



Save the Children

Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific

**SUBMISSION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE JOINT
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Save the Children Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Save the Children Australia acknowledges the input into this submission from our offices in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	6
KEY FIGURES AND GROUPS: LEGAL SYSTEM	8
KEY FIGURES AND GROUPS: GOVERNMENT	9
PROGRAMMING UNDER THE PACIFIC STEP-UP.....	11
INVESTING IN PREVENTION.....	14
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION	16
HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY	16
DEVELOPING A COORDINATED POLICY RESPONSE TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES	18
CONCLUSION	20

Introduction

Save the Children is pleased to contribute this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region. Our submission will focus on the following terms of reference of the inquiry:

- the role of civil society groups in Pacific Islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality;
- the key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls' in the Pacific context;
- the effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls; and
- human trafficking and modern slavery (considered a 'related matter').

Violence against women and girls in the Pacific is a persistent challenge for the region, it negatively affects personal well-being and prevents women from fully participating in the civic and economic life of their society. As with all abuses of human rights, it undermines human flourishing and deprives the Pacific of realising its full potential.

The figures are sobering, familiar to experts on the topic, and worth repeating. Up to 68 per cent of Pacific women have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime.¹ Rates of the lifetime experience of violence is high in Tonga (79 per cent), Samoa (76 per cent), Kiribati (73 per cent), Fiji (72 per cent), Vanuatu (72 per cent), Solomon Islands (64 per cent)² and Papua New Guinea (69 per cent).³ The situation for children is no better: over 70 per cent of children in the region experience violent discipline at home as noted in the *Underinvestment in Ending Violence against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste* report from Save the Children Australia, Plan International, World Vision Australia and ChildFund Australia.⁴

Despite the daunting nature of the challenge, admirable progress has been made by Australia and its Pacific partners over the last 10 years to enact laws and policies that protect women and girls, and to provide better services to survivors. This submission highlights examples of projects and organisations that are particularly effective at delivering that kind of assistance. However, looking to the future, the time is right for Australia to fulfil its commitment to invest in programs which prevent violence before it occurs. New evidence and models for these kinds of prevention programs are emerging which are ready to use in the Pacific, and Save the Children recommends they be prioritised in Australia's development program.

The mood in the Pacific on the subject of violence against women is starting to shift in a way that has not been seen in years: political leaders are speaking out, young people are making their voices heard regarding the kind of society they want to live in and everyday Pacific Islanders are joining the movement to say no violence.⁵ Now is the time to make the ambitious commitment to

¹ UN Women, *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls – Fiji*, accessed 1 August 2020,

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/ending-violence-against-women>

² Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, *Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business!*, 2013, <https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FWCC-National-Research-on-Womens-Health-Fiji.pdf>

³ Dev Policy Blog, *Addressing violence and sexual abuse against women in Papua New Guinea*, <https://devpolicy.org/how-to-address-violence-and-sexual-abuse-against-women-in-papua-new-guinea-20191107/>

⁴ Kavitha Suthanthiraraj, Save the Children Australia, Plan International, World Vision Australia, ChildFund Australia, *Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste*, 2019, [https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-\(1\).pdf.aspx](https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-(1).pdf.aspx)

⁵ Emma David, *Jenelyn Kennedy's death was senseless – we must all ensure she did not die in vain*, Guardian Australia, 24 July 2020, accessed 1 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jul/24/jenelyn-kennedys-death-was-senseless-we-must-all-ensure-she-did-not-die-in-vain>

the elimination of violence a reality. It will not take place through new laws, policies or hotlines, vital though they are, it will take place through conversations in workplaces and schools and on Facebook. It will take place in the home, where children model the behaviour of their parents. It will take place because gender attitudes in society changed, and violence became unacceptable. This should be a source of great hope: change is possible and is currently taking place, and if Australia is willing to step up, the coming generation can be the one that ends the cycle and knows a life free of violence against women and girls.

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Violence against women and girls in the Pacific is the focus of this submission because it is pervasive and so harmful to the realisation of human rights in the region. Pacific Governments and Australia are both alert to the challenge, and thanks to strong leadership across the region the issue is being addressed. The logical starting point has been the legal frameworks and government institutions which address violence – 10 years ago a number of Pacific countries did not have these in place. Thanks to Pacific leadership and support from Australia and other development partners much progress has been made on this front.

There is much to be proud of in building a legal and policy infrastructure which supports women and girls who are victims of violence. This has been a particularly strong outcome from Australia's \$320 million Pacific Women initiative,⁶ with laws changing all over the region. Pacific Governments should be applauded for taking on that challenge, creating new government departments, police units, strategies and policies which are helping create a robust framework for women and girls who have been the victims of violence.

However, some of these departments are still not adequately funded to meet their new mandates. Some of these police units are not equipped to enforce the new laws. Some of the front-line services do not have access to a comprehensive case work system for helping survivors. To fully realise the ambition of the Pacific Step-Up, Save the Children is of the view that Australia should build on this excellent track record of policy and legislative reform by helping partner governments with implementation.

As the public mood shifts in the Pacific, and violence against women is increasingly considered a national problem, an opportunity has arisen to capitalise on this moment by investing in shifting attitudes. Prevention of violence before it occurs should be the guiding principle of the next phase of work on protecting the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific and should inform Australia's aid investments. To date, this area has received less attention than legal reform and service provision. While essential, these programs and reforms are by their nature reactive to violence and so will only go so far in reducing its frequency.

New evidence is emerging that shows programs which transform gender norms through working with boys and adolescents are having a measurable impact on reducing violence in the Pacific and around the world. There is now an opportunity for Australia to support these kind of programs to scale. A part of this work will involve preventing violence against children, which is key to ending violence against women. Research shows that children in the Pacific who were beaten are more likely to become perpetrators of intimate partner violence in adulthood.⁷ As analysis from Save the Children and other NGOs revealed last year, the level of funding for programs specifically designed to end violence against children in the Pacific (including East Timor) was only AUSD\$1.1 million or 0.1 per cent of Australian Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2017.

This submission recommends Pacific Governments and Australia consolidates the significant progress made on the elimination of violence to date, and start planning now for a new phase of work which addresses the prevention of violence.

⁶ Pacific Women, *Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2017-2018*, 2019, <https://pacificwomen.org/key-pacific-women-resources/pacific-women-annual-progress-report-2017-2018/>

⁷ UNICEF, *Harmful connections : examining the relationship between violence against women and violence against children in the South Pacific*, 2015, https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political_declarations/east_asia_and_pacific/harmful_connections.pdf

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should work with Pacific partners to set benchmarks for prosecutions (or the alternative resolution of cases), and commits resources to allow implementation

Recommendation 2: Papua New Guinea should be supported to train and deploy 300 dedicated child protection officers, ensuring they are present in each province.

Recommendation 3: Australia should support the Solomon Islands to restore funding for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) to ensure the continuity of services which protect girls and women from violence.

Recommendation 4: Australia should support the Solomon Islands to create national-level best practice case management system for offences against women and girls.

Recommendation 5: Australia should support the Government of Vanuatu's review of the *National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019* and the *National Child Protection Policy* through investigating funding shortfalls and providing budgetary support for future work, including increased funding for the 'Child Desk.'

Recommendation 6: Response plans developed under Partnerships for Recovery should include outcomes for children as a key indicator and must include the protection of girls from gender-based violence in addition to women.

Recommendation 7: Australia should support the Ending Violence Against Children Coalition of international NGOs to develop a regional program response to the unique threats against children created by COVID-19.

Recommendation 8: Australia should significantly increase its ending violence against children-specific ODA allocation to \$55 million over three years in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

Recommendation 9: The Australian government should establish a policy platform that puts children at the centre of development. This would involve developing child-centred policies and establishing dedicated resources to oversee the mainstreaming of child protection and child rights across all thematic areas of development cooperation programs and to account for and help to track donor expenditure in ending violence against children programming.

Recommendation 10: Australia should work with Pacific Governments to identify effective programs working with boys to shift gender norms and prevent violence, and support them to be delivered at scale.

Recommendation 11: New prevention programs should adopt a socio-ecological model to address social norms that discriminate against women and girls in the household and within institutions such as workplaces, schools and justice systems.

Recommendation 12: Australia should recognise that programs which work on the prevention of violence require longer time frames for results, hence funding models should accommodate this and a results framework tailored to prevention programs developed.

Recommendation 13: Australia should strengthen intersectionality between violence against women and children programming in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. An 'ending violence against children lens' should be applied across the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of all gender-based violence, gender equality and family violence programs to ensure shared risk factors are addressed.

Recommendation 14: Partner with Pacific Governments and international donors to develop a child-focused social safety net payment available across the region to assist the Pacific to recover from COVID-19, designed with best-practice principles for the reduction of violence against women and girls.

Recommendation 15: The Australian government should develop a standalone strategic framework and action plan on human rights and democracy, which outlines how it will protect

and promote human rights abroad. The strategy should set out the Australian government's overarching approach towards the protection and promotion of human rights and provide guidance to overseas missions on developing and implementing advocacy strategies.

Key Figures and Groups: Legal System

A 2019 report of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Office of Development Effectiveness examined the progress made in the Indo-Pacific on ending violence against women and girls, reviewing progress since a similar report in 2008.⁸ On the issue of legislative reform, the report is glowing:

“Ten years ago, most countries in the Indo-Pacific lacked specific laws on [violence against women and girls]. In 2018, out of 32 countries for which data was available in Asia and the Pacific, 29 had enacted laws criminalising domestic violence, mostly known as Family Protection Acts. Further, 23 countries have criminalised sexual harassment and 12 have explicitly recognised marital rape as a crime. In PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, Australia has provided critical financial and technical support for drafting, advocating for and implementing the laws.”⁹

However, the enduring levels of violence against women, and the low prosecution rate of perpetrators indicates that these laws are not necessarily being enforced. For example, in Vanuatu, only 2 per cent of women who experience violence in the home see the perpetrator prosecuted.¹⁰ This matches Save the Children's observation of the impunity of perpetrators in a number of Pacific Island countries which occurs in practice. Legal systems suffer from corruption, incidents of escape from custody, the failure to follow up cases and police holding attitudes which are pro-domestic violence. This creates a context where legal enforcement is difficult, depending on the jurisdiction and type of incident.

While it is difficult to find data on the prosecution of violence against children specifically, a recent report from Papua New Guinea showed that 75 per cent of cases which found their way to the court for sexual offences involved girls as the victims.¹¹ As these offences are at the severe end of the spectrum, it is clear that for minor offences against children the prosecution rate is incredibly low. Many programs in the Pacific are focused on raising awareness of rights and laws, but research indicates that consistent enforcement is just as important in encouraging victims-survivors to report.¹² Australia continues to be a strong partner to Pacific nations in improving policing and justice systems, but there is still a challenge ahead to up-skill police, particularly in Papua New Guinea.¹³ Australia should remain cognisant of the need to remain engaged in supporting policing and the justice system in the Pacific. If funding for justice programs are reduced or focus drifts then it is likely women and girls will bear the brunt.

⁸ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Development Effectiveness, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*, 2008, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/violence-against-women-in-melanesia-and-east-timor-building-on-global-and-regional-promising-approaches>

⁹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Development Effectiveness, *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance*, 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/evawg-final-report-nov-19.pdf>

¹⁰ UN Women, *Women and Girls Access to the Formal Justice System in Vanuatu*, 2016, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/07/women_childrens_access_formal_justice_vanuatu_web.pdf?la=en&vs=5212

¹¹ Judy Putt and Sinclair Dinnen, *Reporting, Investigating and prosecuting sexual violence offences in Papua New Guinea*, June 2020, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/205549/7/DPA%20FSV%20report%202020%207%20July%20smallfile.pdf>

¹² Ellsberg M, Arango DJ, Morton M, et al. 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?' *The Lancet*. 2015. 385(9977):1555–1566

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2020: Papua New Guinea*, November 25, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea>

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should work with Pacific partners to set benchmarks for prosecutions (or the alternative resolution of cases), and commits resources to allow implementation

Key Figures and Groups: Government

Pacific Governments, with the support of Australia and other development partners, have made substantial progress in rolling out government strategies and policies that aim to protect women and girls from violence. However, the teams within the public service of Pacific Governments tasked with that protection, the child protection officers or the departmental staff overseeing the policies, are chronically underfunded and are often the first to have their budgets cut. In the next section we will examine the government environment in a sample of Pacific countries to illustrate the challenge of realising the right of women and girls to be protected from violence. We will look at the current gaps and recognise the substantial progress being made by governments and civil society to meet the ambitious aims of the various strategies which have been created over the last 5 years.

Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea (PNG) the Government faces considerable fiscal and capacity challenges to implementing protection policies and structures. In its Second Cycle Universal Periodic Review national report, provided to the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2016, the PNG Government noted that:

*“Increasing human and financial investments to support effective implementation of national policies addressing women, gender equality and child protection are priorities for the government under Vision 2050 Roadmap”.*¹⁴

While substantial progress has been made on rolling out a gender-based violence institutional framework,¹⁵ this has not translated into ‘on the ground’ prevention activities. This is particularly the case in relation to violence against children. Save the Children has observed that there is a lack of dedicated child protection officers, with the Government instead designating provincial welfare officers and district community development officers as child protection personnel under the *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*.¹⁶

Save the Children has also observed that levels of staffing vary considerably from province to province, with on average only two or three Child Protection Officers or Welfare Officers per province. As a review of the Australian Government Funded Pacific Women program notes:

*“there remain few gazetted Child Protection Officers as required by the Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015 and there are limited numbers of police with skills for interviewing child witnesses or survivors.”*¹⁷

This severe underfunding led to a civil society campaign (the ‘Pikinini Defenders campaign’) for the employment of 300 dedicated child protection officers in 2020, up from the current level of

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review - Papua New Guinea, 2016*, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session33/Documents/A_HRC_33_10_Add.1_AVPapuaNewGuinea_E.docx

¹⁵ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Papua New Guinea National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025, 2017*, http://www.femilipng.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/PNG-GBV_Strategy-2016-2025_150816.pdf

¹⁶ *Lukautim Pikinini Act (2015)*, <http://www.parliament.gov.pg/uploads/acts/15A-45.pdf>

¹⁷ Pacific Women, *Pacific Women in Papua New Guinea Performance Report 2019-2020*, June 2020, <https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Pacific-Women-Papua-New-Guinea-Performance-Report-2019-2020.pdf>

approximately 115.¹⁸ While the campaign has been considered in Parliament, resourcing for child protection officers remain an area for improvement with no firm commitment made to date.

Recommendation 2: Papua New Guinea should be supported to train and deploy 300 dedicated child protection officers, ensuring they are present in each province.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Island's *National Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy*¹⁹ sets the strategic focus for the Government, and has set a 'policy outcome' aimed at preventing violence against women and girls – which has a subsidiary policy on eliminating all violence against women.²⁰ The policy has achieved some early success through new legislation – the *Family Protection Act 2014* – which established a system of Police Safety Notices (PSNs) and protection orders. Research subsequently confirmed the majority (70 per cent) of women who had PSNs issued by police were satisfied with the service and felt safe because of them.²¹

While the policy is comprehensive, the observation of Save the Children is that case management for victims of violence in the country continues to be a substantial challenge. While the policy calls for the Government to 'Strengthen the SAFENET referral and case management system',²² there is still a long way to go, and women experience difficulty accessing services because of these defects in administration. Currently civil society organisations (for example Family Support Centre, Seif Ples and Christian Care Centre) provide key frontline services for women experiencing violence. These services are not funded by the Government and are not a part of a joined-up case management system.

Despite increasing rates of violence against women and children occurring during the pandemic, as evidenced by an increase in calls to violence hotlines, local media reports that the Government of the Solomon Islands has seen the budget of the responsible Department halved – this indicates that while the policy framework is strong, implementation may suffer if a COVID-19 induced recession stretches government budgets, and these teams remain underfunded.

Recommendation 3: Australia should support the Solomon Islands to restore funding for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) to ensure the continuity of services which protect girls and women from violence.

Recommendation 4: Australia should support the Solomon Islands to create a national-level best practice case management system for offences against women and girls.

¹⁸ Save the Children Australia, *Pikinini Defenders Save the Children joins new campaign*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/pikinini-defenders>

¹⁹ Government of Solomon Islands, *National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016–2020*, 2015,

https://www.pacificclimatechange.net/sites/default/files/documents/_national_gender_equality_and_womens_development_policy_2016-2020.pdf

²⁰ Solomon Islands Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, *National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls*, 2019, <http://www.mwycfa.gov.sb/resources-2/strategic-plans-policies/gender-equality-women-s-development/12-national-policy-to-eliminate-violence-against-women-and-girls-2016-2020/file.html>

²¹ Dr Anouk Ride and Pauline Soaki, *Women's Experiences of Family Violence Services in Solomon Islands*, 2019, http://d1009381.my.ozhosting.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Women%E2%80%99s-Experiences-of-Family-Violence-Services-in-Solomon-Islands-FINAL_WEB.pdf

²² Solomon Islands Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, *National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls*, 2019, <http://www.mwycfa.gov.sb/resources-2/strategic-plans-policies/gender-equality-women-s-development/12-national-policy-to-eliminate-violence-against-women-and-girls-2016-2020/file.html>

Vanuatu

Vanuatu's Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) is the government agency responsible for leading work on protecting women and girls from violence and leads implementation of the *National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019*.²³ The policy is currently under review as planning takes place for the next phase. The DWA has limited funding and no dedicated staff working on gender-based violence. The annual budget for the DWA was reduced from 0.17 per cent of the national budget appropriation in 2015 to 0.11 per cent in 2019.²⁴ The *Vanuatu Family Protection Act 2008* allows women to take out family protection orders, but it was not until 2015 that funding was provided to the DWA to raise awareness of the availability of orders.²⁵ Since then promotion of the orders has largely taken place through the Vanuatu Women's Centre.²⁶

Like most departments, the DWA budget does not include funding allocation for policy implementation or programming activities. In 2017, the National Recovery Committee retracted VUV 158 million (AUD 1,924,664) in funding from DWA. These funds were originally earmarked for gender, disability and child protection activities associated with Tropical Cyclone Pam recovery. The funding was instead allocated to other sectors managed by the Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination. The Vanuatu Child Desk, within the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, is responsible for child rights monitoring and coordination and has a budget of only VUV 2 million (AUD 24,273) allocated every year to the operation and implementation of activities, which remains static since 2015, and is insufficient for child protection activities across the country. There is currently no budget for the implementation of Vanuatu's *National Child Protection Policy*.²⁷

Recommendation 5: Australia should support the Government of Vanuatu's review of the *National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019* and the *National Child Protection Policy* through investigating funding shortfalls and providing budgetary support for future work, including increased funding for the 'Child Desk.'

Programming Under the Pacific Step-up

Australian Aid Strategy post COVID-19

In 2016, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*²⁸ established ending violence against women and girls as one of three core priorities to guide work on gender equality across the aid program. The 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper*²⁹ continued Australia's clear policy commitment to the empowerment of women and ending violence against women and girls. Australia's new International Development Policy process has paused in response to COVID-19, however in a submission to the process Save the Children

²³ Government of Vanuatu, *National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019*, 2015, <https://www.nab.vu/sites/default/files/documents/NationalGenderEqualityPolicyJuly2015.pdf>

²⁴ Government of Vanuatu, *Fiscal Strategy Report – Policy Statement 2020*, https://doft.gov.vu/images/2020/Budget/2020_Volume_1__2_Budget_Book_English.pdf, Precise data on budget allocation is not publicly available.

²⁵ Lindy Kanan, *Vanuatu's Family Protection Act: Contextualisation, Resistance and Implementation*, 2019, http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2019-03/ib_2019_7_kanan_final.pdf

²⁶ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Development Effectiveness, *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance*, 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/evavg-final-report-nov-19.pdf>

²⁷ Government of Vanuatu, *VANUATU NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION POLICY 2016 – 2026*, 2016, https://mjcs.gov.vu/images/policy/Vanuatu_National_Child_Protection_Policy_2016-2026_FINAL_Nov16.pdf

²⁸ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*, 2016, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.pdf>

²⁹ Government of Australia, *Foreign Policy Whitepaper*, 2017, <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

highlighted the need to properly fund civil society to carry out activities, including the prevention of violence against women and girls.³⁰

The recent strategy which guides Australian aid in the context of COVID-19, *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*,³¹ contains a commitment to 'Australia's strong support and advocacy for initiatives to enhance gender equality and address gender-based violence, which will increase as societies are placed under strain'.³² Unfortunately the protection of children from violence was not specifically mentioned as a risk during the pandemic response, which is concerning to the extent that the aid program may not account for violence against children in its response. Save the Children strongly supports the inclusion of ending violence against children and women as part of the COVID-19 response – there are a number of viable partners and programs to draw on in doing so, and it would reflect the wider commitment to the issue in the aid program.

Recommendation 6: Response plans developed under Partnerships for Recovery should include outcomes for children as a key indicator and must include the protection of girls from gender-based violence in addition to women.

Recommendation 7: Australia should support the Ending Violence Against Children Coalition of international NGOs to develop a regional program response to the unique threats against children created by COVID-19.

Recommendation 8: Australia should significantly increase its ending violence against children-specific ODA allocation to \$55 million over three years in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

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Programs targeting violence against Women and Girls in the Pacific

Australia has funded a number of effective programs under the 10-year, \$320 million Pacific Women initiative. This submission will highlight particularly impactful uses of aid financing and effective local partners to inform the work of the Committee. As has been covered elsewhere in this submission, programs which focus on the justice sector and counselling for victims are far more common than the more complex 'norm shifting' work which goes to the prevention of violence.

The Vanuatu Women's Centre

The Vanuatu Women's Centre (funded by Pacific Women) raises awareness of laws around family violence and helps to prevent it through shifting community attitudes. A particularly effective intervention has been the use of 'male advocates' who are trained to visit communities, and are then supported by the Centre over the time in their advocacy. This model was first

³⁰ Save the Children, *Australia's New International Development Policy – Submission*, February 2020, <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/3e85a24f-7662-4866-8957-2c40aef6115c/save-the-children-aid-review-submission-submitted.pdf.aspx>

³¹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*, 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response#:~:text=The%20Australian%20Government's%20development%20policy,virus%2C%20together%20with%20our%20partners.>

³² *Ibid.*

developed by the Fiji Women's Centre,³³ and is an example of 'Pacific to Pacific' sharing of best practice. The Government of Vanuatu has also piloted the training of 'authorised persons' who can issue protection orders and give counselling to victims³⁴ under the *Family Protection Act 2008*. An evaluation is pending on the program of advocates and authorised persons, although Save the Children has received anecdotal feedback from community members that it has been effective to date.

Femili PNG

The Australian Government funded 'Femili PNG' has a well-earned reputation in Papua New Guinea for its work providing integrated case management services to survivors of family and sexual violence, to help them access counselling, support and other interventions for protection and justice. This case management work was funded in response to the Australian Office of Development Effectiveness recommendation to strengthening the quality of case management services in the Pacific. The experience of women seeking support after experiencing violence across the Pacific can be haphazard: Femili PNG has been effective in providing an accessible pathway for women seeking help – client satisfaction surveys confirm the women have a positive experience of the service.³⁵ As we have highlighted elsewhere in this submission, case management is an area for improvement across the Pacific, and Femili PNG provides a model for how a national system can be built and integrated with existing services. Having a service provider which coordinates cases also assists with data collection and research – because it is centrally held Femili PNG has been able to contribute to research into the use and impact of family protection orders over 4 years.³⁶

PNG Tribal Foundation

The PNG Tribal Foundation is a well-respected local organisation that focuses on sorcery related violence and works alongside Save the Children in the Child Protection Alliance³⁷. It is a community association, partly funded by external donors. It represents a grass-roots effort to stamp out a culturally specific form of violence against girls. It is responsible for 'Senisim Pasin,' a culture change national campaign centred on a film by the same name. Senisim Pasin is built on the belief that Papua New Guinea can improve how women are valued by society, and is an excellent example of culture change work which is tied to local beliefs and customs.

Save the Children: Safe Communities, Safe Children

Save the Children is implementing a program called 'Safe Communities, Safe Children' in 30 communities across Bougainville and Morobe Provinces. As part of this work we are starting conversations about child rights and the roles and responsibilities of caregivers. In 2019, we trained parents and children using the 'Parenting without Violence' methodology,³⁸ which has led to positive behaviour changes in relation to violence in the home, with parents engaging meaningfully with their children and changing their disciplinary strategies. In the wider

³³ Pacific Women, *Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2017-2018*, 2019, <https://pacificwomen.org/key-pacific-women-resources/pacific-women-annual-progress-report-2017-2018/>

³⁴ Daily Post, *Authorised Persons and Registered Counsellors pilot project launched*, 23 January 2018, https://dailypost.vu/news/authorised-persons-and-registered-counsellors-pilot-project-launched/article_8688d2a2-6cfe-5817-946f-34fb15a8a182.html

³⁵ Femili PNG, *Client Satisfaction Survey 2016–2017*, <http://www.femilipng.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Client-Satisfaction-Survey-2016-17.pdf>

³⁶ Judy Putt, Theresa Phillips, Davida Thomas, Lindy Kanan (2019), *Family Protection Orders a Key Response to Domestic and Family Violence: A Pilot Study in Lae*, Papua New Guinea.

³⁷ The Child Protection Alliance is led by members of Papua New Guinea's Child Protection Alliance which includes Save the Children, World Vision, ChildFund, PNG Tribal Foundation, Equal Playing Field, Cheshire Disability Services PNG, National Disabled Persons Organisation PNGADP, UNICEF, and the PNG Council of Churches, more info available here: Save the Children, *Pikinini Defenders*, 1 October 2020, <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/pikinini-defenders>

³⁸ Save the Children, *Parenting without Violence Factsheet*, May 2020, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17610/pdf/pwv_factsheet_familiar_final_0.pdf

community, we also trained community professionals including police, teachers and health workers to identify and respond to abuse risks. The project has also set up the Child Protection Alliance to coordinate national child protection advocacy and launched a national campaign to advocate for increased child welfare services.

Investing in Prevention

There remains a gap in Australian funded programs in the area of prevention through working with boys to transform gender norms and through socio-ecological approaches. Recommendation 4 of the DFAT Office of Development Effectiveness evaluation of programming for ending violence against women and girls recommended expanding the Australian Government portfolio of activities on prevention.³⁹ The Australian Government agreed to re-orient its programming to strengthen the focus on violence prevention over the next decade.⁴⁰ This re-alignment is yet to occur in practice. This submission proposes that ending violence against women and children are linked issues and can be addressed through programs which get to the core issue of gender norms.

Gender inequality is a common problem across many countries in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, with unequal gender power relations and discrimination driving high levels of violence against women and children within these societies. Communities are deeply patriarchal with entrenched notions of gender roles developed through traditional ideologies. For example, the cultural concept of *Kastom* in the Ni-Vanuatu community has strict divisions of labour which places men in an inherently superior position. The practice of 'bride prices' play an enormous role in driving violence against women across the Pacific, with the practice recognised as the leading cultural issue which will need to be addressed to challenge the view of 'women as property.'⁴¹

According to the National Child Protection Policy of Vanuatu, this 'culturally embedded and pervasive gender inequality can be harmful to children and contributes to domestic violence.'⁴² These norms are what drives violence against both children and women and is the reason the two issues are linked and can be addressed together. It is not unusual to find that a perpetrator of domestic violence is also a perpetrator of child abuse in the same family (physical and/or sexual).⁴³ Progress will not be made on violence against women and girls until the cultural attitudes which undergird it are addressed.

Prevention programs in this area should recognise that violence occurs because of an ecosystem of factors: including an individual's own experiences and characteristics, the dynamics of their relationship, their community context and gender norms, and the laws, policies, and practices governing the society in which they live.

³⁹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Development Effectiveness, *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance*, 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/evawg-final-report-nov-19.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Richard Eves, *Full price, full body: norms, brideprice and intimate partner violence in highlands Papua New Guinea*, Culture, Health & Sexuality an International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care Volume 21, 2019 - Issue 12, and Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*, 2008, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/vaw_regional_report.pdf

⁴² Government of Vanuatu, *VANUATU NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION POLICY 2016 – 2026*, 2016, https://mjcs.gov.vu/images/policy/Vanuatu_National_Child_Protection_Policy_2016-2026_FINAL_Nov16.pdf

⁴³ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children*. Available at <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SolomonIslandsFamilyHealthandSafetyStudy.pdf>, p. 91.

The lack of attention to this important aspect of prevention was highlighted by the Office of Development Effectiveness's 2019 evaluation of existing programming funded by Australia, the report observed:

Most lacked best-practice design, as they did not encompass activities at multiple levels of the Socio-ecological Framework.⁴⁴

Save the Children's view is that there are opportunities to do more work directly with boys in the Pacific to help change the gendered behaviour which leads to the abuse of women and girls. A recent evaluation of gender transformation programs (targeted at adolescent boys) around the world found strong results for this approach:

Shifts to more equitable overall gender attitudes were recorded in two thirds of programmes; two evaluations recorded a 28–31 percentage point increase in the proportion of participants with highly equitable gender attitudes, and another four recorded increases of between 10 and 25 percentage points....Overall, the evaluations of 24 programmes, working across the adolescent age range, found evidence of positive change in attitudes to violence against women or girls.⁴⁵

An example of best practice in this kind of work is Save the Children's 'Choices, Voices, Promises' program in Laos, which uses a sociological model which recognises violence against women as the result of both individual and societal factors. It works with young people aged 10 to 14. A Georgetown University evaluation of the first iteration of the program, in Nepal, showed that it has a statistically significant impact on attitudes towards gender equality.⁴⁶ Programs which work in an intensive way with boys require significant investment and can be more complicated than 'top-down' reform like legislative change or new policies for government departments. However, they represent an area rich in potential for preventing violence before it occurs, and efforts by Pacific Governments and civil society to implement programs of this nature should be supported and scaled where possible.

Recommendation 10: Australia should work with Pacific Governments to identify effective programs working with boys to shift gender norms and prevent violence and support them to be delivered at scale.

Recommendation 11: New prevention programs should adopt a socio-ecological model to address social norms that discriminate against women and girls in the household and within institutions such as workplaces, schools and justice systems.

Recommendation 12: Australia should recognise that programs which work on the prevention of violence require longer time frames for results, hence funding models should accommodate this and a results framework tailored to prevention programs developed.

Recommendation 13: Australia should strengthen intersectionality between violence against women and children programming in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. An 'ending violence against children lens' should be applied across the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of all gender-based violence, gender equality and family violence programs to ensure shared risk factors are addressed.

⁴⁴ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Development Effectiveness, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance, 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/evawg-final-report-nov-19.pdf>

⁴⁵ Rachel Marcus, *Programming to promote gender-equitable masculinities among adolescent boys*, 2018, <https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/GAGE-Masculinities-Policy-Brief-VWEB.pdf>

⁴⁶ Rebecka Lundgren, *Whose turn to do the dishes? Transforming gender attitudes and behaviours among very young adolescents in Nepal*, March 2013, *Gender and Development* 21(1):127-145,

The Role of Social Protection

New evidence is emerging which suggests that cash transfer payments can play a significant role in reducing violence against women:

A recent study reviewed 22 qualitative and quantitative studies across 13 low- and middle-income countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, representing all of the studies of cash transfers that included [intimate partner violence] as an outcome that were available as of early 2018. Of the 22 studies examined, 73% (16 studies) provided evidence that cash transfer programmes decreased [intimate partner violence, two showed mixed impacts (9%), and four showed no impact (18%).⁴⁷

These studies show that social protection payments, such as child benefits, have a pathway to impact based on increasing economic security, increasing emotional wellbeing in the household, decreasing intra-marriage conflict over money and enhancing the autonomy of women within a relationship by making them less financially dependent on men.⁴⁸ A quote from the research sums up the impact:

"In my household it was like happiness, we all got along, with my children, with my husband [...] in my house we were happy [...] because before we did not have enough money for those things [food]."⁴⁹

The inverse of this research is that an increase in poverty will be associated with increased violence against women and children in the Pacific due to the enormous economic impact of COVID-19. Save the Children has detailed the expected scale of the impact on families in a previous submission to this Committee, and holds grave fears for an increase in family violence in the Pacific when data becomes available.⁵⁰ Scaling up social protection programming in response to COVID-19 in the region should be considered a viable pathway to reducing violence against women and children.

Recommendation 13: Partner with Pacific Governments and international donors to develop a child-focused social safety net payment available across the region to assist the Pacific to recover from COVID-19, designed with best-practice principles for the reduction of violence against women and girls.

Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Save the Children has long been engaged in programmatic and advocacy activities in relation to human trafficking, modern slavery and its effects on children in the Pacific. Exploitation of children is detrimental for the overall development and wellbeing of children. With youth making up such

⁴⁷ The Prevention Collaborative, *Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence*, 2019

https://socialprotection.org/sites/default/files/publications_files/EVIDENCE-BRIEF-CASH-TRANSFERS-IPV-low-res-final-1.pdf

⁴⁸ Buller, A. M., Peterman, A., Ranganathan, M., Bleile, A., Hidrobo, M., & Heise, L. (2018). *A Mixed-Method Review of Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. The World Bank Research Observer, 33(2), pp.218–258.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lky002>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Save the Children, *Inquiry into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia's foreign affairs, defence and trade*, July 2020,

<https://www.apf.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=d7246ade-dd89-462a-909f-1dd985d87d8c&subId=685931>

a large proportion of the Pacific population, the implications of denying children their fundamental rights greatly undermines the potential of Pacific island nations. Exploitation can lead to children missing out on going to school as they are forced to work, coerced into under-age marriage and faced with social stigmatisation.

While data on the prevalence of trafficking across the Pacific is limited, some studies have been undertaken. Most recently, in March this year, a qualitative study from Walk Free identified several forms of modern slavery in eight countries across the region, including in Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.⁵¹ The report's findings included analysis on sexual exploitation of children, underpinned by cultural norms about women, girls and children. It noted that cultural norms across the Pacific allow a permissive environment for discrimination and violence against women and children. These cultural norms can lead to the abuse of some cultural practices, such as payments of bride price and informal adoption, which can leave women and children vulnerable to modern slavery.⁵²

Compliance with labour standards and human rights treaties

As Save the Children identified in our submission to DFAT's consultation on the new International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (**2020 Strategy**), Australia can play a valuable role in supporting efforts to combat modern slavery and trafficking in the Pacific.⁵³ It is important that the delivery of the 2020 Strategy is underpinned by specific attention to the vulnerability of children, including awareness of and support for relevant labour standards and human rights treaties which impact upon children. This includes:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000)
- Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (2000)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999)
- Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Work Convention (1973)

Save the Children notes that the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which establishes the first common definition of trafficking in persons, has still not been signed by Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga. They are some of only a relatively small number of countries which have yet to do so. Additionally, many states have yet to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, including Papua New Guinea and Tonga, with some having signed, but not ratified, such as Nauru and Fiji.

Case study: Child trafficking and exploitation in Solomon Islands

In 2015, Save the Children released a report titled 'Dynamics of Child Trafficking and Commercial Exploitation of Children in Solomon Islands' (**the Solomon Islands Report**).⁵⁴ The comprehensive Report, with financial support from DFAT through the Human Rights Grants Scheme, provided a better understanding on the nature of child trafficking and commercial sexual

⁵¹ Walk Free Foundation, *Murky Waters: A Qualitative Assessment of Modern Slavery in the Pacific Region*, 2020

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Save the Children, Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Consultation Paper: International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery', 1 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/b7b6bb8b-f036-4137-a4bc-bc2cb45e2598/2020-05-01-submission-to-dfat-consultation-on-trafficking-strategy.pdf.aspx>.

⁵⁴ Save the Children, 'Dynamics of Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Solomon Islands: Cross Provincial Study', January 2015. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/0c62c66f-16c1-4ba5-aa93-f13251ec786f/Child-Traffickingand-CSEC-in-Solomon-Islands.pdf.aspx>.

exploitation of children in Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands Report included quantitative data, such as household surveys, but also qualitative data, involving focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and key stakeholder interviews. The Solomon Islands Report found that children may be sold through the informal adoption processes by their families to pay off financial debts. In such cases, children are subsequently placed in forced labour environments and/or sexual exploitation.

Save the Children has used the Solomon Islands Report as a basis to inform programming activities. The European Union (EU) has funded Save the Children programs targeting the commercial and sexual exploitation of children in communities close to logging camps and small-scale fishing sites. This program concluded in 2017 and another program funded through International Organization for Migration (IOM) focused on child trafficking took place in 2018 for 8 months. Data from the Solomon Islands Report has also informed other reports on child trafficking and exploitation, including a report from the International Labour Organization titled 'Rapid Assessment of Children in Child Labour, in Honiara, Solomon Islands',⁵⁵ which found from a sample size of 172 working children that 54 were being commercially exploited, with the youngest being just 10 years old. This highlights how interlinked the relationship is between child labour and sexual exploitation.

Unfortunately, many of the recommendations from the Solomon Islands Report are still to be implemented and funding, beyond the project provided by the EU and IOM, has been limited. Outstanding priorities include the need for the Solomon Islands Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan to be revised to provide more safeguards and support in cases of domestic trafficking of children. While the *Immigration Act 2012* and *Labour Act 1996* criminalised child trafficking and provided powers to the police and immigration authorities to combat trafficking, stipulating punishment of those who exploited children under the age of 18, there continue to be gaps. For example, there are no services for adequate psychosocial and rehabilitation support to victims of trafficking, whether adults or children. Furthermore, no guidance has been provided to police about children engaged in prostitution, and they have limited understanding on how to provide support in child trafficking cases.

Additionally, there needs to be an urgent review of the *Labour Act 1996* with respect to employment of children. While data is hard to come by, Save the Children is aware of its significant prevalence, with many parents and families making their children work. Often young girls will work as domestic servants, sometimes within the extended family. In such cases, children will not attend school. There needs to be regularisation of labour market sectors prone to child labour and child trafficking, as well as a focus given to increasing sustainable livelihoods opportunities and viable educational schemes for young people.

Developing a coordinated policy response to ending violence against children and human rights issues

Policy platform to end violence against children

When designing aid programs, many donors categorise violence against children as 'risk' to be guarded against. The programs are therefore designed to avoid the creation of new incidents of abuse – but they *not* are designed to reduce abuse overall.⁵⁶ As noted in the Unseen, Unsafe Report, this requires a policy platform that includes clear commitments to achieving outcomes

⁵⁵ International Labour Organization, 'Rapid Assessment of Children in Child Labour, in Honiara, Solomon Islands', 2017. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_619014.pdf.

⁵⁶ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Child Protection Policy, 2017*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/child-protection-policy.docx>

under SDG 16.2 on ending all forms of violence against children.⁵⁷ Donors like Australia, New Zealand, and the EU must take the first steps towards becoming ‘ending violence against children champions’ and push this agenda in the region and globally. Countries like Australia have shown strong leadership in the area of gender equality and women’s rights – this provides an example of how strong political leadership and strong policy commitment can create positive outcomes for women and girls on the ground.

Standalone strategic framework and action plan on human rights and democracy

In several recent submissions,⁵⁸ Save the Children has recommended the Australian Government develop a separate standalone strategic framework and action plan on human rights and democracy, to stand alongside existing strategic documents, including the Foreign Policy White Paper.⁵⁹ Preparing such an action plan would be timely in considering the human rights implications, especially to child rights, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including violence against girls in the Pacific.

The proposed action plan should outline how human rights will be protected and promoted abroad. The strategy should set out the Australian Government’s overarching approach towards the protection and promotion of human rights and provide guidance to overseas missions on developing and implementing advocacy strategies. Save the Children also notes the value of the EU’s Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019,⁶⁰ which provides a useful example to draw upon. Notably, under the objective “Promoting, protecting and fulfilling children’s rights”, one of the actions listed for the EU is:

*Support partner countries' efforts to promote, protect and fulfil children's rights with a particular focus on strengthening child protection systems to protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.*⁶¹

Additional actions include supporting efforts to fight against the worst forms of child labour and promote the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which as noted above, remains a significant gap in many Pacific countries.

Recommendation 14: The Australian government should develop a standalone strategic framework and action plan on human rights and democracy, which outlines how it will protect and promote human rights abroad. The strategy should set out the Australian government’s overarching approach towards the protection and promotion of human rights and provide guidance to overseas missions on developing and implementing advocacy strategies.

⁵⁷ Kavitha Suthanthiraj, Save the Children Australia, Plan International, World Vision Australia, ChildFund Australia, *Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste*, 2019, [https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-\(1\).pdf.aspx](https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-(1).pdf.aspx)

⁵⁸ Save the Children, Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, ‘Inquiry into whether Australia should enact legislation comparable to the United States Magnitsky Act 2012’, 21 February 2020. Available at: [https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/ed6c9486-1242-4061-937b-604b2f99ff54/save-the-children-magnitsky-act-submission-\(february-2020\).pdf.aspx](https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/ed6c9486-1242-4061-937b-604b2f99ff54/save-the-children-magnitsky-act-submission-(february-2020).pdf.aspx). Save the Children, Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Consultation Paper: International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery’, 1 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/b7b6bb8b-f036-4137-a4bc-bc2cb45e2598/2020-05-01-submission-to-dfat-consultation-on-trafficking-strategy.pdf.aspx>. Save the Children, Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, ‘Inquiry into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia’s foreign affairs, defence and trade’, 7 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/ef08f993-649b-4061-b70c-755b5e24a261/21-july-2020-save-the-children-submission-inquiry-into-implications-of-covid-19.pdf.aspx>.

⁵⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Foreign Policy White Paper’, 2017. Available at: <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/>.

⁶⁰ Council of the European Union, ‘EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy’, 2015. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30003/web_en__actionplanhumanrights.pdf.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

There is much to be proud of in the progress made by Pacific nations in reducing violence against women and girls. Australia has been a true partner in its efforts to support legal and policy reform to create an environment where violence is unacceptable, and victims/survivors are safeguarded by the law. There remains some way to go in realising the full potential of these reforms: laws must be enforced, and policies and strategies resourced for them to impact the lives of women and girls.

The ending violence against women pillar of Pacific Women is another area of success. It demonstrates how to successfully partner with local organisations to deliver services which reach women and girls who need them and has created models which can be replicated across the region.

The next logical step for the prevention of violence in the Pacific is investment in prevention at the community level, looking beyond the judicial and government actors to the everyday experience of Pacific islanders. Bringing a focus to the community level through a socio-ecological approach fits with Australia's ambition to step up in the region, and to engage with our neighbours as equals. Australia has its own challenges when it comes to violence against women and girls – and we have our own work to do when it comes to dealing with the attitudes which generate it. In that way, the Pacific and Australia have a shared challenge: can we teach our boys to have attitudes towards women which do not involve violence and inequality?

Save the Children has seen the transformative impact that prevention programs can have – and now there is international research which confirms that transformation of attitudes is possible, and its link to a reduction in violence. We are calling on the Australian Government to scale up these kinds of programs by working with our Pacific partners to find a model which works for them. Culture is never fixed or static: pre-colonisation, missionary activity and the massive changes brought on by modernity attitudes towards women looked entirely different in the Pacific.⁶² That means these attitudes can change again – Australia should support the efforts of women and NGOs in the Pacific who are leading that change.

Every man who beats a woman was once a child. Every boy learnt that behaviour somewhere. Now that the Pacific has built institutions for addressing violence, it is right to turn our efforts to the transformation of attitudes and beliefs which will help prevent it.

⁶² Anouk Ride, *What's culture got to do with it? Causes of intimate partner violence*, Dev Policy Blog, 13 April 2016, <https://devpolicy.org/whats-culture-got-causes-intimate-partner-violence-20160413/>