



Submission No 22

Inquiry into Slavery, Slavery-like conditions and People Trafficking

Organisation: Plan International Australia

Plan International Australia

Level 18, 60 City Road
Southbank VIC 3006
GPO Box 2818
Melbourne VIC 3001
A.B.N. 49 004 875 807

Call: 13 PLAN (13 7526)
Tel: +61 (3) 9672 3600
Fax: +61 (3) 9670 1130
Email: info@plan.org.au
www.plan.org.au



[Redacted]
[Redacted]
Ja Winkler
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Transform the world for children.

Plan International Submission to the Inquiry into Slavery, Slavery like conditions and People Trafficking, September 2012

Plan International works in over 70 countries across the world to protect and advance the rights of children and promote community development. Plan works with children, their communities and governments through a model of child-focused community development, supported by quality research and advocacy. Plan International understands gender discrimination as a significant factor in the perpetuation of poverty and inequality and a barrier to the achievement of human rights. Girls are particularly vulnerable; while girls and boys have the same entitlements to rights; overall girls face greater challenges in realizing their rights than boys.

Based on Plan International Australia's areas of expertise, this submission focuses on child and forced marriage, and specifically addresses two aspects of the terms of reference, namely:

1. Ways to encourage effective international action to address all forms of slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking; and
2. International best-practice to address all forms of slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking.

Plan International has a long history of working on the issue of child marriage across Asia and Africa, and is currently implementing programs in at least 15 high-risk countries aimed at preventing this practice. In addition to community-based programs, Plan has been active in advocating for the end of child marriage at national, regional and international levels. Most recently, Plan was instrumental in the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting's commitments to end child marriage in its final communiqué. Through Plan's global campaign on girls' education, *Because I am a Girl*, Plan is working closely with key United Nations agencies and movements such as the Elders, to mobilise the international community to end child marriage as a key barrier to girl's education and empowerment.

This submission draws on Plan's global experience to provide insights relevant to the Australian Government about successful initiatives to prevent and remedy child and forced marriage at national and international levels.

International best practice to address all forms of slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking.

Through Plan's work at the community level in multiple countries we know that the causes of child and forced marriage, as well as the way it is understood within a community, are complex, diverse and dynamic. Reasons can include gender inequality, poverty, negative traditional or religious norms, weak enforcement of law, and the pressure caused by conflict and natural disasters. Plan's experience

demonstrates that child and forced marriage are best understood as issues of human rights, gender inequality and child protection, rather than labeled as issues of culture or tradition. We therefore recommend that Australia situate child and forced marriage within the frame of rights, equality and protection, and solutions must begin with an understanding of the lived experience of those involved.

Plan's experience working in countries with some of the highest rates of child marriage including India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Cameroon and Pakistan has repeatedly demonstrated that while legislation is important, it is insufficient to have real impact on reducing rates of child marriage. A systematic review of 23 programs aiming to prevent or reduce child marriage across a range of countries found that,

"The strongest, most consistent results are evident in a subset of programs fostering information, skills and networks for girls in combination with community mobilization."¹

Our experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of four strategies that when implemented together in a coordinated way, and adapted appropriately to local context, bring results.² The best results are had when these community-based activities take place alongside advocacy for legislative change.

1. Working with girls, their families and community leaders to change attitudes and beliefs about girls' roles and potential, in particular the value of girls' education. We need to move attitudes towards girls beyond their reproductive and domestic roles, in order to reduce the social and economic pressure that motivates families to favor early marriage;
2. Building girls' leadership skills. Through empowerment and socio-economic capabilities and the creation of social networks girls increase their participation in political and civic action including youth-led initiatives to end child marriage;
3. Training and enabling community leaders and civil society organisations to design and carry out advocacy and awareness activities that promote and protect the rights of girls; and
4. Ensuring girls have adequate access to quality educational opportunities through formal schooling and alternative or vocational training, and addressing barriers such as fees and transport. A global analysis of data by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) determined that

¹ Anju Malhotra, Warner A., McGonagle A. & Lee-Rife, S. (2011) *Solutions to End Child Marriage. What the Evidence Shows*. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Washington D.C.
www.icrw.org/childmarriage accessed 21 September 2012

² Plan International 2011 *Breaking Vows. Early and Forced Marriage and Girls Education*; Plan International 2011 *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World Girls* report;

girls' education is 'the most important factor associated with child marriage.'³

Translating this into an Australian context, we recommend the following:

1. multilingual education and awareness for communities including girls and boys, parents, community and religious leaders about the damaging impacts of child marriage, the potential and rights of girls, and legal status of child marriage in Australia;
2. Appropriate education opportunities for vulnerable girls and women, including adult education and literacy for mothers; rates of child marriage are much lower where the parents have higher levels of education;
3. Leadership and life skills programs for girls that also help them understand their rights. Enabling girls and boys to become advocates for their own rights, including through their meaningful participation in consultation forums, and in the planning and implementation of programs; and
4. Participatory research with communities that both improves policy makers understanding of the causes and factors associated with child marriage, and also facilitates dialogue and reflection amongst participants about the possible alternative ways of doing things.

Similar to other issues of gender discrimination and gender-based violence, cross-sectoral coordination is essential for tackling child and forced marriage. We suggest that Australia would benefit from establishing an action plan and coordination processes that bring together key departments such as DFAT, FASCIA, DIAC and AusAID with targeted strategies within the *National Action Plan against Violence against Women* and the *National Child Protection Framework*.

Ways to encourage effective international action to address all forms of slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking

Australia has already played a crucial role in leading international action on child marriage through its championing of the issue at the 2011 CHOGM in Perth. As Chair of the Commonwealth, Australia has less than a year left to translate the CHOGM commitment into action. Opportunities such as high-level dialogue with countries already considering ways to prevent child marriage and establishing an action plan for the Commonwealth Secretariat are valuable ways Australia can improve international action. We believe that working with countries who have expressed interest in addressing the issue and encouraging them to be champions at the international level has great value.

Australia can play a valuable role in forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in facilitating

³ Jain, S. and Kurz, K., 2007, "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs", International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Washington D.C.

dialogue on the issue. While to be successful, any resolution on child marriage would need to be led by the countries where child marriage is most prominent, Australia can play a valuable role in facilitating dialogue, sharing best practice, and supporting potential champions for change.

Australia could also lobby for a UN report on the issue, the first step required in bringing about a resolution, and for the *UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice* to conduct an analysis of laws impacting on child and forced marriage and identify ways to cooperate with states to fulfill their commitments.

We also recommend:

1. Provide funds for publicizing existing good practice by civil society and women's organizations;
2. Promote girl's voices in advocacy for their rights and the building of girl-friendly governance and accountability mechanisms;
3. Invest in strengthening the evidence base on the relationship between child and forced marriage and girls' education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the collection of age and sex disaggregated data. In particular, research into the role of education in preventing or delaying child and forced marriage; and
4. Support and advocate for the participation of young women in forums such as CSW. From Plan's experience at forums such as the CSW, enabling girls' themselves to express what they want their leaders to do can be extremely powerful.

Australia's aid program already places a strong and welcomed focus on gender equality, reduction of gender-based violence, and girls' education. As a result, Australia is in an influential position to further international action on ending child marriage. As the second largest donor to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and a supporter of the newly established Education First initiative, Australia has the potential to ensure barriers to education such as child marriage are considered with recipient countries.

Through its significant bilateral investments in education and gender-based violence AusAID has the opportunity to ensure strategies for preventing child marriage are considered and raised with bilateral partners. Through supporting NGO partners who work at both the community and government levels AusAID is also in a position to contribute to local advocacy to end child marriage.