

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

**Inquiry into Papua New Guinea and the Island States
of the South West Pacific**

Submission

Submission no.

Submittor *Margaret Douglas
Chief Executive Officer*

Address *Save the Children Australia
PO Box 767
Hawthorn Vic 3122*

Tel: *[03] 9819 4722*

Fax: *[03] 9819 4733*

Email: *margaret.douglas@savethechildren.org.au*

No. of pages: *7*

Attachments *0*

SCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on Australia's key relationships in PNG and the Pacific region and draws on considerable experience in working cooperatively in the region to improve development outcomes.

This experience is underpinned by an understanding of the strategic importance of the region for Australia's broader interests. Indeed, one of Australia's key interests is arguably its very engagement, understanding and leadership in the region which combine to have significant flow on effects for Australia's reputation and standing in international arenas. There is value in this Inquiry focusing on these less tangible and indirect outcomes of engagement in PNG and the Pacific.

1. Organisation presenting this submission

Save the Children Australia [SCA] is a non-profit, non governmental, non sectarian organisation dedicated to upholding the rights reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Fundamental to our work is implementation of the key principles of survival, development, protection and participation. SCA is a member of the International **Save the Children** Alliance, which is the largest independent global movement for children.

Save the Children Australia has been actively engaged in improving development outcomes in PNG and the Pacific for over 15 years. Our programs in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu focus on long-term development and promoting children's rights, to ensure children have the means for survival, receive protection, and have access to nutrition, primary health care and basic education. Our mode of operation emphasises capacity building and local partnerships, and responsiveness to emerging trends identified by partners, communities and government agencies in the region.

2. Scope of the submission

Save the Children Australia's submission will cover:

- SCA experience in the region
- Recommendations for development cooperation approaches in the region

3. SCA experience in PNG and the Pacific

3.1 Overview of countries of operation

Save the Children Australia has been working in PNG and the Pacific for over 15 years. In Papua New Guinea our programs have been focused in the areas of community development, primary health and nutrition, and children's education. We work with government, UN and NGO partners, and jointly plan and manage programs with **Save the Children** New Zealand within an office based in the Eastern Highlands Provinces. **Save the Children** projects work with 15 partners in 5 provinces, as and where needs are identified.

Save the Children Australia has been working in Vanuatu since 1984, again particularly in areas of primary and village-based health care, community development and education and child rights training and advocacy. In this period SCA's program has matured and expanded and is widely recognised and respected by government and community representatives across the country. SCA has a committed approach to localisation of activities and management in country, which is particularly relevant to the problems of isolation and remoteness in the Pacific.

In the Solomon Islands, **SCA** has also been present for over 15 years, and significantly, remained in the country during the recent ethnic troubles with a program tailored specifically to the critical needs at that point of time. Working in areas of health and education in the past, SCA's programs now focus on the more strategic needs of marginalised youth and children, through capacity building and community education programs for peace-building with groups of youth, communities, women, and the church networks, and also supporting government and partner initiatives in child rights. SCA remains sensitive to the current conflicts and tensions in terms of responding to immediate and future needs of the people of the islands.

Recent analysis on our work in the Pacific has identified the differences and yet commonalities between the situations in the three countries. Some of the key issues influencing SCA's work in the region are:

- the remoteness and isolation of many communities and services
- cultural, linguistic and lifestyle diversity
- civil unrest, lawlessness and lack of confidence in the state
- weak and unresourced government structures and services
- rapidly growing populations and increasing disparities between urban and rural communities
- lack of focus on children's needs and issues.

3.2 Nature of partnerships – government, NGOs, CBOs and church groups

All SCA programs have a current 3-5 year country strategy plan which is the foundation and framework for the work we do in each country. Assessments and strategies are developed using a participatory process with in country staff, national staff, and key stakeholders in the country, from partners, government and NGOs, donors, children and beneficiary communities.

Within its mandate of fighting for children's rights and contributing to children's wellbeing in the country, SCA policy is to have programs that are responsive and appropriate to the relevant country situations, and that are planned and implemented in a participatory process through local partnerships.

SCA is also an active member in the ACFOA network of NGOs within Australia, and has seen the benefit of sharing information and skills between NGOs through Australian working groups on issues, e.g. the conflict and collaborative approaches to programming there.

3.3 SCA's approach and achievements

Lessons learned over the period of working in the Pacific have shown that certain approaches and policies do work in achieving our goals of development and human rights for children, but they take time, commitment, and resources. Some of the approaches we have found successful are:

- Strengthening government policy and service delivery, for example, the Community Based Rehabilitation program in Solomons, the Village Health Worker project in Vanuatu, and substantial work in all three countries to monitor and encourage CRC compliance;
- Developing and strengthening local partner capacity, through a capacity building and training based approach, long-term support to programs and partners (over a 5-10 year period if needs be such as with Ministries of health in Vanuatu, PNG and Solomons), and encouraging an analytical, learning environment for staff;
- Basing project development on community-level needs analysis and participatory involvement in ensuring appropriate programs, e.g. through our peer to peer youth program in Solomons, encouraging local management of programs, working through locally based long-term partners;
- Encouraging pilot and innovative programs which are often taken as models of best practice in approach by partners and institutionalised – such as developing child rights training and monitoring with Government and partners in Vanuatu and Solomons;
- Ensuring focused outcomes for children and communities through developing systems to support structured, well managed and monitored projects which fit within a rights based framework
- Working regionally where possible or appropriate, including in AusAID regional programs on child protection, working with other **Save the Children** Alliance partners (New Zealand and Fiji) on capacity building, training and experience sharing, and working closely with Australian networks for NGOs working in the Pacific (ACFOA working groups), to share knowledge and experience.
- Responsiveness to conflict, such as the development of appropriate programs in the Solomons, relief support for natural disasters in PNG and overall development of flexible and appropriate planning mechanisms.

SCA is clearly committed to working cooperatively and effectively in the region. Programming, is however, constrained by the historically low level of Australian government support for Australian NGO activities in PNG and the Pacific.

SCA recommends that the Inquiry acknowledges and supports the contributions of Australian NGO initiatives in the region, to both improving development outcomes and furthering Australian interests in the region, and seeks to identify mechanisms to increase the level of support and funding for programs of this kind.

4. Development cooperation relationships

Aims of current development cooperation programs in the Pacific focus on *reducing poverty*, with a particular emphasis on improving outcomes in the *health and education* sectors and on promoting *good governance*. SCA supports the broad directions of this program, while always encouraging a focus on issues of equity, and non-discrimination, ensuring that the needs of those who are marginalised and invisible are recognised and answered.

Specific areas that concern SCA are:

- The need to ensure realisation of rights for all, through employing principles of non-discrimination and equity, and increasing investment and focus in these areas, in particular for marginal and disadvantaged groups such as children and youth.
- Creating long-term change through creating new partnerships at all levels, putting people at the centre of programming and policy making, and ensuring their inputs and participation in the process.
- Focusing attention on the impact of policies and programs on people, in particular children and youth.

SCA is calling through the Inquiry for all government bodies, communities, international agencies, civil society organisations and donors to work together, to

- **Provide universal free primary education for all children without discrimination as agreed in 2000 at the World Forum on Education**
- **Introduce and enforce legislation to protect girls and boys from exploitation and abuse including the ratification of ILO Convention 182 on worst forms of child labour**
- **Hold to account those who violate the rights of children during armed conflicts, in particular by recruiting and using them as soldiers**
- **Ensure that all children under five in developing countries have access to basic, affordable healthcare in the most common life-threatening diseases**
- **Recognise the particular needs of children and take these into account in the design and implementation of all policies**

In addition, SCA recommends that:

A broad concept of good governance is adopted.

- Current approaches appear to focus solely on capacity to reform public institutions and on systems of government; ie, a focus on good 'government' rather than governance.

A broader perspective on good governance would allow a more cohesive view of the role of civil society in governance, recognising the multiple roles of non-state actors in community affairs and their central role in making government more effective, accountable and transparent. In this way, *strengthening civil society* should be seen as an important target for the aid program, rather than simply an alternative mechanism for aid delivery. This would serve to reinforce the rationale for a focus on civil society in the aid program, while also providing alternatives to support current initiatives to promote more effective and accountable governments.

A robust focus on good governance in development cooperation also requires consideration of innovative mechanisms for aid delivery to enable a level of participation by a broad range of providers – Australian and local NGOs, community groups and church groups.

Particular emphasis be placed on supporting initiatives for rural populations

- This requires a shift of emphasis from the current focus on support for and reform of central agencies to a network of decentralised communities and institutions. It is essential that aid initiatives be considered in light of current patterns of employment, location of economic activity and vulnerabilities across the region, with particular emphasis on the flow on effects for the vast majority of Pacific populations – those in rural areas.

Development cooperation be informed by a human rights based approach.

- Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that affect their freedoms and human dignity. A rights based approach to development cooperation shifts the focus from a sole concern with needs, to one which also encompasses accountability and legal and moral obligations.

While a rights based approach should inform aid initiatives generally, in the Pacific it is also essential that increased support be provided for initiatives to strengthen recognition, implementation and integration of principles of key human rights framework in public and community life. Examples include support for strengthening implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child [CRC] and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW].

5. Conclusion

The world has moved on since the 1990 World Summit for Children and has just met to discuss these issues eleven years down the road. However there are more children and more unanswered needs than before. The Pacific and PNG is rapidly becoming a region where many of the promises and commitments made over a decade ago have still not been answered and not enough progress made. We have in Australia a responsibility to answer to the needs of our neighbours in this region, and to take on commitments and responses that are appropriate, equitable and just.

***Save the Children Australia* is calling
for all partners and stakeholders in the region
to keep their promises to children.**