



**INQUIRY INTO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES CONFRONTING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN – ASIA PACIFIC REGION**  
**Submission by ChildFund Australia**

*For the attention of:*

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
PO Box 6021  
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Canberra ACT 2600

*Report submitted by:*

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Supporting documents (attached):

- *Family and Sexual Violence Papua New Guinea, 2013, ChildFund Australia & ChildFund PNG*
- *Stop Violence against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea, 2013, ChildFund Australia*
- *Children speak about being free from violence and exploitation, 2013, ChildFund Alliance*
- *Social and Cultural Barriers to Rural Adolescent Ethnic Community Girls Accessing Lower Secondary Schools in Northern Laos, 2011, ChildFund Laos & Plan International Laos.*
- *Case Study: Youth Leadership Through Sport in Namkonngoua Village, ChildFund Laos, 2013*

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## **Terms of reference**

### **1. Barriers and impediments to enhancing the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region, especially regarding the impact of family and sexual violence, women's leadership and economic opportunities.**

#### Family and Sexual Violence

While more global attention is now being paid to the issue of family and gender-based violence (GBV), with a range of new UN resolutions passed to address the problem, it continues to remain one of the world's most pervasive and invisible crimes.

Typical barriers to preventing the abuse of women and children can be attributed to the fact that family violence is usually a hidden crime, occurring in family homes and behind closed doors. In many countries, cultural norms do not treat family violence as a crime, but as a normal part of family



life, and those tasked with law enforcement are oftentimes reluctant to act in what is seen as a private matter. Traditional practices such as early marriage, dowry systems and a lack of education for girls exacerbate the problem.

In 2013, ChildFund Australia and ChildFund PNG conducted both quantitative and qualitative research into family and gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea<sup>1</sup>, focusing in particular on the experiences of children and families in Rigo District in Central Province, as well as women who had sought refuge at a women's safe house in Port Moresby (Haus Ruth).

It has been widely reported that violence occurs in more than two-thirds of families in PNG, with some experts stating that this figure may actually be much higher. ChildFund's field research confirmed the latter assumption, with all 37 female interviews stating that they had subject to violence by a partner.

Violence in PNG also has a significant impact on children. This often begins before birth, with one study finding that 86% of women in PNG experience physical violence during their pregnancy<sup>2</sup>. Violence against children is committed by a range of adults in private and public settings – parents, teachers and other figures of authority.

However, violence within the family appears to be the most endemic, with ChildFund's report finding that children are often witnesses to assaults against their mothers, and around 60 per cent suffer physical abuse from the same assailant.

ChildFund's research found that the following components were key to the high incidence of family violence, leaving survivors with little support:

- *Insufficient legal and security response.* While family violence has been criminalised in legislature, as yet there is little application of these laws and therefore offenders are rarely prosecuted. It continues to be seen as a matter to be resolved in a traditional manner; usually by male leaders in the local community.
- *Poor medical response for survivors.* Hospitals and medical services in PNG are notoriously under-resourced and poor in quality. In addition, those wishing to access care must often undertake long, and costly, journeys, and then pay for medical certificates to certify their injuries.
- *Lack of a coordinated government GBV response.* There is currently no national policy focused on prevention of family violence, and few government resources available to coordinate a country-wide response.
- *Weak services at district level.* Lack of funding, untrained staff, and police unwilling to interfere in family matters all contribute to poor support services. In addition, many services which do exist are only available in urban areas.
- *Few programs working with men.* In order to change prevailing social norms in PNG, it is vital to engage men, as both the victims and perpetrators of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Family and Sexual Violence Papua New Guinea, 2013; Stop Violence against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea, 2013. [attached in annex]

<sup>2</sup> Ganster-Breidler 2009 [see p14 in Family and Sexual Violence Papua New Guinea, 2013 attached in annex]

- *Insufficient prevention activities.* While education and awareness-raising activities have proven to be effective in stopping violence before it starts, more public messaging is essential in PNG.
- *More work needed to prevent violence against children.* It is widely accepted that the impact of violence a child affects their physical, emotional and cognitive development. Adult men who were victims of violence will often go on to reoffend, accepting violence as a method to resolve conflict.
- *Lack of transportation prevents access to services.* Particularly for women living in remote areas, a lack of transportation means few will seek either medical help, or report a violent incident to police.
- *The need for safe houses or shelter.* Currently, very few women’s refuges are available, and these can only be found in Port Moresby. In a country where almost 40% of the population lives in poverty, women often have no choice but to stay in the family home.

### Women’s Leadership Opportunities

Some progress has been made globally to increase women’s participation in decision-making and leadership through affirmative action and the use of quotas in parliament.<sup>3</sup> However, as a result of pervasive discrimination and social and cultural norms which dictate that women’s role is in the household, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in many developing countries. For example, the percentage of women in local governments in the Pacific was less than 1% in PNG and Tonga as of 2010.<sup>4</sup>

Cambodia currently has one of the lowest gender inequality index rankings in Asia, and ranks 96 out of 187 countries in the world.<sup>5</sup> Women and girls have lower status in society than men in society and their responsibilities for domestic duties limits their capacity to generate an income and contribute to community developing planning. ChildFund’s research revealed that these women and girls face multiple barriers, such as corruption, a culture of intimidation, limited education opportunities, low literacy rates and domestic violence which prevent them from obtaining leadership positions in their communities.

Women who do gain positions in the political sphere tend to be passive rather than active due to the patriarchal nature of Cambodia society, and have often internalised gender stereotypes in order to avoid being perceived as a threat to men and the status quo. This has led to an acceptance that men can behave in a dismissive way towards women.<sup>6</sup> ChildFund’s research found that women who are successful have often achieved this success by taking on male characteristics, such as “speaking out” and “talking and joking” in order to be respected by their male counterparts.

Additionally, research conducted by ChildFund<sup>7</sup> in Laos has revealed that social and cultural barriers exist in the country which act as impediments to the realisation of girls’ human rights. For example, due to the importance placed on marriage, many girls drop out of school to get married at a young age (14-16), and have limited opportunities to resume their education in later life. These girls often

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<sup>3</sup> Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women Fact Sheet, United Nations, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Women’s Representation in Local Government in Asia Pacific Status – Report 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Gender Inequality Index, United Nations Development Programme, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Social and cultural barriers to rural adolescent ethnic community girls accessing lower secondary schools in northern Laos, Plan and ChildFund, 2011 [attached in annex]



have poor literacy skills, and poor knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, and as a result are more likely to contract HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Through this research, ChildFund also found that girls who marry at a young age are more likely to be the victims of violence, abuse and forced sexual relations, because they believe their husbands can justify it.

### Women's Economic Opportunities

Although female farmers produce more than half of the world's food, and work two thirds of the world's working hours, women receive less than 10% of the world's income and continue to be denied access to land and resources.<sup>8</sup>

Barriers to women's economic opportunities in the Indian Ocean Asia-Pacific include: unequal gender relations manifested at the household level with decision making; family expectations which prioritise boys' education and vocational training over girls'; and men's inappropriate use of money earned by women. The environment within the communities in which ChildFund Australia works in Papua New Guinea is not supportive of local businesses. This, coupled with the lack of strong female role models in local and national government, have created limited opportunities for women to engage in economic activities in the country. Furthermore, social norms exist which dictate that women's role is in the household and prevent them from being business owners.

ChildFund Australia has observed from its experience in Sri Lanka that as a result of the war, a large number of widowed women have been forced to become the primary income generators of their families. Women are often forced to take whatever work they can get although it is often unreliable and unsafe, out of desperation. As a result, women's work choices are not well informed and often do not have prospects for the progression of their economic future.

Furthermore, in Sri Lanka, as is the case in many other countries in the region, well educated women have more opportunities to get into business, than women with low levels of education. Early marriage, the ethnic divide between the Tamil minority and Sinhalese majority, and the high incidence of women with disability in recently resettled communities have also resulted in women having less opportunities to earn an income in the country.

## **2. Achievements to date in advancing women and girls' human rights in these key areas.**

Globally, the Millennium Development Goals have resulted in significant achievements for women and girls in a number of areas. According to United Nations data<sup>9</sup>, the world has now achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, the global maternal mortality rate has been halved, and more women and girls have access to family planning methods.

### Family and Sexual Violence

The UN concedes, however, that violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all goals, and that poverty is a major barrier to secondary education, especially among older girls. As a result women are largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment.

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<sup>8</sup> Gender Equality, Oxfam Australia, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>



ChildFund Australia, as a member of the ChildFund Alliance, is calling on the United Nations and national governments to ensure that the post 2015 Millennium agenda includes specific goals focused on prevention of child violence and exploitation. ChildFund's research and long field experience leads to the view that child protection measures are essential if we are to build on the gains made under the existing MDGs.

While child violence is often hidden or unreported, it has been estimated that as many as 150 million girls are subject to sexual violence each year<sup>10</sup>. ChildFund's own research<sup>11</sup>, conducted among 1,349 children in 41 countries, found that the top three forms of violence and exploitation identified by children were:

- sexual violence,
- child labour, and
- physical and humiliating punishment.

Young people also expressed deep concern about the violence perpetrated in their communities. While children stressed that both girls and boys are victims to violence and exploitation, they confirm that girls are more exposed to violence related to their gender, while boys are at greater risk of physical harm.

As part of the discussions, children suggested a variety of ways in which world leaders could safeguard them from violence, including more legislation (60%), awareness-raising (44%) and the punishment of offenders (44%).

#### Women and Girls' Leadership

The work of experienced international, non-government development organisations is demonstrating a myriad of ways in which the rights of girls and women can be advanced. Some examples of ChildFund Australia's work in Asia and the Pacific that have increased opportunities for women and girls to engage in leadership opportunities include:

- Through ChildFund's *Child and Youth Participation Project*<sup>12</sup> in Laos, girls have been able to participate in sport for the first time which has increased their confidence, leadership skills, and ability to voice their opinions with parents and duty bearers. Girls' participation in these activities has had positive impacts on the social development of the community, as the community has shifted its attitudes towards girls and women and now sees the importance of valuing their participation in society. Girl leaders are also acting as positive role models for other girls in their communities;
- Through the *Strong, Active Youth for Empowerment* project in Sri Lanka and a series of *Child Protection and Child Rights Implementation* projects in Vietnam, ChildFund has promoted the participation of over 8,000 girls in youth club activities and provided training for girls on youth club management;

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<sup>10</sup> World Health Organisation, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Children speak about being free from violence and exploitation, 2013, ChildFund Alliance.

<sup>12</sup> Case Study: Youth Leadership through Sport in Namkonngoua Village, ChildFund Laos, 2013. [attached in annex]



- Through the *Rehabilitation of Schools* project in Papua New Guinea, ChildFund has facilitated girls' participation in the renovation of classrooms in 13 schools in the Oman and Koko program areas; and
- Through the *ChildFund Connect* education project in Laos, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste, ChildFund has enabled children to use multimedia tools to design, plan and record their own stories and make videos of everyday life. This project has increased the confidence of the children involved, especially girls and enabled them to better express their opinions, improve their leadership skills, and has increased their interest and participation in schools; and
- Through supporting the participation of girls in youth clubs in India, ChildFund has increased the confidence of girls and supported a campaign against child marriage, which has brought the number of child marriages to almost zero in one Indian community.

### Women's Economic Opportunities

ChildFund Australia has helped create economic opportunities for women in Sri Lanka through its livelihoods programming in the north of the country. ChildFund has assisted 2,350 households (of which roughly 15% are female headed and 15% are households looking after a person with a disability) restart farming based livelihoods and improve their skills in agriculture through Phases 1 and 2 of the *Strengthening Farm-based Livelihoods* project.

ChildFund Australia has also provided vocational training and business start up support for youth through the *Strong, Active Youth for Empowerment* project in Sri Lanka which also had had a strong focus on female headed households.

Furthermore, through the *Youth for Sustainable Development* project in Cambodia, ChildFund has provided girls with the opportunity to engage in income generating activities in their communities, which has contributed to the development of their communities. For example, girls who participated in the project received training in livestock raising, vegetable cultivation, and leadership and were able to use these skills to contribute to their families' incomes. This project has not only contributed to the economic empowerment of girls in the communities in which ChildFund works, it has also reduced the incidence of girls migrating to Phnom Penh to seek employment.

### **3. Implications for economic and social development in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region of promoting women and girls' human rights.**

The promotion of women and girls' human rights has had widespread implications for economic and social development all around the world. For example, investment in girls' education has proven to increase the number of female wage earners in society, increase productivity for employers, and reduce the incidence of child marriage and HIV rates.

The impact of this has been shown to be intergenerational, with educated women more likely to send their children to school and for longer periods of time with each successive generation. It has also been found that women and girls who earn an income reinvest 90 percent of it into their families.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Why Invest in Adolescent Girls, United Nations Foundation,  
[http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/ourmeetings/PDF/actionareas/Why\\_Invest\\_in\\_Adolescent\\_Girls.pdf](http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/ourmeetings/PDF/actionareas/Why_Invest_in_Adolescent_Girls.pdf)



ChildFund's long experience in numerous countries across the region has shown that promoting women and girls' human rights, through providing opportunities for women and girls to obtain leadership positions, to be heard, and participate in their communities can have multiple positive implications for the economic and social development of women and girls in the communities in South Asia and South East Asia.

These implications include:

- an increase in women and girls' status in their communities;
- an increase in women's and girls' participation in community development initiatives;
- challenging of cultural and social stereotypes related to women's and girls' roles in society; and
- contributing to repair social ties and generate local economic activity.

#### **4. The effectiveness of Australian programs to support efforts to improve the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean - Asia Pacific region.**

In recent years, there have been positive developments to address family and gender-based violence in PNG. This includes linking the many existing HIV programs to GBV prevention and response; many of which have received funding support from the Australian Government's overseas aid program. Programs which focus on the development of men as advocates for violence prevention are also showing positive outcomes.

ChildFund PNG's work in this area includes working with 19 villages in Rigo District to provide critical medical care and support services for women and children affected by violence, while also preventing violence by working with men and young people to change existing attitudes and behaviours. At the village level, influential community leaders are being trained to raise awareness of family and sexual violence in their communities, as well as provide counselling, advice and referrals.

A school-based education program is also being implemented by ChildFund in primary and secondary schools to teach students about respectful relationships, gender equality and conflict resolution. Local health services including the district hospital are being strengthened, giving survivors of violence greater access to the specialised care they need. Where local services are unavailable, a voucher referral system covering transport and other costs will be introduced so that women and children can access specialised services in Port Moresby.

ChildFund's ANCP funded projects have also contributed to the realisation of children's rights by promoting the Lukautim Pikinini Act with local officials, and duty bearers in Papua New Guinea. This enshrines the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law and localises its implementation. These ANCP funded projects actively promote the Act and use it as a strategic framework to work within. ChildFund has also conducted a widespread birth registration campaign, which has been conducted in close collaboration with the Office of Civil Registry, caregivers and community leaders. Through this campaign, the births of 500 children have been registered.



Furthermore, through ChildFund's *Rights Realisation* and *Youth for Sustainable Development* projects in Cambodia, ChildFund has facilitated the participation of girls in National Youth Forum and campaigns in Cambodia, provided for female youth leaders to monitor project activities, and enabled the election of female youth members as Village Development Committee members for the first time in Cambodia. Girls in the project have also had the opportunity to attend commune council meetings, participate in the negotiation of commune development plans for the first time.

## **Annex**

To follow are attached the following documents in PDF format:

- *Family and Sexual Violence Papua New Guinea, 2013, ChildFund Australia & ChildFund PNG*
- *Stop Violence against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea, 2013, ChildFund Australia*
- *Children speak about being free from violence and exploitation, 2013, ChildFund Alliance*
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