Australia has been providing assistance to developing countries for many decades but it was in 1974 that the government established a single body to manage the aid program. While the shape and amount of our aid has varied over time, our commitment to promoting peace and prosperity and alleviating poverty has not wavered.

Our humanitarian and emergency aid has helped save millions of lives in areas devastated by natural disaster and conflict. We have provided people with clean water, better health and education, sustenance, employment, economic opportunity, better governance and law and order.

Driving peace and security, prosperity and poverty reduction is no small feat. It can often take years to see results. Through these photographs we can see how the Australian aid program has evolved. As a nation, we can be proud of the way we have helped break cycles of poverty and given hope and support to people in our neighbourhood and further afield.

Australian Aid is a badge by which Australians are recognised internationally, for which we are valued and of which we should be proud.
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

The post-World War II period was one of great change. Many countries were emerging from colonization. With little planning or preparation, many faced shortages in capital and capacity. The notion of aid came from past experiences and the Marshall Plan to be inaugurated in January 1949. United States President Truman noted that "more than half of the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people.”

For Australia, which was beginning to establish a diplomatic presence in its neighbourhood, the answer lay, in part, in the Colombo Plan.
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

Above: A subsidised milk program in Bombay and Calcutta, funded by the Colombo Plan, 1958. Photo: DFAT

Four 'sheep's foot' rollers for earth-packing work on Ceylon's (now Sri Lanka) irrigation development leaving Melbourne, Victoria. Six rollers were supplied by the Australian Government under the Colombo Plan. The rollers, with spare parts, cost £16,632. Photo: Australian News and Information Bureau

Colombo Plan scholar, Sasikashem Tongyonk and Supark Bhanich Supapol of Thailand studying at the University of Melbourne, 1957. Photo: DFAT

Indonesian Colombo Plan students, Boediono, Abdillah Toha, Roesenosoe Samdi, and Zaid Afiff at the University of Western Australia, 1964.

Above right: The inaugural ministerial meeting of the Colombo Plan, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1950. The Australian Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender, is second from the left in the front row. Photo: Commonwealth of Australia

Australia's Foreign Minister, Percy Spender, takes tea with the leader of the UK delegation, Lord MacDonald (left) and Ceylon's Minister of Finance, Junius Richard Jayewardene (right), at the first meeting of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee, Sydney, May 1950. Photo: DFAT

Right: The Colombo Plan’s 2,000th student, Che Ummi Kelsom Binte Maidin of Malaysia, a nursing student in Australia in 1957. Photo: DFAT

1950s

The Colombo Plan was launched in 1951 as a cooperative venture for the economic and social advancement of the peoples of South and Southeast Asia.

Percy Spender, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, argued that Australia's future depends upon the political stability of our Asian neighbours, upon the economic wellbeing of these people, and upon the development of understanding and friendly relations between Australia and Asia.

While Australian money went into capital projects, it was the student component that had the highest profile. Over 35 years, about 40,000 young people from 49 countries came to study in Australia. Many would later become leaders in their countries. A new Colombo Plan initiative launched in 2013 builds on the success of its predecessor, providing opportunities for Australian students to work, study and undertake work experience in the region.

Australia's Foreign Minister, Percy Spender, visits the headquarters of the British Information Service in Penang, Malaya. Photo: Australian News and Information Bureau
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the international debate on aid grew. Australia was part of this debate through its membership of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and of UN agencies such as UNICEF and the United Nations Development Program.

Following the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence and the famine that followed, world attention was drawn to food aid. As a leading producer of food, Australia began increasing food aid, especially wheat, to individual countries and to the World Food Programme.

40 years ago, as Papua New Guinea was preparing to become independent, the Australian Government established one agency to administer its official overseas aid program. 1974 is therefore regarded as the beginning of Australia’s official overseas aid program.

Above: Australia’s 10,000th Colombo Plan Student, Rally-Mary-Kate Mon, is welcomed to Australia in 1971. Ms Mon studied a PhD in Parasitology at the University of Queensland. Photo: DFAT

Australian officials studying Australian university servicing and public relations in Canberra, 1977. The course was arranged by the Australian Government’s International Training Institute and financed by the government’s overseas aid program. Photo: Malcolm Lindsay

Village access road being constructed in Thailand as part of TARIP – the Thai Australia Rural Improvement Project, 1977. Photo: DFAT

Australian High Commissioner, Philip Flood, and Minister of State for Forest, Fisheries and Livestock of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Reazuddin Ahmed, inspect a batch of donated baby cockerels at Dacca airport. 2,500 cockerels were donated to the government of Bangladesh by the Australian Freedom From Hunger Campaign, May 23, 1975. Photo: DFAT

Above-right: Papua New Guinea’s first Prime Minister, Michael Somare, with the Australian High Commissioner, T.K. Critchley (left), and the Australian Prime Minister, E.G. Whitlam, at independence day celebrations at Port Moresby on 16 September, 1975. Photo: NAA

Right: Australian soil research scientist, Graeme Hunter, supervises the work of a Thai scientist at a soils laboratory in North East Thailand under the Tung Kula Ronghai Land Development Project. Photo: DFAT
By the mid-1980s, Australia was supporting about 500 projects in more than 40 developing countries. These ranged from large-scale, long-term regional programs in South-East Asia to small-scale projects at the village level in the Pacific and individual initiatives, such as small agricultural improvement projects.

Education and training remained an important part of the aid program during the 1980s. In one year alone, 3,600 students from 70 developing countries were invited to study at Australian institutions or in technical training courses. Most of the students came from South-East Asia.

Australia continued to support the work of non-government organisations who were involved at village level on projects targeting the poorest and most disadvantaged groups. It also supported a volunteer program that began in 1951, when Australia’s Herb Feith first volunteered in Indonesia. This was the beginning of the volunteer program that continues today.

**Above:** Reinforcing bars are tied at a pump station in Laos as a part of Australia’s Agricultural Pumps Project, 1980. Photo: DFAT

**Distribution of high protein biscuits by a PMI Alovette helicopter hired with Australian Aid money at Dili, Timor Leste, 1980. Photo: DFAT**

**Australian sheep husbandry expert, Bruce G. Halbert, with Ko Bo Lay, U Aung Kyi and U Myint Wai at the Meiktila sheep project in Burma. Photo: John Tanner/ Australian News and Information Service.**

**Australian workers help rebuild a home in Tonga, following a cyclone in 1982. Photo: DFAT**

**Australian right: A cataract patient in Solomon Islands with special glasses made for him in wood. The patient was treated during the Australian Eye Surgery Team’s annual visit, 1980. Photo: DFAT**

**Australian volunteer graduate, Lyn Erickson, of Breeza, near Gunnedah, NSW with Solo Rehabilitation Centre patients using Australian wheelchairs and walking machine, Solo, Indonesia. Photo: John Tanner/ Australian Information Service.**

**Right: Small landowner, Yuan Bao Liu with his prize ram on his farm at Qin Shui Guo village, Yunnan Province, China, 1987. Through Australian assistance in improved pasture and grazing programs, Yuan Bao Liu doubled his income within a year. Photo: DFAT.**
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

During 1983-84, the first major review of the whole aid program was undertaken by Sir Gordon Jackson.

"Aid is given primarily for humanitarian reasons to alleviate poverty through economic and social development: it is the response of the wealthy industrial countries to the needs of hundreds of millions of people who live harsh and materially meagre lives. Aid also complements strategic economic and foreign policy interests, and by helping developing countries to grow, it provides economic opportunities for Australia."

As a result of the Jackson Review, Australia's aid program began concentrating its resources on fewer sectors and in areas where it had most expertise. Papua New Guinea and the Pacific remained the largest recipient of Australian aid, followed by South East Asia, India and China.

Funding to non-government organisations, whose work complemented the work of the official aid program, was increased. Australia's aid program reached $1 billion in 1984-85.

1980s

Above: Inside the particle-free atmosphere of the Tianjin Medical Instrument Corporation's No3 Factory, China, 1987. The plastic blood pack manufacturing plant was established under the Australia-China Technical Cooperation Program. Photo: DFAT

A malnourished child in Kampuchea (now Cambodia), 1988. Following the devastating drought in Khmer Rouge-controlled areas, the Australian Government supplied emergency food supplies through the UN World Food Programme. Photo: DFAT

Above right: A young woman draws water from a well installed by Australia's village water supply project, Indonesia, 1984. Photo: DFAT

Right: A young woman draws water from a well installed by Australia's village water supply project, Indonesia, 1984. Photo: DFAT


Commencement of bridge-building in Northern Samar, Philippines, 1988. Photo: DFAT


Right: A young woman draws water from a well installed by Australia's village water supply project, Indonesia, 1984. Photo: DFAT
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

By the early 1990s, there was a greater focus in the aid program on sectors such as education, water, agriculture and infrastructure. The reach of Australia’s aid was extended through support of UN agencies, development banks and non-government organisations.

The 1990s was a time of organisational and policy transformation for the aid program, with growing technical capacity and focus on effectiveness.

There was greater recognition of the cumulative benefits of investing in women and the aid program designed projects to better meet the needs of women and girls.

Throughout the decade, Australia’s support of long-standing commitments provided humanitarian aid to people in the grip of natural disasters. Australia’s response to the drought in Papua New Guinea in 1997-98 was an early example of large-scale cooperation between the aid program and the Australian Defence Force.

Above: Food aid to Somalia. In 1992 Australia gave more than $2.7 million in emergency food aid through the World Food Programme (WFP). Photo: DFAT

Delivering food aid following the drought in PNG 1997. Photo: Darren Hilder, Australian Defence

Opening day, Sur Baher Preparatory Girls School, Palestine, August 1992. Funded under Australia’s Education & Health Rehabilitation Project, the school gave girls an opportunity for an education they may not otherwise have received. Photo: DFAT

Girls collecting fresh water from the new village water system, Luang Prabang, Laos, 1991. The water system was installed through Australia’s freshwater village project. Photo: DFAT

Above right: The Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, Suva, 1992. Since 1989 Australia has supported the Centre to provide crisis counselling, legal advice, advocacy, training, education and awareness, and other support services for women survivors of violence. Photo: DFAT

Right: A cow is drenched in Lombok Indonesia, with the support of Australia, 1991. Photo: DFAT
The 1990s was also a decade where Australia-funded school development made a big difference. Hundreds of single-lane bridges and steel bridges were being constructed in many parts of the Philippines, giving people better connectivity to markets.

Equally impressive, but on a larger scale, was the Friendship Bridge, funded by Australia. The connected Myanmar and Laos and brought a considerable diplomatic and economic advantage to both countries.

'The thing which I shall remember most is not the several kilometres of bunting, nor the majesty of the event dignified by the presence of three heads of state and two heads of government, but that people came. They made real the symbol, coming together. A Friendship Bridge,' recalls Ellen Shipley, an Australian aid employee.

The 1997 Simons Report on the aid program, 'One Clear Objective,' refined the focus of the aid program on poverty reduction and sustainable development in Australia's national interest.

The Friendship Bridge in construction, 1993. The bridge, which was built and funded by Australia, has had significant economic, trade, human, and cultural benefits for the two countries and has become an enduring symbol of friendship and cooperation between Australia, Thailand, and Laos. Photo: DFAT

Bridge being built in Indonesia by the Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation with funding from Australia. Photo: Commonwealth of Australia

Above right: Prime Minister Paul Keating, with the Prime Minister of Thailand, Chuan Leekpai, and the Prime Minister of Lao People's Democratic Republic, at the opening of the Australia-funded Friendship Bridge between Lao and Thailand, 8 April 1994. Photo: Commonwealth of Australia

Right: The Friendship Bridge. In its first year, around 110,000 people crossed the bridge and total trade was $1.8 million, which doubled in 2003. Photo: DFAT
Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

The 2000s

As the new century began, governance emerged as a priority for the aid program. There was growing evidence that improving a country’s capacity to plan, budget for and deliver basic services expected by its citizens, including law and justice, would make a major difference to growth and poverty reduction. The growth in governance in Australia’s aid program was strongest in Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Indonesia and the Pacific.

With global issues becoming more complex, especially after 9/11 and the Bali bombings, the aid program began drawing on the expertise of other government departments in a “whole of government” approach to aid delivery. This put Australia at the forefront of international practice in responding to the needs of fragile and conflict-affected states.

Australia’s aid reached $2.2 billion in 2004-05.
Above: Shirinae’s, a 35 year-old widow, receives 25kg fortified atta (durum wheat flour) under Australian Aid to Bangladesh. Photo: WFP/Shehzad Noorani Bangladesh August 2004.

Australian volunteer Tanya McQueen working as a Rural Women’s Program Adviser in Afghanistan, 2003. Photo: Tanya McQueen, AVI / DFAT

A patient is examined by doctors at a clinic run by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), Sudan 2005. Photo: Sven Torfinn/Panos

Mine clearance signs, Pailin Cambodia, 2006. Australia is committed to working towards a world free of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

Above right: A Tibetan grandmother who suffers from iodine deficiency nurses her grandson who has been protected from similar circumstances through Australia’s Iodine Deficiency Disorders Elimination Project, 2000-2004. Following the program, the rate of the iodine deficiency syndrome, cretinism, in Tibet was reduced to zero. Photo: Professor C.J. Eastman

Right: Opening of the My Thuan Bridge, Vietnam 2005. The My Thuan Bridge, also known as My Thuan Bridge or my Thuan Bridge to comply with the Vietnamese name, was officially opened on 21 May 2005. The bridge was a joint venture between the governments of Australia and Vietnam. The bridge, crossing the Mekong River, was one of the most challenging projects for the Australian aid program, given the width of the river and the nature of the river currents. The construction involved up to 200 Australians and about 1,500 Vietnamese. The majority of these workers were given on-the-job training. Some engineers received formal training in bridge design, construction and management in Vietnam and Monash University in Australia. By 2005, the My Thuan Bridge was already carrying nearly four times more people and freight than did the ferries it replaced. The construction of the bridge provided important training for subsequent projects, particularly in bridge design and management.

Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

On 21 May 2000, the My Thuan Bridge, 125 kilometres south-west of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, was officially opened. The bridge was a joint venture between the governments of Australia and Vietnam. The bridge, crossing the Mekong River, was one of the most challenging projects for the Australian aid program, given the width of the river and the nature of the river currents. The construction involved up to 200 Australians and about 1,500 Vietnamese. The majority of these workers were given on-the-job training. Some engineers received formal training in bridge design, construction and management in Vietnam and Monash University in Australia. By 2005, the My Thuan Bridge was already carrying nearly four times more people and freight than did the ferries it replaced. The construction of the bridge provided important training for subsequent projects, particularly in bridge design and management.
During the early 2000s, development issues became increasingly intertwined with broader regional and international priorities. Issues related to regional security, terrorism, trade, economic integration, illicit drugs, transnational crime, and transboundary threats posed by communicable diseases such as SARS and 'Avian influenza.

As with HIV/AIDS, SARS and Avian influenza had the potential to cross borders and create widespread illness and death, especially in poorer and more vulnerable communities. These and other issues, such as the conservation of Pacific fisheries, were too large and too complex to be addressed by single nation states. Australia's aid program began increasingly collaborating at a regional and international level to address these threats.

Below: A farmer prepares his field for planting near8 Nathenje on the outskirts of Lilongwe, Malawi. For many years Australia has used its expertise and experience to help improve food security in African countries. Photo: Stephen Morrison/DFAT

Secondary students learn about HIV. Phu Cu Province, Vietnam, 2004. Photo: Alice Pagliano/DFAT

Above right: A woman washes her hands using water collected from the village gravity flow taps at the NEWAH WASH water project in Puware Shikhar, Udayapur District, Nepal, 2013. Photo: Jim Holmes/DFAT

Ugandan women celebrate hope through the help they have received at a legal aid clinic in Kawempe which raises public awareness and protects the legal rights of people; funded by DFAT/ANZ. The clinic is run by PLAN Uganda with assistance from Australia. 2009. Photo: Kim Biedrzycki/DFAT


Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid
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On Sunday 26 December 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami claimed more than 220,000 lives and left behind thousands in need of assistance across Sri Lanka and India. Among the worst-affected countries were Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. The tsunami hit Indonesia’s Aceh province particularly hard, where the city of Banda Aceh was destroyed.

Australian aid agencies were among the first to arrive in Aceh, providing immediate relief to survivors. The Australian Defence Force also played a significant role in the early response, helping to distribute supplies and support emergency operations.

Among other things, the $1 billion Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development helped to rehabilitate and upgrade national roads and funded the construction of 2,000 junior secondary schools, both secular and faith-based, in Indonesia.
Above: Australian nurse Natasha Roberts assists a child at Australia’s temporary health centre in Pakistan during the 2010 floods. Photo: Heather Pillans/DFAT

With the help of Australia, this boy in India now has a hearing aid to help him participate at school. Photo: Erin Johnson/CBM Australia

The head of Australia’s aid program in Indonesia, Allison Sudradjat with students from Min Merduti School in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Allison was among the 21 people who died when Garuda Flight 200 crashed while landing at Yogyakarta airport, 7 March 2007. Photo: DFAT

A woman waits to receive food rations at the Ifo refugee camp in Dadaab, Kenya, November 2009. The World Food Programme provides food and to the camp with assistance from Australia. Photo: Kate Holt/Africa Practice

Above right: An electoral commission poster, supported by Caritas and Australia’s aid program, tells voters that PNG is at a crossroads, and the country’s future depends on their votes in the 2007 general election. Photo: Jocelyn Carlin/Panos

Right: Following the declaration of Independence by Timor Leste, donated rice seed created difficulties for farmers. ACIAR was among the first agencies to establish crop trials to put farming on to a reliable footing. The Seeds of Life program has become a case study for building in-country farming capabilities. By the end of 2015, around 65,000 farmers (nearly half of all farmers) in Timor Leste will have access to Seeds of Life seed varieties. Photo: Brad Collins/ACIAR

From 2004-05, Australia’s aid budget grew significantly. This was part of a bipartisan position to substantially increase Australia’s contribution to international development.

The geographic spread of the aid program had now expanded to South and West Asia, Afghanistan, Africa and the Middle East and within Asia to Burma.

Helping to raise the social and economic status of people with disability in developing countries became a priority for the aid program. Australia showed global leadership in this area.

With the new decade came the aid program’s third major review. This was the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness in 2011 and called for the aid program to achieve maximum impact without putting additional administrative and policy for money.
Above: Students in IT class at the Hohola Youth Development Centre, PNG using laptops donated by Australia. Photo: Ness Kerton/DFAT

A woman in PNG uses her mobile phone for banking. The Australian Government supports greater access to financial services in Papua New Guinea. Photo: Nationwide Microbank

Above right: Kesu Magar weaves cloth at a Micro-enterprise Development Program (MEDEP) supported business, NEPAL. MEDEP is supported by Australia and has helped create more than 60,500 micro-entrepreneurs – 74 per cent of them women. More than 39,000 of these entrepreneurs have lifted themselves out of poverty.

Photo: Jim Holmes/DFAT

A scientist at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh works on improving a new cholera vaccination. Australia is a core donor to the Centre. Photo: Conor Ashleigh/DFAT

2014

In 2014, Australia has a strong and targeted international aid program worth $5 billion and is the second largest donor to the East Asia and Pacific region.

Australia’s aid has a clear purpose: to promote Australia’s national interests by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

Australia’s aid focuses on the Indo-Pacific region with a sharp focus on our immediate neighborhood where we can make the most difference.

Australia has challenged the private sector to play a bigger role in driving growth and poverty reduction.

Australia’s approach to solving development problems will be a priority. It will include making effective use of new information and communication technologies.
Above: An artist’s impression of the Cao Lãnh Bridge in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta. Australia is investing $160 million in the design and construction of the bridge which is expected to open in 2017.

A community netball team trains during the week in preparation for its weekend game. Australia supports the netball competition as it encourages Tongans to participate in physical exercise. Conor Ashleigh/DFAT

Australia Award recipients. Left to right: Napae Ipave Hurim (PNG), Norah Nigney (Kenya), Judy Nyokabi Maina (Kenya), Ronald Sofe (PNG), Zuwena Mohammed Kikoti (Tanzania) and Vini Talai (PNG), Canberra, June 2014. In 2014, Australia invested $362.2 million in Australia Awards, enabling over 4,400 recipients from more than 100 countries to undertake study, research and professional development.

Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja visiting a health clinic in Jakarta, Indonesia, February 2014. Around half of Australia’s aid budget is spent on initiatives, policies and programs that focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Photo: Joshua Estey

Above right: Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Honourable Julie Bishop MP, with schoolchildren at Libertad Elementary School in Ormoc City, Leyte, the Philippines, December 2013. The Minister visited the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan that struck in November 2013 affecting about 4 million people. Australia provided $40 million for food, shelter, water and sanitation services. Photo: CPL Jake Sims/Australian Defence

Celebrating 40 years of Australian aid

After 40 years of delivering a world-class international aid program, Australia has a legacy to be proud of. We have an agile and program-based approach, responsive and accountable.

Changing international relationships, new sources of finance, growing middle classes and new challenges require new approaches. Australia, at a crossroads, has supported sustainable economic growth, and the country is responding to these changes with rigor and innovation.

Australia is generous, we expect them to be good partners and help others. It’s good for our neighbours and it’s good for us. A strong program is vital, as it is an investment in our region and serves our national interest.

The Australian aid program has demonstrated 40 years of outstanding results. We are well prepared to continue our efforts in the years ahead.
Words can describe the events that have shaped the Australian aid program. Images help bring them to life. The Australian Government acknowledges those photographers who have, over the years, recorded the delivery and impact of Australia’s aid on those in need. We would like to also acknowledge the dedicated staff who have worked for Australia’s aid program over the past 40 years, our partners in development, business, community, non-government organisations and volunteers. You have all contributed to the success of the program.

Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade