

CHILDREN FIRST

**Why we should and how we can prioritise
children in Australian Aid**

April 2019

For further information regarding this paper contact:

Mercy Juno

Senior Policy Advisor: Child Rights

Mercy.Juno@worldvision.com.au

Summary

The Australian aid program invests in six priority areas to contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. The six distinct areas range from infrastructure and trade to education and health, gender equality and empowering women and girls. Children are not a specific focus although they are beneficiaries of all the six areas.

World Vision Australia believes that children should be prioritised as a logical first step to development. Children not only make up half the world's poor, they are individuals with rights, citizens, consumers, the human capital of tomorrow dependent on adults for support, protection and for their welfare. Deliberately investing in children early and consistently monitoring the impact that aid policies and programs have on children will enable the Australian aid program to strengthen its contribution to the attainment of children's rights and to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. World Vision encourages the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to view children as partners and active contributors to development. Children should be prioritised, consulted and their perspectives considered in matters concerning them, in the same way the aid program intentionally considers women and people with a disability in the design and delivery of aid.

World Vision’s mandate to advocate for children

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by Christian values, the organisation works with the most vulnerable and believes that human rights and dignity are integral to Creation. World Vision was formed in 1950 to champion the dignity of orphaned children in Korea. World Vision Australia was established in 1966 and has been providing early childhood education and relief for children, their families and communities overseas and at home for more than half a century. The World Vision International Board endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and its [Optional Protocols](#) as guiding principles for our work.

World Vision recognises children as partners, participants and key stakeholders in international development. World Vision Australia’s recommendations on children in aid are grounded in evidence from our field work and guidance from the CRC on how governments should protect and provide for all children in their jurisdiction, through policies, laws and aid budgets that consider the best interest of children in all decision making. We also draw on and learn from examples of good practice from the policies of other donor countries.

World Vision Australia’s policy recommendations for change

World Vision Australia calls on the Australian Government to:

1. Develop a child rights strategy for the aid program and place a central focus on children by establishing a children’s rights desk to oversee the mainstreaming of child rights across the aid program and to ensure that all aid interventions consider their impact on children
2. Introduce child wellbeing as a metric for poverty reduction and ensure that at least 80% of investments of the Aid program, regardless of their objectives, effectively support, protect and empower children in their implementation
3. Identify and track how much public spending is allocated to ending violence against children (in the Pacific and Timor Leste) and scale up Australia’s funding

for ending violence against children

4. Ensure that grant recipients listen to and capture the views and experiences of children so that their perspectives can help inform the Australian aid program and policymaking at the local, national and global levels.

Why children should be focus of Australian Aid

Every dollar spent on children is an investment in the ‘future’ human capital of a nation. Under Article 4 of the CRC, Australia as a development aid donor state is obliged to work within the framework of international cooperation to help other states to implement the rights established under the CRC. As such, the CRC forms the framework for good international development assistance.

Children should be made an intentional focus of Australian Aid for four key reasons: children are more likely to live in poverty than adults; children experience inequality and poverty in different ways than adults; children have the right to be heard and listened to; and children have the right to be protected.

Children are more likely to live in poverty than adults

Children represent half of the world’s 1.3 billion people living in poverty,¹ yet they make up only one third of the population. World Bank and UNICEF data shows that children are the worst affected by poverty. Extreme poverty is measured at \$1.90 per person per day. Approximately 387 million, or 19.5% of the world’s children live in extreme poverty, compared to 9.2% of adults. It is important, therefore, that interventions to address poverty consider children as a priority target group in the same way that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “recognise that children are a priority in the fight against poverty”.²

Children experience inequality and poverty in different ways than adults

¹ [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#), 2018

² Child poverty, 2017 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-poverty/>

Children experience poverty differently than adults because their needs, opportunities and social situation are different. The effects of child poverty on development cannot be underestimated given that the foundation and building blocks of a person's life are laid in the first 1,000 days of life. Childhood is the period during which an individual's lifelong health, cognitive development and growth are shaped and determined.³ Childhood experiences of poverty often lead to stunting, mental health, behavioural and social problems that extend into adulthood.

Children growing up in poverty miss out on a great start to life. Regrettably, 56% of all children born today will grow up to be, at best, half as productive as they could be while 92% will grow up to be, at best, 75% as productive as they could be depending on where they are born and how they are raised.⁴ The World Bank advises that one of the [smartest investments](#) a country can make is to invest in children early⁵ to minimise intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Children have the right to be heard and listened to

Children are citizens deserving of rights, respect and a decent standard of living, as articulated in the CRC. Children's rights are a special set of human rights because children need special protection according to their evolving capabilities. The CRC is the most comprehensive statement on children's rights. It is legally binding under international law and has been commonly accepted by nearly all countries in the world.

Children are also consumers and users of infrastructure and services, especially education and health services. Children should be visible in the aid program's strategy and they should be consulted, directly and through child-focused agencies, to inform the priorities and policies of the aid program.

Children have the right to be protected

³ The first 1,000 days of life: The brain's window of opportunity. Sarah Cusick, PhD and Michael K. Georgieff, MD, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/958-the-first-1000-days-of-life-the-brains-window-of-opportunity.html>

⁴ Ending Extreme poverty: focus on children, https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_92826.html , p3

⁵ World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/earlyyears>

Each year, one billion children worldwide experience physical and humiliating punishment, sexual and emotional violence, child labour, child marriage or armed recruitment. Violence not only harms children but jeopardises their future survival, health and education. Children in the Pacific experience unprecedented high levels of violence including sexual abuse and neglect, most often in their own homes. A baseline study by UNICEF estimated the total costs of violence against children in the Asia-Pacific region at US\$ 60 billion or 2% of regional GDP in 2004.⁶

Currently, only around 2.5% of Australian Aid goes toward child-focused programs and even less is allocated to ending violence against children. In fact, the bulk funding to end violence against children has been committed by international NGOs through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and not because of prioritisation by the Department of Foreign Aid and Trade.⁷ Concerning too, is the fact that the Pacific governments are not systematically collecting data to determine the full extent of violence against children, and neither are they or Australia tracking the funding spent on programs that prevent or respond to violence against children.

Given the negative impact and high costs associated with physical, psychological and sexual violence against children today and in their adult lives, it is important to mainstream child protection and wellbeing targets and indicators in development. No sustainable development can take place when childhood abuse, neglect and violence are systemic.

How to make children a focus of Australian Aid

To become a child-sensitive aid program, the Australian aid strategy and framework must align with the aspirations of the CRC and the Sustainable Development Goals and mainstream child rights across all sectors. A child rights-based approach uses the four pillar standards and principles from the CRC and other international human rights instruments to guide behaviour, actions, policies and programs:

1. non-discrimination
2. the best interests of the child
3. the right to life, survival and development

⁶ Violence against children, United Nations, https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/economic_costs_of_vac_viewpoint

⁷ Counting Pennies: A review of official development assistance to end violence against children, https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Counting_Pennies_WEB_FINAL.pdf

4. the right to be heard and taken seriously and the child's right to be guided in the exercise of his/her rights by caregivers, parents and community members, in line with the child's evolving capacities.

Decisions made within the aid program must always consider impact on children and do what is best for children.

Learning from international experience

The Australian Government must be deliberate and purposeful in setting policies and should prioritise the most vulnerable to avoid “entrenching inequities for generations to come”.⁸ World Vision believes that the aid program can learn from CRC as well as international leaders, such as the Swedish Government, in prioritising children in development.

Associated with the CRC and the rights-based approach are various tools the aid program can use to assess the status of children, called [Child Rights Situation Analysis \(CRSA\)](#)⁹ and [Child Rights Impact Assessment \(CRIA\)](#)¹⁰. These are used to review impact of policies on children and vulnerable groups. In their guidance which is based on the 4 pillars of the CRC, UNICEF, the European Union and World Bank highlight what policy makers and program managers should consider, the questions they should ask and how to conduct CRSA and CRIA. Adopting a child-focused approach to analysing situations and assessing impact would go a long way towards ensuring children are protected and empowered through Australian Aid.

The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) takes a rights-based approach to development and has developed toolkits to help staff to develop and implement child-sensitive activities and policies. SIDA also purposely defines what is meant by *vulnerable groups*. The list includes women, girls, children and young people with disabilities and LGBTQ people. In its 2016 strategy, the Swedish Government stated that it “will work preventively to protect children in both peace and conflict”¹¹ and that the “children's right to protection from all

⁸ UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2016 <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2016/>

⁹ Save the Children, 31 July 2008, https://www.crin.org/en/docs/Child_Rights_Situation_Analysis_Final%5B1%5D.pdf

¹⁰ UNICEF, <https://www.childimpact.unicef-irc.org/en/psia-cria/child-centered-psias-unicef-world-bank-guidance-note>

¹¹ Aid policy framework, Swedish Aid, 2016 p27

forms of violence must be guaranteed to enable effective development”.¹² Australian aid must intentionally name children as a priority group befitting special protection.

In addition to prioritising children, the Swedish development approach recognises them as stakeholders, actors and partners in development. For example, SIDA notes:

*Children and young persons are important rights-holders and actors and must be included in the decision-making and implementation processes of building society. In measures concerning children, development cooperation is to be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the four fundamental child rights principles: the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, respect for the views of the child and the child’s right to life, survival and development. It is important to highlight a child rights perspective in dialogue with partner countries and to draw attention to children who are forced to flee.*¹³

SIDA uses the acronym P.L.A.N.E.T.¹⁴ to organise and prompt what should be considered when applying a human-rights based approach to development cooperation. The child-focused, right-based approach considers:

1. **Participation:** Children have a right to be listened to and considered in all decision-making that affects them
2. **Links to human rights:** Children’s rights are considered in the context of legal instruments at the national, regional and international levels – such as the CRC and African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child
3. **Accountability:** The State Party to the CRC is accountable for protecting the best interest of the child, and this is taken into consideration in all matters affecting children and ensuring their right to survival and development
4. **Non-discrimination:** States are obliged to realise children's rights without discrimination of any kind
5. **Empowerment:** States should seek to strengthen the capacity of children, their care takers, and people working with and for children to realise children's rights.

¹² Ibid, p29

¹³ Swedish Government, Skr.2016/17:60 p21

https://www.government.se/49a184/contentassets/43972c7f81c34d51a82e6a7502860895/skr-60-engelsk-version_web.pdf

¹⁴ Human Rights Based Approach at SIDA, Children’s Rights, <https://www.sida.se/English/partners/resources-for-all-partners/methodological-materials/human-rights-based-approach-at-sida/childrens-rights/>

Equally, empowerment is about strengthening the capacity of those responsible to implement children's rights, including the government and NGO workforce

6. **Transparency:** Ensuring that children have access to age appropriate user-friendly information

The Government of [Finland](#) also prioritises children and models its international aid on the requirements of the CRC. As far back as 2005, Finland [developed guidelines that Australia can draw from on how to use child impact assessments to consider the best interest of children](#) in decision making.¹⁵ In 2018 shadow report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child World Vision and a Working Group of child-focused INGOs note that while the Korean Government identifies children's rights as one of the foundations of its international development cooperation nothing has been done to develop and implement a child rights-based approach, strategy and budget to concretize the vision. World Vision and the Working Group go on to outline how the Government of Korea can uphold the CRC and use it as a framework to achieve children's rights in international development. The INGO Working Group's analysis and step by step outline of what the Government of Korea needs to do and how, to honour and progress children's rights through the Korean Aid Program can be transposed to Australian Aid.

Breakout box: The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The aid program should be situated and fully immersed within a human rights-based framework.

This intention begins with the aid program acknowledging the CRC and embedding it across all its thematic areas. The CRC is a treaty, as well as an action-oriented framework, complete with guidance on implementation and indicators to measure progress.

1. **Non-discrimination:** The Convention applies to all children regardless of race, religion, gender, language or ability.
2. **Best interests of the child:** The best interest of children must be the primary concern in making decision that may affect them.
3. **Right to life, survival, and development:** Children have the right to live, and governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

¹⁵ Child Impact Assessment, http://www.raddabarnen.ax/application/files/7614/5623/7988/Child_Impact_Assessment.pdf

4. **Respect for the views of the child:** Children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account; this Convention encourages adults to listen to children and involve them in decision making.

Examples of good practice in prioritising and mainstreaming children's rights in policy and law:

- a) **Sweden** will be the first country in the world to fully incorporate the CRC into domestic law as per requirement on 1st January 2020.¹⁶ Swedish aid prioritises children.
- b) [The European Commission](#) established a coordinator for the rights of the child. The Commission Coordinator [Valeria Setti](#) harmonises the work across departments to make sure that the rights of the child are properly considered in all relevant policies and actions.¹⁷
- c) In 2018 [World Vision](#) alongside other child focused INGOs produced a user-friendly policy focused CRC alternative report giving a step by step account of what it means to prioritise children and [how the Government of Korea can achieve this through development cooperation](#).¹⁸

Develop a strategy to increase the visibility of children

Establishing a child rights desk in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will help mainstream child rights across Australian Aid and indicate leadership and commitment. The child rights desk will be a point of accountability for children's rights and development. It will oversee the mainstreaming of child rights into the aid program and ensure that the impact of aid policies and interventions on children are given due consideration. The child rights desk

¹⁶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to become law in Sweden, <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/news/2018/jun/18/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child-to-become-law-in-sweden/> and <https://www.government.se/articles/2018/04/questions-and-answers-about-incorporating-un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child-into-swedish-law/>

¹⁷ EU action on the rights of the child: How and why the European Commission carries out policies and provides funding to protect the rights of the child. The European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-action-rights-child_en

¹⁸ The Rights of the Child and International Development Cooperation, Alternative Report on the Republic of Korea's Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child By Working Group on the Rights of the Child of KCOC Oct 2018, <file:///ausodom/wva/users16/jumom/WINDOWS/Desktop/WVA%20Korea%20child%20rights%20in%20international%20aid.pdf>

will also help to develop indicators, systems and methods which the Department can use to evaluate success.

The Official Development Assistance evaluation of aid programs notes Australia's success in making gender and disability inclusion measurable and crosscutting priority issues. In a similar vein, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should look to use similar, intentional, planned, targeted and measurable strategies to advance children's rights.

Develop a target and track progress

World Vision Australia calls on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop a child rights strategy with corresponding measures to track progress made in the realisation of children's rights.

For the aid program to be effective and to see a sustainable return on its investment, children's rights and wellbeing must be accounted for in the efforts to end poverty and injustice. At World Vision we address context-specific causes of child vulnerability, combining up to five sectoral approaches (child protection and participation, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, education and livelihoods) within a child-focused, community-led development model. Our child wellbeing aspirations are informed by children's rights and incorporate the intentions and expected outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The introduction of a child wellbeing metric into the aid program will help enable a holistic approach to development that considers all key stakeholders. Policymakers should consider the best interest of children in all matters concerning them. The economic and lived experiences of children, their caregivers and communities should inform policy decisions and allow children's perspectives to be heard and incorporated into policy. The aid program can easily tap into the opinions of children by making sure that their aid delivery partners who directly engage with or run children's programs report on their work with children. Reports can incorporate age appropriate perspectives such as drawings and quotations from children.

In conclusion, World Vision believes that the Aid program will be strengthened if it draws on the four general principles of the CRC to prioritise children in development and to ensure that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled through sound policies and programs.

Key resources and references

1. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx)
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
2. Ending Extreme Poverty: a focus on children, https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Ending_Extreme_Poverty_A_Focus_on_Children_Oct_2016.pdf
3. [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#), 2018
4. Child poverty, 2017 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-poverty/>
5. The first 1,000 days of life: The brain's window of opportunity. Sarah Cusick, PhD and Michael K. Georgieff, MD, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/958-the-first-1000-days-of-life-the-brains-window-of-opportunity.html>
6. Ending Extreme poverty: focus on children,
https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_92826.html
7. Early Years, World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/earlyyears>
8. Violence against children, United Nations,
https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/economic_costs_of_vac_viewpoint
9. Counting Pennies: A review of official development assistance to end violence against children, https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Counting_Pennies_WEB_FINAL.pdf
10. State of the World's Children, UNICEF 2016 <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2016/>
11. <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/news/2018/jun/18/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child-to-become-law-in-sweden/>
12. Child Rights Situation Analysis, Save the Children, 31 July 2008,
https://www.crin.org/en/docs/Child_Rights_Situation_Analysis_Final%5B1%5D.pdf
13. UNICEF, <https://www.childimpact.unicef-irc.org/en/psia-cria/child-centered-psias-unicef-world-bank-guidance-note>
14. SIDA Gender Toolbox, <https://www.sida.se/English/partners/resources-for-all-partners/methodological-materials/gender-tool-box/>
15. Aid policy framework, Swedish Aid, Swedish Government, 2016
https://www.government.se/49a184/contentassets/43972c7f81c34d51a82e6a7502860895/skr-60-engelsk-version_web.pdf
16. Human Rights Based Approach at SIDA, Children's Rights,
<https://www.sida.se/English/partners/resources-for-all-partners/methodological-materials/human-rights-based-approach-at-sida/childrens-rights/>
17. Child Impact Assessment, Sirpa Taskinen, Raddabarnen,
http://www.raddabarnen.ax/application/files/7614/5623/7988/Child_Impact_Assessment.pdf