



**INQUIRY INTO INTERNATIONAL AID (PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY)
BILL 2015**

Submission by ChildFund Australia

For the attention of:

Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Department of the Senate
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Parliament House
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Report submitted by:

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Introduction

ChildFund Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee on the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015*.

ChildFund Australia is an international development agency that works in partnership with children and their communities to create lasting and meaningful change by supporting long-term community development and promoting children's rights.

We believe gender justice is a fundamental right and are committed to ensuring that girls, boys, women and men have equitable opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the programs and projects we support.

Working in partnership with location communities, ChildFund's experience in community development programs points to the fact that that poverty disproportionately affects women and girls. For example, women and girls living in poverty in the Mekong region have fewer opportunities to:

- access educational opportunities, formal and vocational;
- engage in income-generating activities;
- exercise their voice and agency;
- and participate in community decision-making.

Largely, this is due to the fact that cultural and social norms prevent the participation of women and girls in society, and dictate that their duties are primarily within the household.

ChildFund Australia, therefore, views the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015* as an important tool in ensuring gender is considered in every aspect of Australian aid programming, in order to promote equal access and opportunity for women and girls living in poverty.

ChildFund Australia's submission below outlines five arguments for why the international aid bill should be implemented.



Why the International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 should be implemented

1. Promoting gender equality is beneficial for entire communities

Promoting gender equality not only benefits women and girls but entire communities, and therefore has 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 families¹.

ChildFund Australia supports the Australian Council for International Development when it states that failing to invest in women and girls can have negative economic outcomes. For example, the International Labour Organisation estimates that 45 per cent of the productive potential of Asian women is untapped, which results in losses of \$US42 to 47 billion within the Asia region annually.²

Furthermore, a lack of opportunities for girls to access education results in further losses of US\$16 billion and US\$30 billion annually. These losses are primarily due to social, cultural and attitudinal barriers, which prevent women and girls from accessing employment and educational opportunities in their communities.

The barriers contributing to ongoing gender inequality are often invisible. For female children, this may include social norms such as early marriage, lack of educational opportunities due to the costs of education or a failure by parents to understand the value of educating girls, and family reliance on girls as caregivers for younger children within a household.

For women, social norms continue to act as a barrier, such as those which dictate the women's primary role is within the household. These are compounded by other factors such as low literacy levels, legal barriers which prevent women from owning or inheriting property and assets, limited access to business start-up support or vocational training, and a shortage of strong female role models who can demonstrate the role women can play as primary income earners.

¹ Why Invest in Adolescent Girls, United Nations Foundation:
www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/ourmeetings/PDF/actionareas/Why_Invest_in_Adolescent_Girls.pdf

² 'Women and labour markets in Asia: Rebalancing for gender equality, Asian Development Bank, 2011.
www.adb.org/publications/women-and-labour-markets-asia-rebalancing-gender-equality

2. There is an international precedent for the Introduction of a Gender Equality Bill

An international precedent has already been established for the introduction of a Gender Equality Bill in Australia. In 2014, the United Kingdom passed a Gender Equality Bill with similar provisions to the proposed Australian Bill. This had bipartisan support, and Norway and Sweden are expected to soon follow suit with similar legislation.

Additionally, a review of the first year of the UK's Bill implementation, conducted by the GREAT Initiative and Plan International UK, has shown that the Bill has been successful in promoting gender equality, with many aid initiatives incorporating strong gender analyses in their design³.

The success of the Bill was also attributed to strong commitment from leadership within the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). However, despite this success, there is still room to improve the incorporation of gender considerations into the humanitarian sector and across all programs in a more meaningful way. As the report highlights, a key challenge of the Bill is to ensure that not only program design, but program delivery and implementation includes a gender focus, and that proper monitoring and evaluation can be established.

In addition, the UK Government has yet to clarify whether the Bill applies to other government departments involved in aid delivery. This is pertinent for Australia given that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Department of Defence and other government agencies often also responsible for aid delivery programs.

3. The Bill strengthens the Australian Government's existing policy commitments

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has recently made commitments to prioritise gender equality. For example, in *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effective of Australia aid*⁴, the Department commits to ensuring that more than 80 per cent of aid investments, regardless of their objectives, will effectively address gender issues in their implementation. The Foreign Minister has also emphasised that gender equality is a major priority of the aid program.⁵

These commitments are important and very welcome, however policy commitments to gender equality do not automatically ensure that all aid programs are gender sensitive. By ensuring that aid officials consider gender equality when making decisions on aid programming, the proposed Bill will increase the likelihood that these policy commitments are put into practice.

Furthermore, as the Bill incorporates gender into law, Australia's commitment to gender equality will become a long-term priority of the Australian government, one which cannot be easily reversed.

³ One Year Down the Road: The Impact of International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, The GREAT Initiative & Plan International, 2014. www.thegreatinitiative.org.uk/report-launch-one-year-down-the-road-the-impact-of-the-international-development-gender-equality-act-2014/

⁴ Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effective of Australia aid, DFAT, June 2014. <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/making-performance-count-enhancing-the-accountability-and-effectiveness-of-australian-aid.aspx>

⁵ The new aid paradigm, Julie Bishop, 2014.

http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2014/jb_sp_140618.aspx

Address to United Nations: Security Council, New York, Julie Bishop, November 2014.

http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2014/jb_sp_141121.aspx?ministerid=4



4. The Bill will promote transparency and accountability within the aid program

The Bill will improve transparency and accountability within the Australian aid program due to the parliamentary oversight of spending and progress which provides a mechanism by which Parliament can measure how effectively the Government is considering gender equality in its aid programs.

The Bill also provides an opportunity for the Australian Government and other aid implementing partners to connect gender policy commitments to implementation and resourcing. ChildFund Australia believes that the proposed Bill's provision of ensuring aid programming and funding decisions are informed by how well aid projects commit to promoting gender equality will provide an impetus for other aid partners to prioritise gender in their development work.

5. The Bill provides an opportunity to support the work of Australian development NGOs on promoting gender equality

Australia's international non-government organisations (INGOs) have a long and successful track record of implementing development programs which promote gender equality, in countries within the Asia-Pacific region. ChildFund Australia believes the Bill provides an opportunity to highlight, within the Australian Parliament, the important work these NGOs are undertaking to ensure gender considerations are taken account into all aspects and sectors of aid programming.

Due to the extensive experience of Australian INGOs, ChildFund Australia, like World Vision, Care and Oxfam, also urges the Committee to consult with civil society while implementing this Bill. This will ensure that gender considerations are incorporated into the design and implementation of the aid program in the most effective way, and that gender equality outcomes are appropriately measured in the aid program.

Conclusion

ChildFund Australia supports the *International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015's* mandate to enshrine gender considerations into law and recommends that it be passed. We believe that the Bill provides an opportunity to strengthen the Australian Government's existing policy commitments on promoting gender equality and will ensure that factors perpetuating discrimination and disadvantage for women and girls are addressed within the aid program.