

Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's relationships with the Pacific Islands

Submission by ChildFund Australia: 30 April 2020

About ChildFund Australia

ChildFund Australia is an independent and non-religious international development organisation that works to reduce poverty for children in the developing world. ChildFund Australia is a member of the ChildFund Alliance – a global network of 11 organisations which assists more than 15 million children and their families in over 60 countries. ChildFund Australia is a registered charity, a member of the Australian Council for International Development, and fully accredited by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which manages the Australian Government's overseas aid program.

Submitted by:

Larissa Tuohy, Head of Communications, ChildFund Australia
Level 8, 162 Goulburn Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
Tel: 02 8281 3106
Email: [REDACTED]

Introduction

ChildFund Australia is making this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Aid to the Pacific as an Australian NGO working in the region. ChildFund manages programs in health, education, social and emotional well-being, gender equity, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, child protection, and sport for development in the region.

This submission primarily addresses the second of the three Terms of reference for the Inquiry: *Exploring prospects to strengthen and broaden Australian engagement in the Pacific Step-up, through non-government and community-based linkages...*¹

The submission is being made at a time when the threat of the COVID 19 virus to most Pacific countries is still very real but containment measures may avert a regional disaster. As events of recent months have shown, however, situations can change rapidly. The submission assumes that responding to the COVID 19 crisis will be the overwhelming priority for 2020 with a return to other activities in 2021.

ChildFund Australia in the Pacific

ChildFund Australia has been working in Papua New Guinea (PNG) since 1995 and in the wider Pacific since 2010. ChildFund is fully accredited with DFAT and is an active member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

¹ Terms of Reference for Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's relationships with the Pacific Islands
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/PacificRelationships/Terms_of_Reference

ChildFund Australia also has close ties with ChildFund New Zealand which has been conducting development activities in the Pacific since 2006. At present, ChildFund Australia is conducting or resourcing activities in PNG, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Nauru and Vanuatu, with ChildFund NZ active in Kiribati since 2017.

The Australian public contributes the largest proportion of the funds for ChildFund's international development activities with other significant contributions from DFAT (under its Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and other grant funding), grants from other multi and bilateral donors and the private sector.²

The role of Australian NGOs

ChildFund Australia believes that Australian NGOs (ANGOs) have played, and will continue to play, a key role in Australia's relationships with its Pacific neighbours.

Global development actors and Australia's bilateral programs in Pacific countries will address high level issues of international coordination, regional and national security, resource management and macro-economic development.

However, it is often ANGOs, working with local civil society partners and at grassroots, which implement the practical activities of these regional initiatives. Programs implemented by ANGOs at a local level make immediate differences in the quality of peoples' lives and opportunities for longer-term improvement. For example, while the Australian government works to provide greater online connectivity to PNG and the Solomon Islands via the Coral Sea Cable System, ANGOs will be relied upon to address the social risks which greater access to the world wide web (and cheaper data downloads) will bring.³

ANGOs, working in partnership with local civil society organisations (CSOs) and community based organisations (CBOs), are best placed to establish and strengthen the people-to-people links which are key to effective development, and which also enhance Australia's role as a supportive regional neighbour.

ANGOs and their local CSO partners work across all levels of government and society in Pacific countries, from advisory and technical working groups in various ministries to participation in national level forums. They also work closely with provincial and district level government officials, and with local health centres, schools and institutions at community level. This on-the-ground approach enables ANGOs to convey the experiences and aspirations of villagers to policymakers and decision-takers in national capitals.

Many development actors, for reasons of time, security or expense, do not have such reach and their interactions are often limited to high-level executives with no direct operational responsibilities. While NGOs do have access to national leaders, their primary working relationships are usually with sub-national level officials who are operational leaders, inspectors and trainers, in regular contact with local institutions and frontline personnel.

² Public contributions 49%, Australian government grants 18%, Overseas grants 29% other sources 4%. ChildFund Australia Annual Report 2018-19, p.13.

³ <https://www.coralseacablesystem.com.au/about/> and see below, p. 5.

ChildFund Australia has found that there is no simple formula for delivering effective assistance in the Pacific. As will be seen from the descriptions which follow, many of the organisation's programs are delivered in a mixed mode. This involves a combination of direct implementation and working through partners, such as local civil society organisations or government officials, with the immediate objective of improving service delivery at the local level, but also with an eye to strengthening government systems.

While acknowledging the important role government has to play in service delivery, there is also a recognition that community self-sufficiency, the basis of traditional life in the Pacific, is necessary, and beneficial, in building sustainable systems which can operate effectively over the longer-term. The people of the Pacific place great value on their own distinctive cultures and languages and demonstrate a resolve to retain them in a globalising world.

Australia's aid program and the Pacific

ChildFund, like other ANGOs, has been concerned for some time about the overall size of Australia's international aid program and changes in the balance of spending within it. The overall proportion of overseas development assistance as a proportion of gross national income (GNI) has declined from 0.33% in 2012 to a current level of around 0.2%, largely due to substantial cuts to made to the development spend for countries in Asia.

It is less recognised that aid to the Pacific has been increasing since 2012-13. Australia and New Zealand are now the biggest aid donors to Pacific states. In PNG, Australia is by far the largest single donor.

An increasing proportion of aid funds have, however, been diverted from the traditional areas of health and education to spending on infrastructure.⁴ The wisdom of this shift has been criticised for some time but is now the subject of some alarm.

This is especially the case in PNG, which now faces the threat of the COVID 19 pandemic with a public health system described as "broken" and where the major, national, public hospital is unable to carry out testing for the virus because of run-down facilities and lack of PPE.⁵

ChildFund Australia's development work in the Pacific

As will be seen in the following brief examples, many of ChildFund's interventions in the Pacific support social service delivery, particularly health and education, primarily in PNG. This work has often been conducted as members of NGO consortia or in partnerships, especially with government at sub-national levels.

ChildFund is well-known for its work in PNG, on gender-based and family violence, in the training of village court magistrates and human rights defenders and in preparing teachers and peer educators

⁴ Stephen Howes, COVID-19: implications for Australian aid, Development Policy blog, March 27, 2020. Howes estimates that ... *aid health spending has been cut by 25% after inflation since 2013–14, whereas infrastructure spending has increased by 50%*. A similar argument, highlighting the decline in funding for education, was made in the submission to the recent general Aid Inquiry by ACFID (Education Community of Practice), New International Development Policy Submission, February 2020.

⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-28/coronavirus-risks-indonesia-png-becoming-failed-states/12191850>

to deliver its *Rights, Respect, Resilience* curriculum that strengthens young people's social and emotional wellbeing and combats the harmful gender norms that result in Gender Based Violence.⁶

More recently ChildFund has demonstrated a capacity for innovation with its work on child protection and digital media (cyber safety) and for reaching in and out-of-school youth, particularly girls, through Sport for Development interventions in other nations in the south-west and south pacific.

Health

ChildFund Papua New Guinea works primarily through provincial health departments. Due to chronic understaffing and lack of funds, the state health system provides inadequate access and poor coverage including low rates of safe child delivery and vaccination.

With 80% of PNG's population based in rural areas, using a mobile health outreach approach brings integrated services to remote communities and helps overcome the multiple barriers to reaching health facilities and services (including distance, cost of travel, drug and staff shortages, and poor infrastructure).

ChildFund provides critical field support by assisting in the coordination and planning of the outreach schedule with health department staff, transporting health staff and vaccines in agency vehicles, and mobilising communities through trained health volunteers to gather patients and children for local health days.

Large numbers of community members attend these quarterly events, which are often their primary, and sometimes only, source of health advice and treatment. There is a clear role for NGOs/CSOs to continue to partner and strengthen the governance and operations of provincial and district health departments where investment in capacity, infrastructure and resources is urgently required.⁷

The insecurity and unpredictability of funding can frustrate achieving sustainable improvements in health outcomes. ChildFund was a member of a consortium tackling tuberculosis (TB) control in the National Capital District of PNG. This was initially funded by DFAT but transitioned to the World Bank during its third year.

The project achieved strong results in increasing TB treatment, testing and cure rates and reducing the loss and drop out of patients. The latter is essential in addressing the rising levels of drug resistant tuberculosis in PNG. The initiative was underpinned by a network of TB health volunteers trained and supported by NGOs.

However, with the transition of funding, and a drastic budget reduction, two of the three NGO members of the consortium were dropped from the project, staff made redundant and volunteers sidelined. It is predicted that important health gains will be lost and the morale of health staff and volunteers seriously undermined.

⁶ PNG is the only country in the Pacific in which ChildFund Australia has a representative office and is the biggest of ChildFund's programs in the region. In other countries ChildFund works through the offices of local, partner NGOs.

⁷ Work in PNG's Central Province has been part-funded under DFAT's ANCP program and will be supplemented by a recent grant to expand the provision of child vaccination administered by DFAT's Papua New Guinea Partnership Fund (PPF).

Education

ChildFund is a member of one of three ANGO-led consortia working across a total of 10 of PNG's 24 provinces to improve early grade literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. Like the health project described above, project field staff work directly with government officials at sub-national levels (Central Province and its districts) responsible for school supervision. ChildFund has been focused on in-service training of teachers to develop learning practices for students which are effective and sustainable.

As a result, more schools have increased levels of self-sufficiency, and are less passively reliant on an under-funded and overly bureaucratic system. Teachers have greater levels of confidence, knowledge and skills, which will contribute significantly to the learning outcomes of their students. The consortium projects have also distributed educational resources to schools, including learning materials to assist teachers implement a new Standards based Curriculum.

An external evaluation of the three consortium projects in late 2019 identified strengths and activities with potential for impact, recommended consolidation and has informed the development of proposals for a Phase 2 to run from 2020-2022.

Funding NGO consortia to improve education quality was a radical change in Australia's approach to development aid for education programs in PNG. It marked a move away from a strategy-based approach around placing high level technical advisers with the National Department of Education (NDOE) in Waigani, which had been criticised in both PNG and Australia as expensive and ineffectual with little or no trickle-down impact on the quality of education in schools.

The NGO consortium projects have directly reached large numbers of PNG teachers, children and parents, supplemented PNG's Standards Based Curriculum with a range of innovative and engaging resources for learning and teaching and reinvigorated NDOE officials at sub-national level.

Visitors to PNG are often struck by the number of stories about education in daily newspapers. There are stories of promise and hope but also, frequently, complaints about declining standards, dilapidated schools, low teacher morale, parental apathy, lack of accountability and corruption.

The continuing challenge for NGOs will be to demonstrate that bottom-up reforms can be sustained beyond the period of direct Australian Aid program implementation. There is certainly a present need for ANGOs to continue to partner with the NDOE, local schools and communities to bring this about. This may, in turn, lead towards strengthening PNG civil society organisations to take a permanent role in supporting and monitoring education service delivery.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

ChildFund PNG has a strong relationship with PNG's National Department of Education, one that currently involves the joint initiative to promote respectful relationships among secondary school students in National Capital District and Central Province.

The pilot project includes training teachers to incorporate the *Rights, Respect, Resilience* learning resource developed by ChildFund within PNG's Personal Development curriculum. In a country where levels of family violence are at endemic levels, the resource covers topics including consent, gender norms, gender-based violence, healthy relationships, family planning and help-seeking.

Concurrently, ChildFund PNG is partnering with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to implement the *Rights, Respect, Resilience* learning resource with out-of-school youth. Following the successful implementation of this pilot project, ChildFund PNG is seeking formal endorsement of the resource by the National Department of Education.

Gender equity and justice

ChildFund Australia has been prominent in civil society's response to gender-based violence in PNG since its seminal 2013 report, *Stop Violence Against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea*, and follow up campaigns to support counselling and safe housing.

ChildFund PNG established the *1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain* (Helpline) in 2015 in partnership with the Family Sexual Violence Action Committee of the Consultative Implementation Monitoring Council (CIMC). CIMC is PNG government funded but operates as an independent entity. Located in Port Moresby, helpline counsellors trained by ChildFund provide immediate counselling and referral services via a freephone number available nationally.

The service has been used by both victims and perpetrators of violence as well as young people seeking advice on relationships and others who have witnessed acts of violence. The helpline has since added value through its ability to pivot and serve as a source of information for callers following the Highlands earthquake of 2018, and the current COVID 19 health emergency.

Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Emergency Response

ChildFund has been involved in Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Emergency Response in PNG and Fiji over the past three years. The organisation is currently a member of one of seven ANGO consortia under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP).

ChildFund activities under the AHP have included assisting community members to assess their own disaster and climate related risk, developing community action plans to mitigate that risk, working with farmers to introduce and trial drought resistant crops, and advising sub-national government officials on drawing up emergency preparedness plans based on national guidelines.

In Fiji, ChildFund works with the Fiji Council of Social Services to improve their ability to coordinate local actors during times of disaster along with the Fiji National Disaster Management Office and the Fiji Red Cross, and with Empower Pacific in Fiji to respond to the needs of beneficiaries during disasters more effectively through their mental health and psychosocial initiatives.

ChildFund is currently working in PNG and Fiji through ChildFund country offices and partners to respond to COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold through Risk Communication and Community Engagement activities, the distribution of food and non-food items, and the provision of mental health and psychosocial support services.

A recent, innovative activity has been a collaboration with the Australian non-profit agency Library For All on the production of a series of 18 age and culturally-appropriate story and non-fiction books for primary age readers in PNG on natural disasters. The books are written in engaging formats to

develop children's understandings of the causes, warning signs and consequences of natural disasters and convey messages about prevention, risk reduction and safety.

Child protection

As a child-focused development agency ChildFund Australia prioritises the well-being and participation of children in all its activities. As in other sectors ChildFund works directly with community members and local government, with officials at sub-national levels and at the national level through membership of advisory bodies and direct relationships with policy makers and elected leaders. In many cases ChildFund's initial work has been followed up by government or civil society partners continuing activities in their own right.

In 2015 ChildFund Australia increased its attention to the Pacific and made Child Protection a sectoral focus. From 2016-2020, responding to a gap identified by key child protection actors across the Pacific, ChildFund developed curricula and provided a six-week training program on child protection for frontline service providers.

The training, coaching and mentoring program has been delivered to date to over 130 staff from over 40 different key stakeholder government ministries and departments, Civil Society Organisations, Disabled Peoples' Organisations and Gender Based Violence service providers in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Vanuatu and Nauru.

For many of the participants this program was their first, in-depth exposure to child protection and skills development in working directly with children on child protection issues. Following the training, sixteen small project grants were provided to key service providers to assist them embed key learnings into ongoing practice and delivery of essential child protection services.

From 2019-2020 ChildFund, in collaboration with Plan International Australia, launched an ANCP project into address Child Online Safety and Protection across the Pacific responding to the completion of the Australian supported Coral Sea Cable.

A component of the project was a participatory research paper on the risks and opportunities in Solomon Islands, PNG, Kiribati and Fiji in conjunction with the University of Western Sydney. The research identified issues facing children online in the Pacific that have never been explored or documented. Subsequently, ChildFund launched a pilot, youth-led online protection program for children, youth and key community stakeholders around child online safety aiming to establish online self-protective behaviours and build protective community environments in community.

ChildFund will scale up this project in the Solomon Islands over 2020-2022, integrating multiple community delivery points, including schools, churches and youth groups to maximise reach. The scale up will also coordinate and strengthen national capacity to address and respond to Violence Against Children online.

ChildFund is currently working through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) in Fiji to assist officials of the Department of Social Welfare working at sub-national level to develop and put into place their own community action plans for Child Protection in Emergencies based on national guidelines. Under the AHP, ChildFund is partnering with Fijian CSO, Empower Pacific, to produce training materials, conduct training and pre-position volunteer psycho-social counsellors to be first responders for children affected by natural disasters.

ChildFund is a member of the Australian Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) Coalition. The Coalition commissioned a joint study into EVAC across the Pacific which was published in 2019. The *Unseen and Unsafe* report drew attention to the prevalence of violence against children across the Pacific and the lack investment in addressing issues underlying it.⁸ ChildFund has also contributed to a recent Coalition proposal DFAT to address these issues, potentially exacerbated by the impact of COVID 19.

Sport for Development

ChildFund is working closely with World Rugby, Oceania Rugby, Rugby Australia, Fiji Rugby Union, the International Cricket Council, Cricket PNG, Netball Australia and Netball Tonga. These partnerships highlight the value of bringing together development and sports stakeholders to share development priorities. They also support the approach of the Australian Sports Partnerships Program which “recognises that stronger outcomes can be achieved by mobilising the best assets of both development and sports actors to deliver on shared priorities”.⁹

Since 2012 ChildFund has worked with sports bodies on Sport for Development programs covering key life skills around leadership, gender, future planning, sexual and reproductive health, and preventing violence. In all programs (*ChildFund Pass It Back*, *Get Into Rugby PLUS*, *Cricket for Good with ChildFund*) over half of all coaches and participants are female.

Data shows participants not only learning but applying critical social and emotional competencies to make informed decisions, solve problems, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, and manage challenges in their lives.

The program’s inclusive approach has attracted young people who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to try and/or remain involved in the sport. An external evaluation found the program to be “amongst some of the best in the world for connecting sport and development outcomes”.¹⁰

ChildFund’s Sport for Development programs create opportunities for positive local role models to challenge accepted negative gender norms. An external evaluation stated that *ChildFund Pass It Back*’s ‘commitment to gender equity is one of the most authentic and far reaching in mixed gender Sport for Development activities’.¹¹ Through participation in *ChildFund Pass It Back*, “coaches are recognised and appreciated in their communities, and women gain respect through their contribution and achievements”.¹²

In collaboration with Rugby Australia, Oceania Rugby and UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office, ChildFund designed the initial pilot curricula and Monitoring and Evaluation tools for *Get Into Rugby*

⁸ Unseen and Unsafe: Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, July 2019 by Australian EVAC coalition, ChildFund Australia, Plan Australia, Save the Children, World Vision.

⁹ GHD (2019), Australian Sports Partnerships Program (ASPP) Overview.

¹⁰ Bates, K, (2017), Pass It Back External Evaluation.

¹¹ Bates, K, (2017) Pass It Back Evaluation

¹² G. Nicholas, Gender Assessment – ChildFund Australia International Programs (2019), p 27.

PLUS in 2018. ChildFund also delivered the initial training for Fijian Coaches on the life skills content and subsequent Training of Trainers to ensure local ownership and independence.¹³

As a pioneer organisation on the UNICEF International Safeguards for Children in Sport, ChildFund has also taken a lead in supporting Sports Governing Bodies to improve their safeguarding practices. An external evaluation described ChildFund's work in this area as exemplary.¹⁴ ChildFund is currently supporting safeguarding in sport work in five Pacific countries working in partnership with rugby national governing bodies and Oceania Rugby.

Summary

ChildFund Australia believes that ANGOs and their local civil society partners are playing a vital role in Australia's aid programs in the Pacific. They strengthen social service delivery systems and practice at operational levels through capacity building of government staff, especially at the critical sub-national levels, and through their experience in mobilizing and training local volunteers. Their presence promotes accountability and inspires confidence, especially in contexts where government performance is weak or operating under severe resource constraints.

Being able to work in mixed modes (combining direct implementation, working through local Civil Society Organisation partners and with government) will continue to be an important contributor to their impact of ANGOs. Predictable, longer-term funding of programs that encourage ANGOs to work together in consortia should require the participation of CSOs as partners. Strengthening local CSOs, and their participation in the delivery of social services alongside state actors, will enhance the prospects for sustainable improvements in government performance and consequent improvements in peoples' lives.

¹³ *"The extent of impact that has been seen - personal transformations in attitudes and practice around gender equality, violence against women and female empowerment- so early in the delivery of Get into Rugby PLUS, was unexpected."* World Rugby and Oceania Rugby, PSP Annual Report 1 July – 30 June 2019 (2019), p 2.

¹⁴ *"...safeguarding measures likely to become embedded and continue to safeguard children for years to come, with the potential to spread to other sports codes and through wider society"*, Brooke Sport Consulting, ChildFund Pass It Back Safeguarding and Gender Inclusion Evaluation (2019).