

# Inquiry into Human Rights Issues Confronting Women and Girls in the Indian Ocean- Asia Pacific Region

## Oaktree Submission

**For the attention of:**

Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and  
Trade

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Parliament House

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**Dot Point Summary:**

- Depriving a girl or a woman of an education is a violation of her human rights. Education can give her skills that enable her to combat family and sexual violence, networks to seek help through and give her greater access to economic and leadership opportunities.
- At the same time, family and sexual violence as well as a community's perception of the lack of economic and leadership opportunities for girls, can prevent a girl or a woman from receiving an education.
- As well as being an end within itself, education girls can also benefit the state's economy, conflict resolution and can contribute to the broader empowerment of women.
- Working in partnership with local NGOs is an effective way of addressing human rights concerns.
- In the education system, encouraging a public-private partnership can increase the sustainability of changes made to protect the rights of girls in the school system.

## Oaktree

Oaktree is a youth led, movement building organisation that believes that young people can lead the movement to end extreme poverty. We use funds from our youth led fundraising activities to invest in education projects in the Asia Pacific. We work in partnership with local organisations. Gender is one of the key cross cutting issues we focus on in all our projects.

This report takes evidence from research into four of our seven projects. These are the Girls' Education Initiative (GEI) run through local partner KAPE, the Beacon Schools' Initiative (BSI) also run through KAPE, the High School Transformation Project (HSTP) run by Ba Futuru and the New Life Skills Farm run by City Mission. These projects are in Cambodia (both KAPE projects), Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea respectively.

## 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;**

Through our work in Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste- Oaktree has noticed a direct correlation between human rights violations confronting women and girls and education. We believe that deprivation of education is a human rights violation that prevents women and girls from reaching their full potential.

Education can help girls combat family and sexual violence and improve their economic and leadership opportunities. At the same time family and sexual violence and the perceived lack of economic and leadership opportunities for women can impact on the rights' of a woman or girl to receive an education. Therefore, education exists as both an opportunity to combat human rights violation and a right within itself.

#### **Family and Sexual Violence:**

- Students we have spoken to have cited family violence or the fear of it as a factor that prevents girls from going to school. If a girl wishes to continue her education, this may be met with violent resistance from family members who feel this is either too expensive or would rather the girl sought paid employment.
- We have noticed that non- physical family violence that can prevent girls going to school (manipulation, guilt, threats).
- Violence in schools can prevent girls going to school. This can include violent methods of discipline and non-girl friendly schools.

- Girls and their families can fear community violence and this can prevent them physically getting to school. Some parents we have worked with worry about letting their daughter go to school because they fear she will be attacked on her way there.

#### Economic Opportunities

- When girls are denied an education this can be an impediment on their future economic opportunities. It can result in them being unable to seek employment in a safe environment that respects workers rights. In countries such as Cambodia they can be vulnerable to exploitation by the sex industry. Girls' are also vulnerable to encouragement by family or neighbours to work in factories for low wages and in poor conditions. We can therefore see a clear link between the deprivation of education and the deprivation of economic opportunities for women and girls.
- This perception that boys have more economic opportunities than girls can sometimes result in families prioritizing the education of their sons, thus denying their daughters of their right to an education.

#### Leadership Opportunities

- Girls' denied an education can be less empowered to seek leadership opportunities. This is evident in our school and scholarship management committees in the HSTP and GEI projects. Despite their mission of promoting girls' education, many of them are mostly run by men. This perhaps reflects the lack of education and therefore leadership opportunities for Cambodian and Timor Leste women from previous generations and why we should act to change this in the next generation.

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

Our projects demonstrate the successes we have had educating women and girls' and how this has advanced their human rights'.

#### Family and Sexual Violence

- Girls' empowered through education often have more negotiating power in their family as their education can lead to higher levels of employment.
- School offers girls' a way to escape violence in the home and to form social networks that they can seek help from.
- We have found that training teachers on the particular issues facing their female students can help them support these students to stay in school. It can further increase their ability to support students who are facing issues of family or sexual violence.
- Our BSI and HSTP projects have trained teachers on non-violent methods of discipline. As a result we have seen the development of a much safer schooling environment for girls and boys. HSTP reports that the Peer Mediation Trainings

have achieved significant results; before training, only 5% of the participants knew how to mediate a problem; after the training, 62% accurately listed ways of resolving peer problems. Before the training, 38% of students said they felt confident to prevent and resolve conflict at the student level at their school; an impressive 95% felt this way at the end of the training. The training aims to ensure that students feel safe and secure in their learning environment and students know how to get assistance if they are dealing with violence or abuse at home or at school

- Our GEI and BSI projects have provided students bikes to help them get to school. This has helped make the road to school less dangerous for girls.
- Our HSTP project has established extracurricular Drama Clubs that address relevant community and youth issues such gender-based violence, and human rights, for both boys and girls.
- In Papua New Guinea, our New Life Skills Farm run by City Mission works with young boys who are at a high risk of joining gangs and leading violent lives. A key aspect of this program is a gender-training module. The boys learn how and why they should treat women and girls with respect and dignity. The program has had amazing success in transforming the lives of these boys, their sense of self worth and their attitude to violence.

#### Economic Opportunities

- Educating women and girls provides opportunities for them achieve safe employment. Currently, our projects have female students training in teaching, nursing, agriculture, hotel and tourism, architecture, accounting, agriculture, electricity and animal husbandry. Without an high school education, there opportunities would have been considerably more limited.
- Through our GEI project we have seen that training both students and their families in income generation activities- such as life stock raising, vegetable growing, bracelet making, etc- we can increase the families income considerable. This often requires a small invest on the part of the organisation in training and providing start up materials. The long term social and economic benefits for the family well outweigh the initial investment. When the girls' are trained in these skills, they have increase bargaining power within the family as they are providing a source of income. We have found that families who have received livelihood training are also considerably less likely to encourage their children to be involved in child labour.

#### Leadership Opportunities

- Through our projects we have seen young girls empowered through their education to seek leadership opportunities. Schools we support through the HSTP, GEI and BSI projects have all set up students councils which have a high female representation. One HSTP school has a female Student President. GEI has also trained a group of mostly female scholarship students to talk local communes

leaders about child rights'. A key aspect of many of our projects' is encouraging youth leadership in schools and community. Giving students small opportunities- such as participating in school councils and talking to their local commune leaders- empowers them and increase their sense of self worth.

- We have noticed that in many projects we have had more trouble getting older women onto school or scholarship management committees. This might reflect the fact that barriers still exist for women in in pursuing community leadership opportunities even if the task relates to selecting female scholarship, as it does with the GEI Local Scholarship Management Committees. It could also reflect the lack of education that the previous generation of Cambodian and Timor Leste women were offered, and how this affected their future leadership opportunities.

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

#### Economic

- Education can lead to higher levels of employment for women and can assist in breaking the cycle of poverty for families and communities. Higher levels of employment mean families have a higher disposable income, which can be spent within their communities, raising economic growth and wealth within communities, and can be invested in health and future livelihoods.
- Education leads to safe employment opportunities for women and girls, making them less vulnerable to exploitation.
- Economic growth is one of the most powerful driving forces for the eradication of extreme poverty, Empowering women through education enables them to take advantage of economic opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them. Utilising the whole available workforce (ie, not just males) can contribute to economic growth, as has been a factor in the rapid development of China and India.

#### Social

- Girls' empowered through education often have more negotiating power in their family, as their education can lead to higher levels of employment and income for the family. This empowerment leads to higher levels of equality in community decision making forums, which more effectively represents community interests.
- Disciplinary methods in schools can be changed by example; non-violent and best practise methods of teaching can engage students and set an example for conflict resolution and peace building practises. We have witnessed through Ba Futuru and HSTP that these methods of education prepare young people not only for the work force, but also for other aspects of adult life, including community participation and civic responsibilities that contribute to a stable society.

#### **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.**

Oaktree has found that for us working in partnership with local NGOs to be the most effective way of improving the rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific. Our local partners have a greater understanding of the country context and community needs. We partner with organisations that share our values in regards to the rights of women and girls. Having them implement the project, as opposed to us, avoids the impression or actuality of foreigners enforcing their belief systems on others. Further, we have also found that local leadership is particularly useful for the young girls we work with as they can easily seek mentoring and advice from local project staff and trained local leaders who understand their language and needs.

KAPE, our partner in Cambodia, has also had a lot of success with their public- private partnership model for school management. The presence of the private NGO, KAPE, in the school has allowed them to train teachers,, award scholarships to struggling female (and male) students and provide a girl friendly school environment. However, the school remains public, and therefore the government involvement helps make these changes and investments sustainable. Through Oaktree's assistance, this model was replicated in Timor Leste through our partner Ba Futuru. It has also been used as an exemplary case study in ACFID (2014) publication 'Reach, Relationships and Results- Case Studies of Australian NGOs Work in Education.'