



Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper 2017

Submission by
Marie Stopes International

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About Marie Stopes International

Marie Stopes International (MSI) is a results-driven, not-for-profit social business specialising in the provision of high-quality reproductive and maternal healthcare to communities in 37 countries globally. Our services prevent unnecessary maternal deaths and make an impact on the lives of millions of people every year. In 2015, more than 20 million women globally were using their choice of contraception supplied to them by MSI, averting an estimated 6.3 million unintended pregnancies and 18,100 maternal deaths, and saving AU\$418 million in direct healthcare costs.

Support for Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper

MSI recognises the achievements of Australia's foreign policy in recent years, particularly under the Australian aid program. As a development partner, we've seen Australian investment in family planning yield tangible benefits for women and their communities. In 2015 alone, DFAT support to MSI helped contribute to programs that averted over half a million unintended pregnancies and more than 194,600 unsafe abortions in the Asia Pacific region.

We also appreciate the Government's desire to consolidate strategies and efforts, and identify high impact approaches that will promote peace and stability in our region, and ensure Australia's prosperity, security and influence into the future. Family planning is a key driver in improving health, driving equitable economic development and poverty reduction¹, and supporting peace and security². As experts in reproductive healthcare, MSI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Foreign Policy White Paper, and to demonstrate why family planning should remain a priority issue in Australian foreign policy.

Response to Key Question 5: Australia Confronts a Range of Strategic, Security and Transnational Challenges.

→ *How can Australia best deal with **instability** beyond our borders? How can our foreign policy, including our overseas development assistance program, support a more **prosperous, peaceful and stable** region? How should our international engagement work to protect Australia against transnational security threats, such as terrorism?*

Family Planning and Prosperity

- **Health:** Prosperity starts with good health. For half the world's population, pregnancy can be a major source of ill-health. Multiple, successive births, particularly amongst young women, significantly increase the risk of pregnancy-related deaths and disability. Family planning is widely recognised as one of the most cost-effective approaches to improving maternal health³. Ensuring access to comprehensive, high quality contraception alongside quality maternal and newborn healthcare for all women with a need for these services would reduce unintended pregnancies by 70%, resulting in 194,000 fewer maternal deaths and 2.24 million fewer neonatal deaths globally per year⁴.
- **Education, Employment and Empowerment:** Wealth and prosperity flourishes when citizens are educated and employed. Adolescent pregnancy however, is a major contributing factor to poor school attendance and completion. Reducing unintended pregnancies, particularly amongst girls, supports improved educational and employment opportunities⁵. In fact, for every year a girl past the age of nine spends in school, her income potential increases 20%⁶. Affording women and girls good education and employment in turn contributes to empowering women by supporting agency over and contribution to household and community income. One study has illustrated that women who have access to and use family planning have around 40% more family assets than those who do not⁷.

¹ Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

² Potts M, Mahmood A, Graves AA. *The pill is mightier than the sword*. *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 2015; 4(8):507–510.

³ AusAID. *Family Planning and the Aid Program: Guiding Principles*. August 2009; and Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

⁴ Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

⁵ Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

⁶ USAID *Youth in Development Policy. Realising the Demographic Opportunity*. 2012

⁷ Gribble, J., Voss, M. *Family Planning and Economic Well-Being: New Evidence From Bangladesh*. 2009 Population Reference Bureau

- **Equitable Economic Growth:** Whole economies also benefit from communities that are able to access family planning services, through supporting the greater participation of women in the workforce and ensuring a healthier population. A number of countries, particularly in Asia, have demonstrated this ‘demographic dividend’ – where a growing workforce with fewer dependents can lead to huge economic growth, in some cases in the space of just one generation⁸. Women also reinvest up to 90% of their incomes back into their families, creating a positive cycle of women’s empowerment, and prosperous communities and nations⁹.

Family Planning, Peace and Stability

- **Women, Peace and Security:** The importance of ensuring women’s leadership and participation in peace-building and national policy development is globally understood¹⁰. When women are equally represented in decision-making and negotiations, outcomes are more effective and there is a greater chance of deescalating violence and preventing armed conflict¹¹. However, beyond establishing equal opportunity policy, ensuring women are able to meaningfully participate in decision-making from community level right through to the highest level of government requires they be empowered to do so. By improving women’s health, education and employment, family planning plays a key role in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment by creating the basic enabling environment for women to achieve their full potential¹².
- **Extremism and Insurgency:** A number of countries globally, including those in the Indo-Pacific region, have large and growing youth populations. If coupled with policy to support access to family planning and declining fertility, these countries are poised to benefit from the ‘demographic dividend’. However, citizens, particularly young people, also need to be empowered, engaged and nurtured to ensure lasting peace and security. Countries experiencing large ‘youth bulges’ – particularly those with high school drop-out rates, and significant unemployment – are more at risk of conflict and violent extremism¹³. In fact, 86% of all countries that have experienced internal conflict have majority populations under 30 years old¹⁴.

There is a need to create environments that support conditions to achieve the ‘demographic dividend’, and reduce those that foster disenfranchisement. Although boys are at a greater risk of recruitment to violent groups and networks, women’s role in reducing conflict is well regarded. As such, interventions should ensure both boys and girls have the best start in life, are healthy and educated, and are empowered to participate positively to their communities. Through improving health, school retention and employment, family planning is a powerful precursor to realising women’s empowerment and gender equality, and assuring women’s and girls’ roles in civic life and the promotion of peace and stability.

- **Climate Change:** A rapidly changing climate and ensuing scarcities of basic resources are and will continue to be major issues for peace and security, particularly for countries in the Indo-Pacific region. While climate change is primarily caused by unsustainable consumption and production patterns of the world’s richer countries, high population growth in the world’s poorer countries makes it difficult for the most vulnerable communities to adapt to the effects of climate change. Fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights – including access to family planning – can create more economically and socially resilient communities better able to adapt to change¹⁵. Although the linkages are complex, increasing access to rights based, voluntary family planning is a cost-effective climate compatible development strategy.

⁸ Bloom D, Williamson J. *Demographic Transitions and Economic Miracles in Emerging Asia*. World Bank Economic Review. 1998:12

⁹ USAID *Youth in Development Policy. Realising the Demographic Opportunity*. 2012

¹⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

¹¹ M. Caprioli. *Primed for Violence: The role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict*. 2005. International Studies Quarterly 49

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, *Gender equality and women’s empowerment strategy*. 2016; and Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

¹³ USAID *The Development Response to Violent and Extremism and Insurgency Policy*. 2011; and Potts M, Mahmood A, Graves AA. *The pill is mightier than the sword*. Int J Health Policy Manag. 2015; 4(8):507–510.

¹⁴ USAID *Youth in Development Policy. Realising the Demographic Opportunity*. 2012

¹⁵ Bremner, J et al. *Building Resilience through Family Planning: a Transformative Approach for Women, Families and Communities*. 2015. Population Reference Bureau.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Family planning is a key driver of women's empowerment and gender equality. As noted by the Foreign Minister, gender equality is "one of the best ways to promote economic growth and to achieve peace and security"¹⁶ and is "integral to advancing Australia's national interests"¹⁷. Because of its far reaching benefits, family planning is already articulated as a priority intervention in Australia's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* and in Australia's overarching aid program policy *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*. It also supports the strategies outlined in the Australian Government's *Defence White Paper 2016*, with reference to deterring extremism, and supporting the security of Australia's neighbours. This highlights family planning as an important investment towards ensuring an integrated approach to foreign, trade and development policy.

MSI applauds the Australian Government's recognition and support for family planning. However, 225 million women globally still have an unmet need for family planning, resulting in the needless deaths of hundreds of thousands of women each year, and stifling opportunities¹⁸. To further strengthen Australia's Foreign Policy for the promotion of prosperity, peace and stability globally, regionally and for Australia, we believe Australia could:

- 1. Increase support for sexual and reproductive health and family planning programs delivered through the Australian aid program.** Despite its prominent feature in a number of existing foreign policy documents, family planning funding only accounts for about 0.7% of the ODA budget¹⁹, and is decreasing²⁰. Moreover, family planning is widely regarded as one of the most cost-effective, high impact interventions to improve health, drive inclusive economic development and reduce poverty. It is estimated that each dollar invested in family planning can yield up to \$120 in social, economic and environmental benefits²¹. A greater, significant investment in this area would have both immediate and long-term development benefits that would contribute directly to promoting prosperity, peace and stability in the region and beyond.
- 2. Explore mechanisms to integrate and/or mainstream family planning through non-health development programs, such as climate change and youth development/engagement programs.** Although a complex issue, family planning should be considered as an integral component of climate adaptation and resilience-building. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has already recognised family planning as a climate adaptation strategy, as has the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)²². Reproductive health should also be considered as part of youth development programs aimed at strengthening youth engagement and combatting extremism, an approach already embedded in the United States Agency for International Development's Youth Development Policy²³. Australian support in these areas, especially to countries in the Indo-Pacific region that are already experiencing the effects of climate change and a large youth bulge, could help foster greater peace and stability for the region.

¹⁶ Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Women's Day 2014

¹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*. 2016.

¹⁸ Singh, S et al. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014*. Guttmacher Institute.

¹⁹ According to expenditure figures reported by DFAT in 2014/15 for specific DAC codes (13010, 13020, 13030, 13040, 13081) multiplied by internationally agreed percentages, the amount attributed to family planning was AU\$33,966,980 as a proportion of total ODA spend of AU\$4,620.7million (0.7%).

²⁰ The 2014/15 figure is a decline from DFAT 2013/14 data for the same DAC codes which attributed AU\$46,445,237 to family planning as a proportion of total ODA spend of AU\$5,048,9million (0.9%). Official DFAT figures for 2015/16 are unavailable, but a report by FP2020 indicates that Australia's family planning spend has declined further to AU\$17,000,000 (<http://progress.familyplanning2020.org/>)

²¹ <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/post-2015-consensus/economist>

²² IPCC *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* Chapter 11 Human Health: Impacts, Adaptation, and Co-Benefits. http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap11_FINAL.pdf

²³ USAID *Youth in Development Policy. Realising the Demographic Opportunity*. 2012