


# **Inquiry into the Human Rights of Women and Girls in the Pacific**

## **World Vision Australia's submission**

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## Introduction

World Vision Australia welcomes the initiative by Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, to inquire into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific and to review how Australia can enhance their opportunities in the context of the Pacific Step-Up.

World Vision works in 99 countries around the world, including the Pacific Island Countries of the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu which form the basis of this submission. The child-focused organisation was established in 1950 to champion the dignity of children orphaned in Korea. We are a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision is committed to the poor because we are Christian. We work with people of all cultures, faiths and genders to achieve transformation. We do this through relief and development, policy and advocacy, collaboration and education about poverty, with an emphasis on personal growth, social justice and spiritual values. The World Vision International Board endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as guiding principles for our work. Accordingly, World Vision recognises children, as partners, participants and key stakeholders in international development. We believe that children should be at the centre of development and that all programmes should integrate gender equality and disability inclusiveness.

World Vision understands gender inequality is a source of injustice and poverty and one of the most powerful drivers of vulnerability for children in every context. We recognise the imperative to advance gender equality as a critical element in our vision of 'life in all its fullness for every child' and a prerequisite for the sustained well-being and rights of girls and boys within their families and communities. Our organisation works to advance gender equality and reduce gender inequalities in the family unit, working with women and men as parents and caregivers, and at the community and societal level in order to support peaceful, reconciled and gender equal families, communities and societies.

## Recommendations

World Vision Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

<b>Refocus the Pacific Step-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pivot the Pacific Step-Up to focus more on transformational community development, women's empowerment, child protection and climate resilience, through the development and implementation of a holistic Pacific Strategy in consultation with Pacific communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Recognise the differences between girls and women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a child rights unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to mainstream a focus on boys and girls in the design and delivery of Australian aid, including the Pacific Step-Up.</li> </ul>
<b>End violence against women and girls in the Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase support to primary prevention programs in the Pacific region that work with faith leaders to change attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls.</li> <li>Share insights and lessons learned from recent efforts to address domestic violence and child sexual abuse in Australia to help Pacific governments respond to similar challenges.</li> <li>Invest \$55 million in aid funding over three years in programs aimed at ending violence against children in the Pacific.</li> <li>Develop an 'ending violence against children' policy marker (similar to the gender equality marker) to enable the tracking and reporting of expenditure on initiatives aimed at ending violence against children.</li> </ul>
<b>Empower women and girls with a disability in the Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to maintain a focus on disability inclusion through the aid program and strengthen the implementation of current disability inclusion policies.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the reproductive rights of women and girls in the Pacific through the aid program and by influencing Pacific governments through diplomatic channels.</li> <li>• Partner with Pacific Island Governments to provide free sanitation products to vulnerable women and girls including those with disabilities and assist women to produce these products.</li> </ul>
<b>Support women's economic empowerment in the Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply a gender inclusion lens in all aid for trade and economic development programming in the Pacific to remove barriers to and increase opportunities for women's economic empowerment.</li> </ul>
<b>Support women's participation and representation in the Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all new aid investment plans aimed at policy reform and good governance in the Pacific region promote women and children's participation and representation.</li> </ul>
<b>Empower women and children to build a climate safe Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematically include women and children in climate change mitigation and adaptation decision making and management of disaster risk. Women and children's exclusion from climate related decision-making compounds inequality and increase vulnerability.</li> <li>• Increases investment in programs that build the resilience of women and children to climate change and disaster risk, in line with DFAT's Climate Change Action Strategy, recognising their increased vulnerability to compounding shocks and disasters in the aftermath of COVID-19.</li> </ul>
<b>Reduce the impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls in the Pacific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute \$165.8 million to the global effort to defeating COVID-19 through the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan.</li> <li>• Maintain a Humanitarian Corridor for the Pacific to ensure the continuity of essential medical and food supplies to the region during this phase of disruptions from COVID-19.</li> <li>• Support and subsidise the delivery of a COVID-19 vaccine, once developed, across the Pacific region and provide appropriate technical and medical support, ensuring the vaccine goes to the most vulnerable first.</li> </ul>

## Background - Key Issues

The Governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and are partners in the global agenda 2030 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These international agreements enshrine the inalienable rights of women and girls and the commitment of state parties to ensure these rights are protected, always upheld and realised. The inclusion of a specific target (SDG 16.2) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end all forms of violence against children gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. However, 41 years since the establishment of CEDAW, 31 years of the CRC, and 14 years of the CRPD have shown slow progress, and many challenges for women and girls remain. In its latest review of the Beijing+25, the Pacific Community cites "limited investment in gender mainstreaming and women's human rights" and notes the "gap between stated and demonstrated political will of leaders."<sup>1</sup>

There are many challenges to the realisation of human rights for women and girls in the Pacific. They include but are not limited to widespread and normalised violence in the home, rape by husbands and strangers, early marriage and the associated health challenges, trafficking, accusations of and death for 'sorcery', sexual harassment, poverty and limited representation in the formal business sector and politics. The violations of

<sup>1</sup> BEIJING+25: A summary of the review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island countries and territories, Social Development Programme: Pacific Community, 2020, p2.

women's and girls' rights in the Pacific are situated in traditional, customary and religious beliefs and norms that reinforce male dominance and often underpin justifications of violence against women. The traditional mores are normalised by women and men alike - for example, 88% of men and women in a survey conducted by World Vision Vanuatu (2016) said husbands are justified in beating their wives under some circumstances. However, a 2020 report by the Pacific Community contends that women and girls, including those with disabilities, in the Pacific Islands are gaining voice to champion their own causes.

World Vision welcomes the increased focus on the challenges facing Pacific communities, and especially women and girls, through the Australian Government's Pacific Step-Up. We also welcome initiatives to strengthen the socio-economic and legal systems of our Pacific neighbours through investing in women's leadership and economic empowerment programs and interventions to end violence against women and girls. This includes the investment of \$320 million over a period of 10 years to the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women)<sup>2</sup>, the Gender Equality Fund amounting to \$55 million in 2019-20<sup>3</sup> and the recently announced Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's Covid-19 Development Response.<sup>4</sup>

This inquiry is timely given the findings of the evaluation of the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) on Australia's 10-year support to ending violence against women and girls in the Pacific. The report, which was released in October 2019, shows that **Australia has much to be "proud of"** and that **there has "been a significant increase in funding and support for a diverse range of programs to support women's access to justice, services and—perhaps most importantly—to prevent violence from occurring in the first place."**<sup>5</sup>

This submission discusses the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific based on World Vision's experience working in the **Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu**. It draws on the child focused mission of WVA and the thematic areas of our programming in the Pacific, particularly **ending Violence Against Children (eVAC)**, **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)** and **Gender Based Violence (GBV)**, with **Disability inclusion** and **Climate change** as cross cutting themes. We also consider the implications of the unexpected yet potentially devastating and still to be fully determined **impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic** on the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

## 1. The Pacific Step-Up and women and girls

World Vision welcomes the Australian Government's renewed focus on the development and prosperity of our Pacific neighbours through the Pacific Step-Up. However, the focus of the Pacific Step-Up to date has been primarily on financing economic infrastructure and strengthening defence ties, instead of addressing the pressing social challenges facing women and girls in the region. World Vision recommends that the Government's Pacific Step-Up integrates a stronger focus on the issues raised in this submission – women's empowerment, child protection, social transformation, climate resilience and inclusive community development. It is recommended that a Pacific Aid Strategy (2020- 2030) be developed to provide a strategic, coherent framework to guide Australian aid investments in the region, developed in partnership with key regional development partners including Pacific governments and communities. The empowerment of women and girls should be a central pillar of this new strategy.

### **Recommendation:**

- *That the Australian Government pivot the Pacific Step-Up to focus more on transformational community development, women's empowerment, child protection and climate resilience, articulated through a cohesive and holistic Pacific Strategy developed in consultation with Pacific communities.*

<sup>2</sup> Pacific Women Shaping Development, Papua New Guinea Country Plan Summary, January 2019

<sup>3</sup> DFAT, Gender and empowering women and girls

<sup>4</sup> Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response, DFAT, May 2020

<sup>5</sup> Ending violence against women and girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance October 2019, Office of Development Effectiveness, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/evawg-final-report-nov-19.pdf>

## 2. Women and girls as different actors in Pacific development

World Vision welcomes the Government's ambitious gender equality targets for the aid program, which have been critical in driving progress and change for women around the world. However, the Government must commit to practical action in the strategy which says 'In implementing this strategy, we will take practical action, including to: *-recognise that women are not a homogeneous group, paying particular attention to girls, those with disabilities, indigenous women and disadvantaged women*'<sup>6</sup>

Violence against women and girls has devastating short-term effects whose impacts can be felt across generations. World Vision is concerned by the intergenerational transmission of violence against women and the spectrum of consequences for child wellbeing. Evidence indicates that women's exposure to intimate partner violence leads to poor, nutritional, education and longer-term development outcomes for their children.<sup>7</sup> Research in Vanuatu found that violence against mothers 'impacts on children's emotional well-being and schooling' and predisposes them 'to the risk of violence in their intimate relationships as adults', as victims for girls, and as perpetrators for boys. Children who experience violence have lower educational attainment and face social exclusion which negatively impacts the development of human capital. UNICEF quantifies the total costs of violence against children in the Asia-Pacific region at US\$160 billion or 2% of regional GDP<sup>8</sup>, and yet only around 0.1% of Australian Aid goes toward the cause.<sup>9</sup>

There is an opportunity to better address the specific challenges, needs and opportunities of girls across the aid program by viewing them as development actors in their own right. A dedicated strategy, performance targets, financial resources and political leadership have been critical for making women's empowerment a genuinely cross-cutting development issue for Australia's aid investments in the Pacific. The same levers should now be used to champion the well-being and rights of children, particularly girls. It is recommended that the Government apply a child rights lens across Australian aid. New aid investment plans should mainstream the rights and needs of children across the aid program and mandate child impact assessments to be conducted for all development activities to determine their likely impact on children, both girls and boys. World Vision recommends this be driven by a new child rights unit set up in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to mainstream a focus on children so that they are intentionally considered in the design and implementation of Australian aid, including the Pacific Step-Up.

The Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children (2020) affirms World Vision's proposal for a Child Rights Unit by establishing the need for dedicated resources to oversee children's rights. The report contends that to end violence against children and to achieve the SDG target 16.2, *"there should be clear leadership and accountability"*<sup>10</sup> in efforts to end violence against children and *"Governments must ensure that an appropriately resourced agency is explicitly mandated to coordinate multisectoral action to end violence against children"*.<sup>11</sup> Recognising that the most effective methods to end violence against children and engender peaceful communities are not yet embedded across thematic areas, the Global Status report calls for the highest leadership possible to champion the change; *Governments are encouraged to clearly mandate ministerial line responsibility for the delivery of those ... strategies – norms and values, parent and caregiver support, safe environments and income and economic strengthening – which may not be clearly aligned with existing sectoral roles and responsibilities.*

### Recommendation:

- That the Australian Government establish a child rights unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to mainstream a focus on boys and girls in the design and delivery of Australian aid, including the Pacific Step-Up.

<sup>6</sup> DFAT, *Gender and empowering women and girls* p25

<sup>7</sup> *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence*, Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies

<sup>8</sup> *Economic cost of violence against children*, UN

<sup>9</sup> *Unseen, Unsafe, the underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste*, p4

<sup>10</sup> *Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children*, WHO, 2020, p xiii

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p xiii

### 3. Violence against women and girls in the Pacific

The Pacific region holds some of the highest reported levels of violence against women and girls in the world with intimate partners and family members as the primary perpetrators. Women and girls with disabilities are especially at risk of violence with the combination of their disabilities and inferior social status entrenching their vulnerability. Survivors do not often pursue legal channels, and some are reluctant to leave abusive partners for social, emotional and financial reasons.<sup>12</sup>

The ODE evaluation commends Australia for making progress in advancing gender equality. However, the severity and scope of the abuse of the rights of women and girls in the Pacific to-date, shows the need to do more. Formal services for survivors of violence are limited and often unreliable in Pacific countries, and they are virtually non-existent in rural areas. Some churches run safe houses for women and children. Faith and community leaders often serve as trusted informal service providers, especially in contexts with limited or non-existent formal services for survivors of gender-based violence, yet they often hold and reinforce harmful beliefs focusing on community mediation, forgiveness or compensation rather than prioritising women's rights and safety and facilitating referrals for survivors through the legal system. Such practices deny women access to services, support and long-term safety. Furthermore, lack of rehabilitative support in prisons means perpetrators return to communities even more likely to reoffend.

Issue	Vanuatu	Solomon Islands	PNG
Number of women who reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. <sup>13</sup>	60%	64%	68%
Women who disclosed experience of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in the last 12 months <sup>14</sup>	44%	42%	33 %
Number of women reporting incidents of violence to customary leaders <sup>15</sup>	24%	-	39%
Women reporting incidents of violence to religious leaders <sup>16</sup>	23%	-	36.4%

At least 70 to 87 % children in the Pacific experience violence in the home.<sup>17</sup> The *Unseen, Unsafe* report (2019) published by World Vision Australia in partnership with other child focused organisations Australia shows that, although violence against women is interlinked with that of girls, it is not enough to simply assume that programs aimed at reducing violence against women automatically address the risks of violence for girls. The issues of violence against women and violence against girls need to be addressed as priorities each, in their own right, through complementary but targeted interventions. For an example of the types of behaviour change programming that have proven effective, see the Channels of Hope case study on page 8 of this submission.

<sup>12</sup> Bashed Up, family violence in Papua New Guinea, Human Rights Watch, 2015

<sup>13</sup> <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/violence-against-women-regional-snapshot-2019-knowvawdata>. The data reflects the most recent (if available national) data collected with either the WHO methodology, the DHS-DV module, or the UNECE VAW module, from publicly available survey reports, updated in May 2019. *mate Partner Violence, 2000-2016, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Region*. Bangkok.

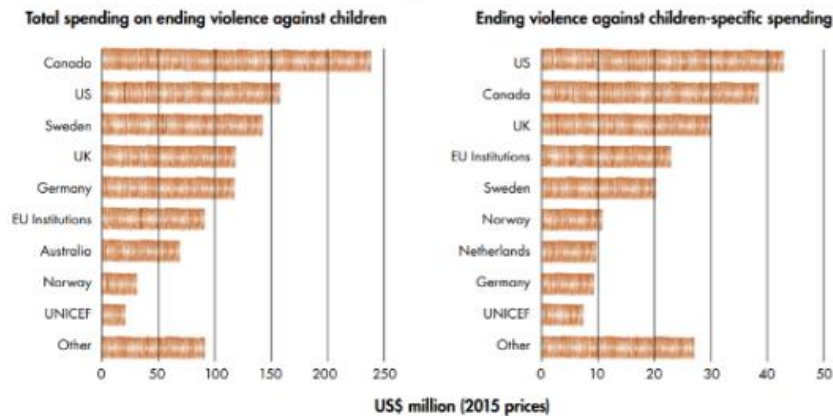
<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> UN Women: 2016

<sup>16</sup> UN Women: 2016

<sup>17</sup> *Unseen, Unsafe: The underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste*, World Vision et al. 2019

FIGURE 7: Largest 10 donors of ODA to end violence against children, 2015



Source: Development Initiatives, based on OECD Development Assistance Committee data

(Counting Pennies p.23)

Ending violence against children (eVAC) is seriously underfunded. It made up “only AUS\$1.1 million or 0.1% of Australian ODA in 2017.”<sup>18</sup> In 2015, globally US\$238 million (0.1% of the total gross ODA) was spent on projects that directly addressed ending violence against children with Canada in the lead followed by the United States of America and Sweden.<sup>19</sup>

However, to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, women and girls must be clearly recognised as ‘rights holders’, ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘women’s rights and empowerment must remain central’.<sup>1</sup> Patriarchal systems of male dominance across the Pacific have led to deeply rooted subordination of women and girls compared to men and boys. World Vision situates women and girls’ rights and empowerment at the heart of our work to advance gender equality. At the same time, we believe it is important that the Australian aid program prioritises violence against children in general as a stand-alone violation of the rights of the girl child.<sup>20</sup> As it addresses gender equality issues, the aid program must equally rise to the protection of boys, an unknown number of whom suffer child sexual abuse in silence because the subject is taboo. While programs to empower the girl child are critical, it is important to ensure that the protection needs of non-binary/trans gender children are protected. The aid program should recognise children as a group deserving separate consideration, standalone trackable wellbeing markers and more specific investment because of their unique experiences and vulnerability as children. It is important to note that children experience different life stages that have different needs. The complex progressive development and life stages of children from infancy through adolescence to adulthood illustrated by Sawyer et al., highlight why World Vision believes there should be a specialised resource to protect and integrate the rights of children into the aid program.

<sup>18</sup> Unseen, unsafe: the Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, p4

<sup>19</sup> Counting Pennies: A review of official development assistance to end violence against children

<sup>20</sup> Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, World Vision et al, 2019



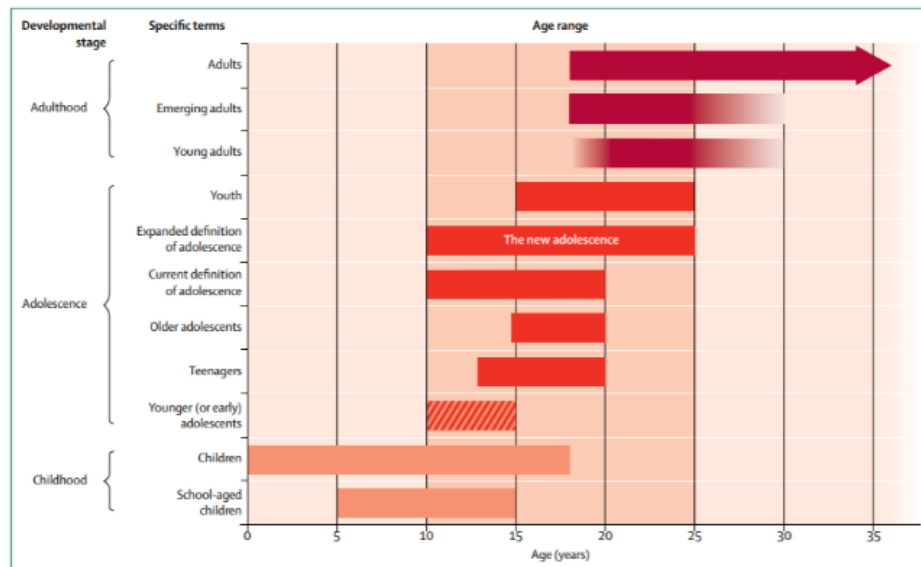


Figure 1: Commonly used age definitions of specific terms of relevance for adolescence that span or overlap with the developmental periods of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Colour shading highlights variation in the lower and upper age limits of the term. Stripes denote a term that sits within more than one developmental stage.

The Age of Adolescence: Susan Sawyer et al. [Lancet](#)

Religion is a salient identity in communities across the Pacific region. In most Pacific Island Countries, over 90% of the population is Christian, with religion an important part of people's everyday life. Except for Fiji, Christian adherence in Pacific nations ranges from 79% in Nauru to 99.2% in Papua New Guinea and 99.8% in Tokelau.<sup>21</sup> In the Pacific context, faith leaders are among the most influential, trusted and accessible members of communities. According to Research for Development Impact Network, *"there is increasing recognition among development and humanitarian agencies, practitioners and scholars that the Church is a significant civil society player and has the potential to be an influential voice, challenging adverse social and cultural norms and promoting human rights"*.<sup>22</sup> DFAT's ODE evaluation described faith-based engagement to address violence against women and girls as 'a new field globally', yet a form of engagement that is 'promising and appropriate' for countries where 'religious beliefs are integral to women's and men's values, identity and social norms'.<sup>23</sup> World Vision is encouraged by Australia's investment in faith-based communities and sees significant opportunities to better leverage faith leaders to change attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls to ensure they are respected and protected.

In the Pacific, World Vision has six years of learning, adaptation and increasing innovation using our faith-based Channels of Hope model. It is the primary methodology we use to address gender inequality and gender-based violence by engaging faith communities and faith and customary leaders to become champions of change within their communities. Our past Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention programming identified gaps in engaging men, working with children and youth in age-appropriate prevention programming and in skills building for faith leaders and their spouses who often serve as trusted informal service providers. As a result, World Vision has been trialling new primary prevention interventions in the Pacific, supported in part through DFAT's Gender Action Platform. Our programmes challenge unhealthy norms and practices with children and adolescents, address behaviour change with male perpetrators of violence, engage community and faith leaders about positive masculinities, increase survivor's security and ensure perpetrators take responsibility for violence.

<sup>21</sup> Research for Development Impact Network, *How to Collaborate with Pacific Churches for Development* research' Guidance, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> How to collaborate with Pacific Churches for development research, Research for Development Impact Network, p 8

<sup>23</sup> Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), 'Ending violence against women and girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, 2019, pp. 58-9.



Harmful masculinities and femininities are cemented early in life, as children witness violence between men and women, often between their own father and mother and can lead to violent perpetration in adolescents' early relationships.<sup>24</sup> Research from Asia and the Pacific shows that 50% of men who had ever raped a woman or girl did so for the first time when they were still teenagers.<sup>25</sup> The Channels of Hope model can easily be adapted and scaled up with churches throughout the strong self-identifying Christian Pacific Island Countries.

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**Case study:** Gudfala Laef (Bislama for "good life") is an innovative Sunday School curriculum for boys and girls (5-12) designed to instil positive gender norms and healthy gender relationships in Vanuatu. A midterm evaluation shows that in its pilot stage, messages are being relayed to children who are reiterating the messages to their parents. This has been an unintended outcome of the project. Anecdotal evidence suggests that boys are showing more positive attitudes toward girls. The curriculum appears to be helping reduce bullying behaviour and encouraging more socially inclusive behaviour. The Channels of Hope Sunday School programme has been well received by teachers, parents and religious leaders and it is showing highly positive results in instilling gender positive messaging in children at an early age.

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The Channels of Hope model is also being used in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu World Vision to engage an age group (12-18 years) that will be starting romantic relationships; through age-appropriate group education about healthy relationships, violence, consent, online safety. The programme works through student leaders and out-of-school church youth leaders and congregational youth groups. Youth have been playing a role in directing the programs, with topics developed through participatory consultation with female and male youth. In Papua New Guinea we work through existing youth groups and peer educators. In Vanuatu, staff and trained youth facilitators run the program together, leveraging peer-to-peer learning. Program delivery is tailored to the needs of each participating group. For instance, after-school sessions are run for students; during work hours for unemployed youth while sports federations' sessions are integrated into existing training schedules.

The World Vision's Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) program in Vanuatu utilises small group therapy for perpetrators, led by trained faith leaders and World Vision staff to assist men to reduce and cease family and domestic violence. The program is run in close coordination with the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) who support spouses/partners and the children of men involved in the program to ensure they are safe. Faith leaders and their spouses, staff and other partners are first trained through a Counselling Skills Course to increase understanding of family violence and improve their ability to help both survivors and perpetrators of violence in their congregations and communities. After four pilots of the MBC program, findings from a 2019 precursory impact study (small sample size) indicate it is a promising practice, including potential for sustainability of change. All participants and their spouses and other family members identified significant changes in the participant's attitudes and behaviour. These included greater engagement in housework and family life, less anger, more emotional connection with wife and family, and changed understandings about the relationship between men and women.

Implementing the MBC program has highlighted the need to create a formal space for survivors and victims to have their voices heard and their suffering acknowledged and validated. There is also a clear desire from MBC participants to have an opportunity to make a formal apology to their victims, families, communities. As working with faith-based communities to address violence against women and girls is a relatively new field globally, Australia, as a donor providing funding to many organisations engaging in faith-based programs, is well placed to bring together shared learning on faith-based approaches.

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<sup>24</sup> Fulu et al., 2013.

<sup>25</sup> The Asia Foundation, 2016, p.67

#### **Recommendations:**

- *That the Australian Government increases support to primary prevention programs in the Pacific region that work with faith leaders to change attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls.*
- *That the Australian Government share insights and lessons learned from recent efforts to address domestic violence and child sexual abuse in Australia to help Pacific governments respond to similar challenges.*
- *That the Australian Government invest \$55 million in aid funding over three years in programs aimed at ending violence against children in the Pacific.*
- *That the Australian Government develop an 'ending violence against children' policy marker (similar to the gender equality marker) to enable the tracking and reporting of expenditure on initiatives aimed at ending violence against children.*

#### **4. Women and girls with a disability in the Pacific**

In the Pacific, as is the case worldwide, **women and girls with disabilities face triple discrimination**; by being female, having a disability, and being amongst the poorest of the poor. Women and girls with disabilities are often subjected to discrimination in accessing education, employment, family life, health care, water and sanitation services and are often at a greater risk of violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation and poverty. In many instances, children with disabilities, especially girls, are not sent to school and are hidden away from the community.

Most Pacific Island Countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), which recognises that women and girls with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination. The CRPD contains a range of Articles which require State parties to ensure equality between men and women with disabilities and to address the specific needs and rights of women with disabilities (Article 6). This includes protection from violence and abuse (Article 16) and access to healthcare (Article 25). Pacific Island Countries also jointly adopted the 2016-2025 Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and identified empowering persons with disabilities as a key issue requiring collective attention.

However, women with disabilities continue to be excluded in regional and national initiatives, policy, programs and services. **Addressing this issue and tackling discrimination is not simply about adding disability and gender together.** Rather unique forms of discrimination require holistic responses from lawmakers and policymakers alike. In Vanuatu, World Vision is implementing the 'Laetem Dak Kona: Gender-Equitable and Disability-Accessible WASH' project under the Water for Women fund. Gender-equity and social inclusion are not cross-cutting themes in this project – they are the focus. People with disabilities, especially women, are project staff, lead advocates in communities, and core implementing partners. Their aim is to cast "light into dark corners" and lead similar groups to raise their own expectations, voice, and agency to remove barriers to accessing water, hygiene and sanitation services. A mini census undertaken through the project which covered more than 54,000 people in two provinces showed specific challenges faced by women with disabilities, such as access to carers, menstrual hygiene and incontinence.

#### **Recommendations**

- *That the Australian Government continue to maintain a focus on disability inclusion through the aid program and strengthen the implementation of current disability inclusion policies.*
- *That the Australian Government promote the reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including those with disabilities, in the Pacific through the aid program and by influencing Pacific governments through diplomatic channels.*
- *That the Australian Government partner with Pacific Island Governments to provide free sanitation products to vulnerable women and girls including those with disabilities and assist women to produce these products.*

## 5. Women's economic empowerment in the Pacific

Women's economic empowerment is central to the realisation of gender equality. All too often women succumb to abusive relationships for fear of losing the source of their food and shelter. It is also true that women participate alongside men in local, national and international markets – as producers, consumers, entrepreneurs and workers. They make a huge contribution to Pacific economies, through formal, informal, subsistence and domestic labour and activities. However, entrenched gender inequalities and harmful gender norms in numerous economies limit the ability of women to be recognised and benefit as economic actors compared to men. Research shows that when women are stable financial contributors to a household, investments in health and education for children increase and household poverty decreases.<sup>26</sup>

For example, a World Bank study found that when women in Papua New Guinea are empowered to make decisions in the sale of cocoa and coffee, their households ultimately benefit.<sup>27</sup> In a best case regional scenario, the Asia Pacific could add \$4.5 trillion to annual GDP in 2025, or 12% above business as usual with women's increased participation in the economy.<sup>28</sup> Some of the enablers of this growth noted are: women's labour-force participation rate; the number of paid hours women work (part-time versus full-time mix of jobs); and women's productivity relative to men's by adding more women to higher-productivity sectors.<sup>29</sup> In Papua New Guinea, although labour participation rates are relatively even<sup>30</sup>, more women are engaged in subsistence farming than men.<sup>31</sup> In Solomon Islands, the annual turnover at the Honiara Central Market is between USD10–16 million, with women responsible for about 90% of this marketing activity as both bulk buyers and retailers.<sup>32</sup>

World Vision is committed to advancing gender equality and economically empowering women through an intentional approach across our livelihoods programs. Our programs adopt a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment, recognising the importance of working across interrelated empowerment domains. This includes women's economic advancement, access to opportunities and resources, and agency to make and act on economic decisions. To promote inclusive markets, World Vision Australia adopts a hybrid push-pull approach, which seeks to build the productive capacity of small-scale producers, while working to strengthen market systems. World Vision also continues to make a business case for gender equality by encouraging the private sector to adopt inclusive business models which engage poor women and men as producers, employees and consumers.<sup>33</sup> Despite growing global attention to issues of gender equality, there are still challenges with the uptake of gender inclusive practices. Substantive gender mainstreaming is often only done for programs that have gender equality identified as a core objective. However, all programs need to work towards this. Programs must be designed intentionally to increase economic growth, reduce poverty and empower women, with careful consideration of trade-offs. The RISE model has promoted a 'household approach' and equitable gender relations between men and women, working together on livelihoods and sharing the benefits.<sup>34</sup> This involves promoting joint decision making in relation to income generation activities, gender equitable distribution of labour, and the valuing of women's work in the household. In 2018-2019, 342 people (257 women and 85 men) were trained in RISE. On noticing that infants were a distraction to their mothers' participation during training, World Vision established Child friendly spaces led by locals empowered, trained and paid as casual workers. World Vision purchased mats for the children to sit and play on, games and toys creating an engaging and safe space for children during training.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Foundation, *A Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2013, Available at: [http://www.womeneconroadmap.org/sites/default/files/WEE\\_Roadmap\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.womeneconroadmap.org/sites/default/files/WEE_Roadmap_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/113871538723729835/pdf/1305274102018152610PNGreport.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> According to McKinsey (2018)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Asian Development Bank (2016) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste.

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/181270/gender-statistics-pacific-tim.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments (2012) Papua New Guinea.

xiv World Bank

<sup>32</sup> International Finance Corporation in Partnership with AusAID (2010). Economic Opportunities for Women in the Pacific, p1.

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/aid-trade-and-mdgs/wva--aid-for-inclusive-trade-report.pdf?sfvrsn=7033d03c\\_4](https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/aid-trade-and-mdgs/wva--aid-for-inclusive-trade-report.pdf?sfvrsn=7033d03c_4)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/ruralwomen/ifad-good-practice.html>

## Recommendations

- *That the Australian Government apply a gender inclusion lens in all aid for trade and economic development programming in the Pacific to remove barriers to, and increase opportunities for women's economic empowerment.*

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### Case study: Resilient & Inclusive Social Enterprises (RISE)

World Vision has piloted and tested the Resilient & Inclusive Social Enterprises (RISE) programming model in partnership with The Difference incubator (TDi) designed to work with a range of social enterprises as they grow and scale across eight programmes in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste. In Vanuatu, RISE helped a World Vision beneficiary to develop confidence and skills to be able to start up her business. For Caroline, a 32-year-old mother of three from Luganville, Vanuatu's second largest town, the importance of having access to savings and being able to provide for her family is personal. As a child Caroline was forced to leave school after she completed primary school because her family could not afford high-school fees.

From the knowledge gained in RISE Business Training and the childhood experience working in her father's store, Caroline encouraged her father to expand their Honey Business. She drew a business plan and purchased materials to grow and scale her business. honey business has grown significantly and she often produces more than 100 bottles of honey in a week earning more than \$5000 AUD from her business. To date, Caroline has formed strong partnerships with market actors in Luganville including two of the largest supermarkets. She also works with an agent in Port Vila (Vanuatu's capital city) whom she sends her product to by Air or shipment transportation. The business has not been without its challenges, with Caroline's business impacted by two crises within a month. As Vanuatu went into a State of Emergency in March which saw restrictions on domestic travel, Caroline was unable to send her products to her agent in Port Vila. Then on April 6, a disaster of a different kind struck Caroline's business when Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Harold made landfall on Santo Island, where she lives. The damage was extensive throughout the island with more than 50% of all dwellings in Luganville estimated to be destroyed. Caroline's Bee Shed and other infrastructure were not immune from the damage. While Caroline and her business are still recovering from the dual crisis', she is passionate about more women getting into business *"Women have to stop underestimating themselves and grab on to opportunities that can develop their skills when they are available,"* she said.

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## 6. Women and girls' participation and representation in the Pacific

Women are consistently underrepresented in decision-making across all levels across all Pacific countries. For example, since independence in 1975 only 7 women have been elected into the 111-member Papua New Guinea parliament. According to Pacific Women in Politics, there are no current women MPs in PNG. The Solomon Islands currently has 3 women in a 50-member parliament.<sup>35</sup> These numbers mean that women and girls are seriously underrepresented at the highest level of decision making. Only five donors, excluding Australia, spend more than 1% of their ODA on strengthening political participation of girls and young women.<sup>36</sup> Between 2014 and 2016, more than two-thirds (68%) of all global funding for the political participation of girls and young women come from Sweden, the UK, Norway, the EU institutions, and Canada.

The CRC and its general comments outline developed countries' responsibilities in international development and affirm the child's right to participate in societal activities, to be heard and taken seriously according to their evolving capacity. World Vision therefore, encourages the Government of Australia to ensure that the aid program intentionally seeks out, is informed by and reports on children's opinions. We call on the Government of Australia, also party to the egalitarian human rights treaties ratified by the Pacific Governments to exercise leadership by supporting its neighbours to meet their human rights obligations to women and children. The chart below shows that all countries featured in this submission are up to date with their voluntary reports on the SDGs. Their reporting on the human rights of vulnerable populations are not as diligent. Papua New Guinea lags in submitting monitoring reports on the most vulnerable groups such as children (CRC), women (CEDAW) and people with disabilities (CRPD).

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.pacwip.org/country-profiles/papua-new-guinea/>

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.plan.de/fileadmin/website/05\\_Ueber\\_uns/Maedchenberichte/GNO\\_Girls\\_Report\\_2018.pdf#Girls-Report-2018-\(English\)](https://www.plan.de/fileadmin/website/05_Ueber_uns/Maedchenberichte/GNO_Girls_Report_2018.pdf#Girls-Report-2018-(English)) p18 -19

Country	Papua New Guinea	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Convention on the Rights of the Child	2002	2016	2016
Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women	2009	2017	2018
Universal Periodic Review	2016	2016	2019
Voluntary National Report	2020	2020	2019
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	-	-	2015

World Vision calls on Australia to use diplomacy to highlight the intersection between honouring treaty obligations and good governance. As a state party to the human rights treaties also signed by the Pacific Governments, the Australian Government should use the international standards to model the aid program and trade agreements, calling out gaps and supporting its neighbours to action the intention of the conventions and realise child rights for all Pacific girls and boys and indeed the human rights of all in the Pacific. In the 2019 Concluding Observations on Australia the Committee on the Rights of the Child advised,

*International cooperation:*

16. *The Committee recommends that the State party adopt a child rights-based approach in respect of its trade agreements and development aid policy and programmes, with the rights of children and their engagement included in programme design, delivery and evaluation.*<sup>37</sup>

#### **Recommendations**

- That the Australian Government ensure all new aid investment plans aimed at policy reform and good governance in the Pacific region promote women's and children's participation and representation.

### **7. Women and girls and climate change impacts in the Pacific**

The world's climate is changing at a speed and on a scale that has grave implications for the rights of women and girls in the Pacific. The Pacific is already the most disaster-prone region in the world. As a child-focused organisation, World Vision is concerned that climate change threatens the human rights, health and wellbeing of current and future generations of children. According to UNICEF the greatest killers of children — malnutrition, diarrheal disease and malaria — will be exacerbated by climate change.<sup>38</sup>

Climate change is already a reality for the poor communities with whom World Vision works. The 2015-16 El Nino event resulted in significant food security issues in Papua New Guinea and other Pacific Island countries. In Papua New Guinea the post drought assessment report<sup>39</sup> identified over 480,000 people facing critical food shortages. The report also found malnutrition in boys, girls and children under 5 as well as high incidences of negative coping mechanism, including removing children from school to work, sending children away to eat and abandoning older children or adopted children<sup>40</sup>.

In the Pacific region, climate change is creating more intense and severe floods, droughts, cyclones, along with sea-level rise, coastal erosion, water salinisation, coral bleaching and ocean warming, reduced fish stocks and crop yields. The result is failed harvests, disappearing islands, destroyed homes, homelessness and forced migration, water scarcity, and deepening health crises, which are undermining Pacific island peoples' rights to life, security, food, water, health, shelter, and culture. In this region, it is the poorest communities who tend to be most affected, and of these, women and girls are at particular risk.

#### *Women and climate change*

<sup>37</sup> OHCHR, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Australia, p4

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF UK, (2008) "Climate Change: Our Climate, Our Children, Our Responsibility - The Implications of Climate Change for the World's Children", London, UNICEF UK, 36 pp.

<sup>39</sup>

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/png\\_el\\_nino\\_post\\_drought\\_assessment\\_sep\\_2016\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/png_el_nino_post_drought_assessment_sep_2016_final_report.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

Women and their rights are particularly vulnerable to climate change for a range of reasons, including unequal access to resources and power, restricted rights and ability to move freely and without fear, and limited ability to influence the ways their communities are managed.<sup>41</sup> The Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. Climate change is exacerbating disasters in the Pacific<sup>42</sup> and during times of disaster, violence against women increases.<sup>43</sup> This is particularly true for women or girls displaced or living in temporary accommodation, where there is a far greater risk of rape and physical violence. Women also often face increased insecurity, with women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as health checks, access to sanitary items and contraception, often being overlooked.<sup>44</sup>

For women farmers, disasters and climate variations mean that women face not only water shortages and loss of land to farm, but a loss of the income they rely on to survive. And where women are also responsible for water collection, water shortages disproportionately put added pressure on women and girls. Many are forced to travel longer and farther to access clean water, taking them away from school and work.<sup>45</sup>

However, **women's distinct roles also provide skills and knowledge which, if utilised effectively, can be a key resource for positive adaptation and response.** Women are not victims, and their contributions will be fundamental to effectively adapting to the effects of climate change and building resilience to disasters.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Children and climate change*

Children are disproportionately impacted by climate change due to their unique metabolism, physiology and developmental needs. **The negative impacts of climate change threaten the rights of children to health, life, food, water and sanitation, education, housing, culture, and development, among others.**<sup>47</sup> **Climate change heightens existing social and economic inequalities, intensifies poverty and reverses progress towards improvements in children's well-being.**<sup>48</sup> Climate change also has a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, poor children, and children separated from their families. Girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse, child labour, trafficking and other forms of exploitation, and decreased access to food, water and basic services such as healthcare and education.<sup>49</sup>

World Vision believes that our collective response to climate change will profoundly affect the quality of life of future generations of children, yet this intergenerational aspect has yet to be placed at the heart of climate change discussions. A child rights approach to climate change would take the concerns of intergenerational justice into account and radically transform the policies and commitments of those in power.<sup>50</sup> Such an approach urgently needs to be implemented by governments and civil society actors shaping the response to climate change.

#### **Recommendations**

- *That the Australian Government systematically include women and children in climate change mitigation and adaptation decision-making and management of disaster risk. Women and children's exclusion from climate-related decision-making compounds inequality and increases vulnerability.*

<sup>41</sup> UN Women 'Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management' <https://pacificwomen.org/resources/pacific-brief-gender-climate-change-and-disaster-risk-management/>

<sup>42</sup> The World Bank, (2017), Climate change and Disaster Management - Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-change-and-disaster-management-pacific-possible-background-paper-no6>

<sup>43</sup> IWDA "Here's what climate change looks like in the Pacific" <https://iwda.org.au/heres-what-climate-change-looks-like-in-the-pacific/>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 'The impacts of climate change on the rights of the child'. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/RightsChild/ChildrenOnePager.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF 'Climate change, child rights and intergenerational justice' <https://www.unicef.org.uk/publications/Climate-Change-Child-Rights-and-Intergenerational-Justice/>



- *That the Australian Government increases investment in programs that build the resilience of women and children to climate change and disaster risk, in line with DFAT's Climate Change Action Strategy, recognising their increased vulnerability to compounding shocks and disasters in the aftermath of COVID-19.*

## 5. Women, girls and the impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific

The number of COVID-19 cases in the Pacific Island Countries to date, are very few and contained. According to the World Health Organisation, Papua New Guinea has so far registered 8 cases with full recovery while Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have zero cases.<sup>51</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and its wide-ranging impacts are acting as a risk multiplier for women and girls in the Pacific region. In the Pacific region, women are overrepresented in sectors and jobs that are impacted significantly by economic downturn associated with the pandemic, such as retail and hospitality. With global supply chains disrupted, women migrant workers and women-led small and medium enterprises have been heavily affected. Several countries in the region are also dealing with the impact of Cyclone Harold. Despite these challenges, the Pacific women leaders meeting held in June 2020 acknowledged that women have a vital role to play in the economic recovery of the region.

The health, economic and social ramifications of COVID-19 are:

- **Increased workload:** COVID-19 will likely increase the paid and unpaid workload of women and girls in the Pacific given that they are traditionally the caregivers in their households and disproportionately occupy frontline health roles in the community such as nursing. **Increased risk of violence:** Lockdowns, social isolation and increasing family pressures heighten the risk of gender-based violence and the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of women and girls. There are anecdotal reports from World Vision's offices in the Pacific and media reports of a spike in family violence associated with the lockdown period.
- **Mental health:** Intensified negative emotions can lead to psychosocial distress and place women and girls at increased risk of violence, including physical and psychological aggression.
- **Negative coping mechanisms:** While promoting good health, the COVID-19 lockdowns have unintentionally led to loss of income and disruption of livelihoods for both men and women and increased the threat of family violence, children and women being trafficked and placed into forced labour. The probability of child marriage, child trafficking and child labour has also increased.
- **Reduced resilience:** Should COVID-19 take a greater hold and spread in the Pacific, the health and economies of our neighbours which are already strained will struggle absorb and recover from COVID-19 and future health and natural disasters. This has been borne out by countries struggling to recover from Cyclone Harold.

WVA has been collaborating with partners to support integration of gender and social inclusion considerations in our COVID 19 response. We welcome the commitment to enhance gender equality and women's economic empowerment and address Gender Based Violence in the recently announced Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response.

World Vision welcomes the COVID-19 funding made possible through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) mechanism and encourages DFAT to keep up this support. We suggest more investment be made to make sure solutions are scaled so that as many vulnerable populations as possible are reached. We intentionally call out child protection as a cross-cutting theme that should be given the same importance weighting as Gender Equality and Social Inclusion which have been at the forefront of DFAT investments for a few years now. We also encourage the Australian Government to support our Pacific Island neighbours to maintain minimum quality standards, equip frontline workers to respond, avoid institutionalization and unintentional separation of children during and after the pandemic and to ensure non interruption of critical services and access to child protection workers, hotlines and safe houses.

World Vision welcomes the flexibility of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in allowing existing projects funded under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) to pivot towards COVID-19 needs. World Vision applauds this move and encourages the Government of Australia to continue to support the recovery of Pacific economies through the Pacific Step-Up and by contributing our fair share (\$165.8 million) to the global effort to

<sup>51</sup> World Health Organisation, <https://worldhealthorg.shinyapps.io/wproccovid19/>



defeat COVID-19 through the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan with at least 4% of the total dedicated to child protection. While the pivoting of ANCP projects to COVID-19 is important for immediate responsiveness, it is important to acknowledge the disruption that has occurred which includes the withdrawal of Australian volunteers and experts. This strengthens the case to build back stronger and for more effective capacity and resilience building to be done with local partners to ensure continuity of all the programs supported before COVID-19 and in the new normal otherwise progress will be derailed and vulnerable to disaster.

#### **Recommendations**

- *That the Australian Government contribute \$165.8 million to the global effort to defeating COVID-19 through the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan.*
- *That the Australian Government maintain a Humanitarian Corridor for the Pacific to ensure the continuity of essential medical and food supplies to the region during this phase of disruptions from COVID-19.*
- *That when developed, the Australian Government support and subsidise the delivery of a COVID-19 vaccine across the Pacific region and provide appropriate technical and medical support, ensuring the vaccine goes to the most vulnerable first.*

In conclusion, World Vision submits that this inquiry, the advent of COVID-19 and the resulting pivot provides a great opportunity for the Government of Australia and all its aid partners to build back stronger. The new partnerships for recovery must be child centred and gender sensitive. In the words of the key women leaders from the region, *"Pacific women leading the region's response is vital to ensuring women and girls interests are at the forefront of government and community responses"* said Foreign Minister Marise Payne and *"We should find ways which not only build resilience in our communities and help to continue economic growth but do so in a manner which also enhances the well-being of women and girls"* said Deputy Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa of Samoa. (DFAT, media release, June 2020)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/media-release/joint-statement-co-convenors-meeting-pacific-women-leaders-australian-foreign-minister-and-minister-women-marise-payne-and-samoan-deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-natural-resources-and-environment-fiame-naomi-mataafa>

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