including the Gender Equality Strategy where the focus is strongly on women with little recognition of the unique challenges for and interventions that benefit adolescent girls.**

##### Recommendations:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade develop a stand-alone action plan for achieving gender equality for adolescent girls through Australia’s foreign policy, trade, aid and development.
- The language and commitments of the adolescent girl action plan are embedded in all high level strategic policy documents to reflect a clear commitment across portfolios and priorities to achieve gender equality for girls.

#### Bilateral aid

**Australia’s Aid Investment Plans have a strong focus on “youth” and “women” however fail to set out investments and focus areas that address the challenges faced by girls aged 10 to 19.**

**Country specific Annual Program Performance Reports fail to include performance benchmarks that identify how adolescent girls are benefiting from Australia’s investments.**

##### Recommendations:

In order to strengthen the focus on adolescent girls in Australia’s bilateral aid program:

- Embed the principles of a stand-alone adolescent girls’ action plan in Aid Investment Plans and Annual Program Performance Reports.
- Develop performance benchmarks for Aid Investment Plans that include both age and gender disaggregated data to identify how investment is impacting on women and men, girls and boys.
- Ensure that Annual Program Performance Reports tell the story of how Australia’s bilateral aid is benefiting adolescent girls.

- Build DFAT’s expertise on adolescent girls both in Australia and at post through training, focal points and guidelines.
- Work with Australian Embassies to increase the visibility of adolescent girls in their country-specific Gender Action Plans.
- Develop guidance to ensure that adolescent girls are included as part of program designs.

#### Secondary education

**In the area of education, Australia’s focus is on primary education and post-secondary education. This is despite the staggeringly low rates of enrolment for adolescent girls in upper secondary education, particularly in the Pacific. In 2016-17, approximately \$10m was allocated to secondary education compared with \$126m for primary education, \$22m for higher education and \$315m in scholarships.<sup>7</sup>**

**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.**

##### Recommendations:

- Increase funding to addressing the barriers that stop the most disadvantaged girls completing upper 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.
- 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.

#### Economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women

**Adolescent girls fall through the gap of “youth economic empowerment” and “women’s economic empowerment” commitments in Aid Investment Plans and reporting. Though girls and young women may well benefit from these investments, without a clear recognition of this group (particularly in the women’s economic empowerment context) the interventions needed to economically empower girls and young women are not mapped out, nor are they measured and evaluated meaningfully.**

##### Recommendations:

- Youth economic empowerment and women’s economic empowerment initiatives must recognise girls and young women as a specific group in program designs, investments, measurement and reporting.

#### Ending violence against adolescent girls

**Addressing gender based violence forms a significant part of Australia’s bilateral aid, particularly in the Pacific and through regional investments such as Pacific Women. However it is unclear how adolescent girls benefit from this investment, with no recognition in Australia’s Gender Equality Strategy and performance benchmarks of the experience of gender based violence that girls’ experience.**

**Girls aged 10 to 19 require specialist services and justice responses recognising their young age and vulnerability. Services and responses by police, justice and family violence services must recognise the gross power imbalance and the nature of the violence that girls experience, which often occurs in their homes, at the hands of their carers, guardians, extended family members, at school, as well as intimate partners.**

##### Recommendations:

- Australia’s Gender Equality Strategy, policies, program designs, investments and evaluation must recognise the unique challenges and interventions required to keep adolescent girls safe from violence.

#### Multilateral institutions

**An analysis of strategies for United Nations Agencies that Australia invests in showed that a number of agencies have a stronger focus on adolescent girls than Australian strategic policies and Aid Investment Plans – in particular the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Aids.**

##### Recommendations:

- Australia learn from and reflect in its own aid policies, the strategic priorities and programming of multilateral agencies that have a strong focus on adolescent girls, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and HIV.

#### Regional aid – Pacific Women

**In recognition of Pacific Women’s strong focus on women, rather than girls, a new Pacific Girl program has been created with an investment of \$3 million dollars over three years to strengthen programming and research. This is a strong example of how Australia’s aid investments can begin to respond to the unique challenges that girls face.**

##### Recommendations:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs learn from the Pacific Girl example to strengthen its focus on adolescent girls in its bilateral and multilateral aid programs as well as through its strategies and thematic investments.
- Increase investment in Pacific Girl (as part of Pacific Women) to grow and strengthen the regional focus on adolescent girls in the Pacific in the long term and ensure that Pacific Girls is a catalyst for further investment in girls as part of the core Pacific Women strategy.



19-year-old Faridah leads a group of girls in Kampala who are committed to making their city safer. At night, the dimly lit streets are putting girls' lives in danger. "Where my friend was killed, there is now light," she says with a mixture of sadness and pride.

## 4. HOW ARE ADOLESCENT GIRLS BENEFITING FROM AUSTRALIA'S AID PROGRAM?

We want to acknowledge that there are pockets of good practice, where programs are designed and developed with and for adolescent girls as primary beneficiaries. In particular we wish to recognise that there are Australian and local NGO partners working to empower and support adolescent girls. Many of these programs are funded through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), Water for Women and the Australian NGO Gender Action Platform.

However without a clear, strategic approach across regions to increase the visibility of adolescent girls in policies, Aid Investment Plans and monitoring and evaluation, this good work will not be captured and rolled out in the long term.

### SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS

Plan International works in partnership with Women in Cities International and UN-HABITAT to deliver the Safer Cities for Girls Program in Honiara, Hanoi and Kampala, supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The program goal is to build safe, accountable, and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls (aged 13-18). By working closely with girls and decision-makers, the program aims to increase girls' safety and access to public spaces as well as promote active and meaningful participation in urban development and governance and increased autonomous mobility in the city for girls.

### KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL THROUGH MENSTRUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Keeping Girls in School is a three-year project in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea, supported by the Australian Government under the Gender Action Platform (GAP). Marie Stopes International Australia and WaterAid Australia are working with adolescent girls in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea to address reproductive and menstrual health, both areas that are critical to girls' ability to be healthy, educated and empowered. For countries with rapidly increasing youth populations, this project is an opportunity to improve adolescent health and address barriers to education while promoting women-led businesses. This partnership will test one of the first integrated reproductive health and WASH approaches in the region, offering a holistic solution to improving girls' health and education.

### GIRLS LEADING CHANGE IN FIJI

International Women's Development Agency works in partnership with Fiji Women's Rights Movement to deliver Speak Up, Speak Out: GIRLS Leading Change in Fiji. The three-year program for girls aged 10 to 17 combines creative writing, performance and human rights education. Supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, the project empowers adolescent girls to articulate their safety and security concerns and become agents of change in their family and community to address multiple forms of discrimination based on ethnicity, age and gender. Parents, carers and other duty bearers are engaged in the program through tailored information sessions to support them in creating an enabling environment for girls. The project recognises the interlinkages between women's civil and political participation and women's safety and security.

### PROTECTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN LAOS

With funding from the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) Save the Children in partnership with government agencies has commenced a 4-year project in Luang Prabang Province designed to transform social norms and practices that are harmful to very young adolescents (10-14 years), especially girls. The "Safe in my Community" project targets ethnic communities due to their increased vulnerabilities and focusses upon issues such as early marriage, gender inequality and lack of opportunities for adolescents. Using a socio-ecological method, the project engages very young adolescent girls and boys, mothers and fathers, community leaders and members and government workers in discussions and activities to strengthen knowledge, and transform attitudes and practice to protect young adolescents living in both rural and urban areas. The project is contributing to the "Every Last Girl" campaign: a national campaign aimed at sensitizing communities and policy makers on the right of girls to learn and the importance of investing in them.

This project is part of a multi-donor (Save the Children Hong Kong, US Department of State and ANCP), multi-sectoral portfolio known as the Adolescent Initiative. This Initiative aims to ensure more ethnic adolescents and young people, especially girls, delay marriage, plan for healthy parenthood, participate in their communities and pursue safe, dignified livelihoods.



## 5. AUSTRALIA'S HIGH LEVEL STRATEGIC POLICIES

Australia's high level strategic policies guide Australia's aid, development, trade and foreign policies. We analysed 13 of the most relevant strategic policies to identify the focus on adolescent girls. The policies included:

- Australian Aid Policy
- Making Performance Count
- Health Strategy
- Education Strategy
- Humanitarian Strategy
- Social Protection Strategy
- Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy
- Development for All Strategy
- Aid for Trade Strategy
- Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Strategy
- Private Sector Development Strategy
- Economic Infrastructure Strategy
- Effective Governance Strategy

Overall, Australia's policies reflect commitments set out in the Gender Equality Strategy.

The Gender Equality Strategy set out the three priority areas of women's decision-making and leadership, women's economic empowerment and violence against women and girls. However, the language of this policy document fails to recognise the unique needs of adolescent girls and the role of aid and development investments and programs to address these needs.

For example, interventions to promote women's economic empowerment focus largely on older women and no reference is made to gender transformative youth economic empowerment strategies.

Similarly, a focus on women's leadership misses the importance of strengthening leadership opportunities for girls and young women through school, their communities and at a national and regional level, another key intervention that can place girls on a path to achieving gender equality as they transition to adulthood.

**As the Gender Equality Strategy is weak on outlining a clear, strategic approach to empowering adolescent girls, this filters through to all other strategic policies that adopt the language of the Gender Equality Strategy.**

Adolescent girls are not visible in these high level documents and there is a failure to recognise the intersectional and intergenerational nature of gender equality. Disability is recognised as a stand-alone commitment, however it sits separate to the commitment to gender equality with little recognition of the intersectional nature of disability and gender. No recognition is made in most policies that Australia's approach requires a deeply intersectional and intergenerational approach.

There is enormous potential for 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.

The United States *Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* sets out an ambitious road map for tackling the barriers that keep adolescent girls from reaching their full potential. The Global Strategy includes an implementation plan for each of the departments responsible for helping girls aged 10 to 19 around the world achieve their full potential.

One example of how a clear strategy on adolescent girls can guide investments and ensure that they directly benefit girls is USAID's investment in secondary education for adolescent girls in Pakistan.

USAID committed \$70 million to help educate and empower over 200,000 adolescent girls in Pakistan. The Sindh Basic Education Program mobilises communities to increase girls' enrolment and trains female teachers. USAID is rebuilding girls' schools damaged by conflict and natural disasters in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas.

**We recommend that Australia adopts a similar approach to the United States to improve the impact of its gender equality investments. An adolescent girls' 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.

Alongside this, there is considerable scope to strengthen the visibility of adolescent girls in Australia's thematic strategic policies on health, education, humanitarian and social protection. For example, the Health for Development Strategy 2015-2020 is an important strategy for articulating the specific needs of adolescent girls; however mention of girls' needs are limited to nutritional deficits in adolescence. Girls' needs in reproductive and sexual health, menstrual hygiene management and youth friendly health services are important aspects of improving outcomes for adolescent girls through Australian aid.

Similarly, the Humanitarian Strategy 2016 provides an opportunity to strengthen the visibility of adolescent girls who regularly fall through the gaps in humanitarian responses that focus on "women" or "children" as an affected group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**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.**

**The language and commitments of the adolescent girl action plan are embedded in all high level strategic policy documents to reflect a clear commitment across portfolios and priorities to girls.**



Young mother Natalia, 19, cradles her baby daughter Afeena

## NATALIA'S STORY

As rain rat-a-tats on a flimsy tin roof, baby Afeena lies sleeping. "I knew a little bit about how a baby is made, but not too much," Natalia, 19, Afeena's mother, confides. "I had no education about this at school. No lessons at all related to this topic. Nothing."

Situated on the very rim of Asia's south-east, the country of Timor-Leste is one of the region's poorest and least developed. Having gained democratic independence just 15 years ago, after centuries of occupation and cruelty, it's a nation still very much in recovery and a state of painstaking renewal.

Despite the political gains however, life for many - and especially that of women and girls - is both disadvantaged and precarious. Raised to be obedient, subservient and have little to no voice in terms of their own future and rights, Timorese girls are quite often subjugated by society at all levels and not least in terms of their sexual and reproductive health.

Alarming, almost one quarter of all teenage girls in Timor-Leste will fall pregnant and have a baby by the time they are 20 years old. In addition, some 19 per cent are married by the time they are aged 18, indicating a deep stigma and shame around early pregnancy.

"I dropped out of school and never went to see a doctor or had any consultation" reveals Natalia, who was also abandoned by her boyfriend soon after her positive pregnancy test result. "I even managed to hide it from my family. When I went into labour I told my father I had back pain, but he soon discovered I was having a baby."

Traumatized and scared, with no understanding of what to expect, Natalia was rushed to a local clinic. Having lost her mother, who had died during the birth of a younger sibling, Natalia was later relieved to be able to deliver Afeena safely.

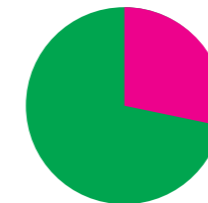
**"OUR CULTURE IS VERY PATRIARCHAL AND VERY TRADITIONAL, SO WOMEN AND GIRLS DO NOT HAVE POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEIR OWN SELF. FOR THEIR HEALTH, FOR THEIR BODY, THEIR PARTICIPATION, THEIR VOICE, THEIR EDUCATION. AS WELL, EVEN THOUGH THE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION CURRICULUM IS THERE, OFTEN THE TEACHER IS NOT CONFIDENT TO DELIVER THE INFORMATION, AND IT IS NOT SOMETHING THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE TO TALK ABOUT. THEY FEEL THEY CANNOT INTRODUCE THESE IDEAS TO CHILDREN, IT IS ONLY FOR THOSE WHO ARE MARRIED. THEY TELL ME, WHEN THEY GET TO THIS TOPIC, THEY RIP THE PAGES OF THE TEXTBOOK OUT"**

- Lala Soares, Women and Girls Empowerment Program Manager for Plan International in Timor-Leste

## 6. BILATERAL AID

According to the 2016 OECD review, bilateral aid forms the greatest part of Australia's aid and development program, making up close to 70% of Australia's overall aid contributions.<sup>8</sup> Engaging with governments bilaterally is critically important to Australia's place in the world.

### OECD DAC GROSS AID CONTRIBUTIONS 2016



**BILATERAL AID 70%**  
**MULTILATERAL AID 30%**

The most recent Aid Budget Summary describes the aims of Australia's bilateral engagement as "promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability". In particular it highlights the importance of bilateral aid in promoting the rights of the most marginalised including people with disabilities and women and girls.

Given the importance of Australia's bilateral aid program, investment in adolescent girls is critical if Australia is serious about meeting the objective of gender equality for all women and girls.

Yet when we analysed Aid Investment Plans, performance benchmarks and a sample of Annual Program Performance Reports, it was clear the issues facing girls aged 10 to 19 were not a priority, despite a consistent overall commitment to gender equality.

Of the 31 Aid Investment Plans, none specifically mentioned adolescent girls as beneficiaries though the terms 'youth' and 'women and girls' are used, mostly in the context of youth economic empowerment and ending gender based violence against women and girls.

The performance benchmarks, for the most part, failed to take into account adolescent girls as a beneficiary group. For example, performance benchmarks for youth economic empowerment programs measured the number of youth reached rather the number of young men and young women. Gender based violence initiatives measured the number of women reached without any age disaggregation and education related initiatives mostly measured the number

of children – though where improving gender parity was an objective, indicators were broken down into girls and boys.

We have provided a snapshot of the bilateral aid program of three countries, identifying some of Australia's major investments and identified examples of how Australia's bilateral aid is either, failing to reach the most marginalised adolescent girls or failing to tell the story of how girls are benefiting from Australian aid.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the focus on adolescent girls in Australia's bilateral aid program:

- Embed the principles of a stand-alone adolescent girls' action plan in Aid Investment Plans and Annual Program Performance Reports.
- Develop performance benchmarks for Aid Investment Plans that include both age and gender disaggregated data to identify how investment is impacting on women, men and girls and boys of different ages.
- Ensure that Annual Program Performance Reports tell the story of how Australia's bilateral aid is benefiting adolescent girls.
- Build DFAT's expertise on adolescent girls both in Australia and at post through training, focal points and guidelines.
- Work with Australian Embassies to increase the visibility of adolescent girls in their country-specific Gender Action Plans.
- Develop guidance to ensure that adolescent girls are included as part of program designs.



## PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG)

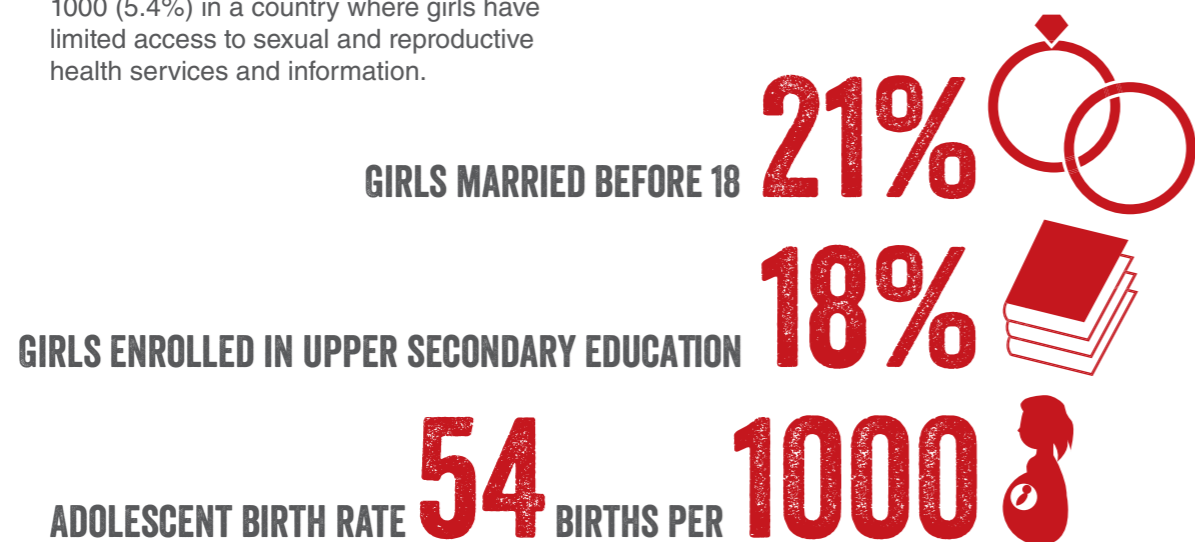
Celinda, 18, is seven months pregnant with her second child. Plan International's health team in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea is providing much needed support to young mothers in rural communities.

PNG is, by far, Australia's largest aid recipient estimated to receive \$519.5 million in bilateral aid in 2018-19.<sup>9</sup> In 2016-17, Australia was one of Papua New Guinea's main partners in gender equality, contributing \$9.2 million to investments that promoted gender equality as their main objective. Despite this, the Aid Program Performance Report struggles to tell a positive story of how adolescent girls benefited from this focus.

PNG is one of the most difficult places to be an adolescent girl. Enrolment rates of adolescent girls in higher secondary education is frighteningly low. Statistics show that only 18% of girls are enrolled in upper secondary education.<sup>10</sup> High school fees, domestic chores, poor menstrual hygiene management, early pregnancy and marriage all contribute to girls being unable to complete their education. The adolescent birth rate remains worryingly high with 54 births per 1000 (5.4%) in a country where girls have limited access to sexual and reproductive health services and information.

From our analysis, PNG is one of the few countries where there is some level of focus on adolescent girls in Australia's aid investments across several areas. Whilst we welcome this focus, at this moment in time that investment lacks the long term strategic planning needed to address the dire situation for girls in PNG.

For example, education is a strong focus of Australia's bilateral aid program in PNG however the focus is yet to strategically shift to addressing the issues for girls in secondary school, particularly upper secondary school. The 2016-17 Aid Program Performance Report<sup>11</sup> identifies investment in achieving gender parity at a primary school (grade 5) level and the building of new schools and teacher residences. The performance benchmarks focus on the number of boys and girls enrolled at the grade five level as well as the number of schools constructed.

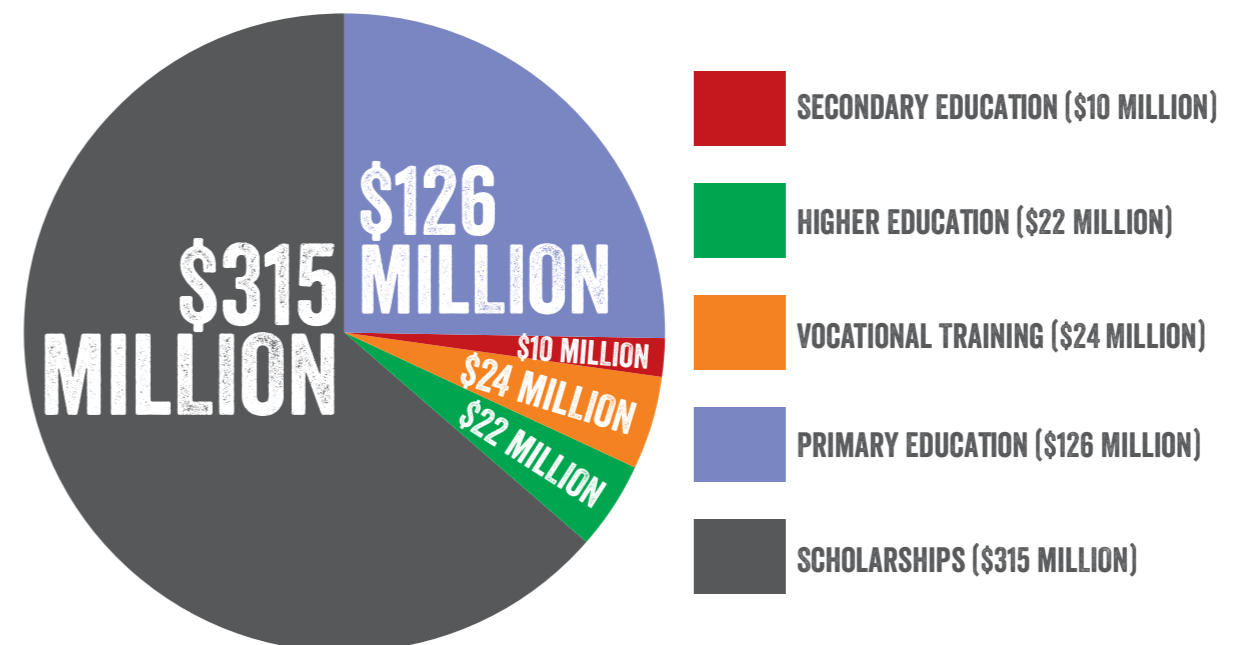


The Performance Report identifies a number of projects focussed on adolescent girls and menstrual hygiene which is one of several barriers to secondary school attendance. Australia supported the "Last Taboo" project, research undertaken by IWDA, Burnet Institute and Water Aid into barriers to women's and girl's effective menstruation management. The Performance Report also indicates support for training in 22 schools in WASH and menstrual hygiene practices. This focus is most welcome and provides an example of how other bilateral aid programs can begin to shift positively towards the barriers in secondary education for girls. This would be further strengthened in PNG by a more strategic approach addressing the multiple barriers that girls experience, which is articulated and measured effectively through the investment plan and performance benchmarks.

**The question of how to ensure that adolescent girls remain in secondary school and transition into the workforce is a key challenge for Australia's bilateral aid program.**

**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.**

### PROPORTION OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION ODA SPENDING 2016-17 <sup>12</sup>





## SOLOMON ISLANDS (SI)

Maria, 19, wants to see police do more patrols to keep the area where she lives in Honiara safe.

Adolescent girls in SI face high levels of gender based violence, teenage pregnancy and a significant lack of educational and employment opportunities. Rape and sexual violence against girls is high, with a study finding that 42 per cent of women surveyed, who had their first sexual experience before the age of 15, reported it was forced.<sup>13</sup> Twenty two per cent of girls are married by the age of 18 and adolescent birth rates are high with 45 births per 1000 (4.5%), though it has been dropping over the last decade. Only 27% of girls are enrolled in upper secondary school<sup>14</sup> and 50% of girls and young women aged 15 to 24 are unemployed, not in education or training in SI.

Despite the high rates of gender based violence amongst women and girls and SI being the second largest aid recipient in the Pacific, there is little evidence that the commitment in the SI Aid Investment Plan to focus on preventing family violence and implementing the Family Protection Action 2014 is translating into benefits for adolescent girls. The 2016-17 Annual Aid Program Performance Report<sup>15</sup> prioritises investments in key support organisations however this does not include services that are youth specific.

**Girls aged 10 to 19 require specialist services and justice responses recognising their young age and vulnerability. Services and responses by police, justice and family violence services must recognise the gross power imbalance and the nature of the violence that girls experience, which often occurs in their homes, at the hands of their carers, guardians, extended family members as well as intimate partners.**

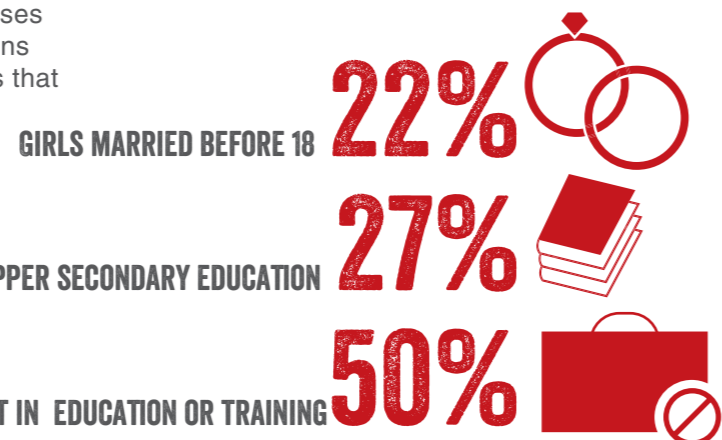
The Performance Report recognises that gender equality is prioritised across sectors and that sex disaggregated data is collected. It also notes that the program designs conducted in 2016-17 for the justice governance and growth programs included gender expertise in the design teams. Unfortunately the cross-cutting issue of age and the collection of age disaggregated data is not a regular practice within the bilateral aid program.

**Until age is considered a cross-cutting issue and program design incorporates the needs of adolescent girls and older women, the impact of gender equality initiatives will be short term and lack impact across generations.**

Economic empowerment for adolescent girls is not factored into program design or reporting of women's economic empowerment initiatives. This is a weakness across the bilateral aid program. The SI Performance Report notes the establishment of the Solomon Islands Professional Network for Women and training by Solomon Islands Women in Business Initiatives. The number of women trained is reported but without any age disaggregation.

Australia does invest in youth economic empowerment programs and it is a key focus area, particularly in the Pacific (approx. \$10m in vocational training and \$32m in advanced technical training in the Pacific in 2016-17). This should have an impact on adolescent girls and young women, however again, as the focus is on youth with little gender disaggregation, it's difficult to identify how such programs specifically benefit girls and young women. In 2016-17 Australia supported the Solomon Islands National University to develop ten national Certificate III and IV level qualifications in Plumbing, Electrical, Construction, Automotive and Business, and commenced support for the development of courses in Agribusiness, Tourism and Hospitality. This is an important initiative however without gender quotas and positive initiatives to encourage girls and young women to enrol across these qualifications Australia's investments will make little different in lifting girls and their families out of poverty.

**Adolescent girls and young women are not well targeted in economic empowerment initiatives because of the focus on youth or women.**







## BANGLADESH

Rahina (17) and Khurshida (14) are best friends in the camp



Yuri, 17, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

In 2017-18 Australia's total estimated aid to Bangladesh was \$89.9 million making it the second largest recipient of aid in south-west Asia. Adolescent girls in Bangladesh face a range of challenges that are closely interlinked. Child marriage rates, though falling slowly, are some of the highest in the world. A staggering 59% of girls are married by the age of 18 and 22% are married by the age of 15.<sup>16</sup> In line with this, adolescent birth rates are extremely high. In 2015, there were 82.5 births per 1000 (8.3%). Early pregnancy and marriage also impacts on girls' ability to access education with only 44% of girls enrolled in upper secondary education.

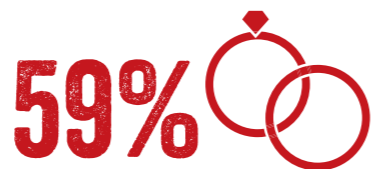
The Bangladesh Aid Investment Plan 2015-16 to 2018-19 sets out Australia's focus on education which is largely at a primary level with investments focussed on text books and teacher training. There is a strong need to address primary school enrolment given the high rates of non-completion, particularly amongst girls, however in order to address the high rates of child marriage key interventions must occur for girls between the ages of 10 and 18.

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the most effective policy and systemic interventions are those which support girls to stay in schools to receive a quality secondary education, to empower girls and mobilise

their communities to challenge gendered attitudes and behaviours that support child marriage, improve reporting and enforcement systems, laws and policies and address poverty and economic insecurity. Working with families as well as religious, traditional and community leaders and elected officials at a provincial and local level is critical in building support for change and identifying champions who will speak out against harmful practices.<sup>17</sup>

Youth economic empowerment initiatives were central to Australia's bilateral aid program in Bangladesh with 33,000 youth receiving targeted vocational training, including in mobile phone servicing and tailoring. Of the total, 31,578 youths either received job placements or started their own business following their training. Such initiatives are important however the benefit to girls is unknown given the performance benchmarks and indicators focus on the number of youth rather than boys and girls.<sup>18</sup> This is an illustration of how Australia could more effectively tell the story of how it is benefiting girls and young women through its bilateral aid program.

GIRLS MARRIED BEFORE 18



GIRLS ENROLLED IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION



ADOLESCENT BIRTH RATE



## YURI'S STORY

Yuri, 17, sees education as an opportunity for girls to improve their communities. But she sees her friends dropping out of school when they fall pregnant, or when their parents can't afford their school fees, and regretting the way their life is unfolding. As the only girl amongst four brothers, Yuri feels pressure to make something of herself. "My brothers will eventually have wives and kids to look after, so I have to look after myself."

## NESLYN AND MONICA'S STORY

Sisters Neslyn, 20 and Monica, 19 live with their parents and siblings near Honiara. When it comes to decision making in the community, in the Solomon Islands it sits largely with the men.

"Here girls are not involved in decision making in community but girls have the right." Neslyn says. "It will be nice if we have more girls involved in making decisions, talking about girls' rights. We need more girls. We need community leaders to work with girls and boys. To raise awareness that boys should respect girls and girls' rights."

"I think that Prime Ministers should have many girls in front of the members of the parliament to tell them their rights. Now, they only talk to big members, but they don't listen to girls. But girls have more ideas that they don't expect and we have the right to talk to members of parliament."

## 7. REGIONAL AID - PACIFIC WOMEN

Pacific Women is a flagship initiative strengthening gender equality in the Pacific. Pacific Women commits \$320 million to improve the political, economic and social opportunities of Pacific women.<sup>19</sup> It supports 14 Pacific countries to meet the commitments made in the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration working with a range of partners including Pacific governments, civil society organisations, regional and multilateral agencies and the private sector.

Adolescent girls do benefit from some investment by Pacific Women but the focus is largely on women. Take, for example, the Young Women's Leadership Project delivered by IWDA and the Bougainville Women's Federation. The project trains and mentors young women in south and central Bougainville. Participants use their public speaking, budgeting, and networking skills by organising and participating in a Young Women Leaders' Forum. The project also works with men and the broader community, raising awareness to support an enabling environment for women taking on leadership roles.

In recognition of the gap in reaching adolescent girls, Pacific Women has recently established Pacific Girl, a plan to guide investments that focus on programming and research on adolescent girls aged 10 to 19. Pacific Girl has an overall budget for regional learning and country-specific programming and advocacy activities of approximately \$3 million over four years, from July 2018 to June 2022.

This specific and strategic commitment to adolescent girls at a regional level is a welcome development to increase the visibility of adolescent girls. It's an example of Australia's aid program identifying the gap in addressing gender equality for adolescent girls and taking the first step in developing strategies that will strengthen this focus.

Given the model adopted by Pacific Women, we believe that Pacific Girl should continue to grow as a flagship initiative for Pacific Women. The \$3m that has been earmarked over three years until 2022 is a small investment given the significant interventions required to support adolescent girls in the Pacific to achieve gender equality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Increase investment in Pacific Girl (as part of Pacific Women) to grow and strengthen the regional focus on adolescent girls in the Pacific in the long term.**

**The Department of Foreign Affairs learn from the Pacific Girl example to strengthen its focus on adolescent girls in its bilateral and multilateral aid programs as well as through its strategies and thematic investments.**

## 8. MULTILATERAL AID

Health club member from Tororo, Uganda

In 2017-18, Australia contributed \$277 million to international and multilateral organisations. We analysed the strategic focus areas of key United Nations bodies that Australia contributes funding to, in order to identify the strength of their commitment to adolescent girls. While we were unable to identify how Australia's multilateral aid dollars directly impacted on adolescent girls, the strategic priorities of the UN bodies did at least indicate a high level commitment to achieving gender equality for adolescent girls as a specific group.

Adolescent girls were strongly visible in a number of UN strategic plans. The UNFPA's Strategic Plan 2018-21 provides a strong focus on adolescent girls; a key priority of their work is to promote the sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescent girls in all contexts. Alongside this is a priority to advance adolescent girls reproductive rights in humanitarian settings.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV Aids (UN Aids) Strategic Plan also identifies adolescent girls as a priority group; with UNAids committing to empowering adolescent girls to protect themselves from HIV and access testing and services.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Australia learn from and reflect in its own aid policies, the strategic priorities and programming of multilateral agencies that have a strong focus on adolescent girls, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and HIV.**

## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is one of the world's oldest and largest child rights development agencies. We work in over 80 countries around the world to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. We strive for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls - working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners to achieve change. Plan International is independent, with no religious affiliation.

### Endnotes

- 1 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/#>.
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- 4 WHO, *Global Health Estimates 2015: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2015*. Geneva (2016).
- 5 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.
- 6 Plan International Australia engaged The Social Economy Group to undertake the analysis.
- 7 Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade *Australia's International Development Assistance: Official Sector Statistics Summary 2016-17*, May 2018, p. 20
- 8 This is 70% of total gross disbursements in 2016 as cited in *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2018*, p. 54
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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.
- 11 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17: Papua New Guinea*, September 2017 accessed on 14 September 2018 at <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/papua-new-guinea-aid-program-performance-report-2016-17.aspx>
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- 13 Pacific Community (SPC), *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*, (December 2009) p.34.
- 14 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Gross enrolment statistics for lower and secondary education - females (2012)* as found in World Bank Data.
- 15 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17: Solomon Islands*, September 2017 accessed on 14 September 2018 at <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/solomon-islands-aid-program-performance-report-2016-17.aspx>
- 16 Girls not Brides citing 2017 UNICEF figures <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh/> accessed 1 September 2018.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17: Bangladesh*, September 2017 accessed on 14 September 2018 at <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/bangladesh-aid-program-performance-report-2016-17.aspx>
- 19 Information accessed on 12 June 2018 at <https://pacificwomen.org/>

## 9. CONCLUSION

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

Australia's strong commitment to gender equality places it in a unique position as a global leader for women and girls. The OECD has recognised the government's approach to gender equality as a genuinely cross-cutting issue, strengthened by policies, investments and structures.

**We believe that Australia now has an opportunity to embed this work so that achieving gender equality is a long term, sustainable objective that will not only benefit the women of today, but generations of women to come.**

Our report illustrates how the effectiveness of this commitment must be strengthened with a deeper understanding of and approach to promoting gender equality for all women and girls – recognising the inter-generational and intersectional issues that women and girls face.

Our report illustrates how this requires:

- A deeper understanding and expertise of the issues facing adolescent girls in Australia's aid and development program.
- A clear and strategic approach to promoting gender equality for girls aged 10 to 19 through a stand-alone action plan.
- Aid Investment Plans that identify articulate a commitment to investing in initiatives that promote gender equality for girls.
- Improved performance management frameworks that collect the right age and sex disaggregated data to measure effectiveness in Annual Program Performance Reports.

- Continued investment in UN Agencies that have a strong strategic focus on adolescent girls.
- A commitment to grow the regional focus in the Pacific on adolescent girls through Pacific girl.
- Growing Australia's investment in ANCP in order to strengthen and expand the work NGOs are doing with adolescent girls in communities.

Without this commitment to adolescent girls, without increasing their visibility in Australia's aid and development agenda, Australia will fail to achieve long term, sustainable impact for women and girls globally.

Authorised by CEO, S. Legena.

 /planaustralia

 @PlanAustralia

 @plan\_australia

**13 75 26**

**plan.org.au**

**Plan International Australia**

18/60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006 GPO Box 2818, Melbourne VIC 3001

Tel: 13 75 26 Fax: +61 (3) 9670 1130 Email: [info@plan.org.au](mailto:info@plan.org.au)

ABN 49 004 875 807

