



Changing Aid – Changing AusAID

An issue brief from the Australian Agency for International Development

AID AND DEVELOPMENT HAVE BEEN PROMINENT ISSUES RECENTLY. THE MAKE POVERTY HISTORY CAMPAIGN, THE LIVE 8 CONCERTS AND THE ADVOCACY OF CELEBRITIES HAVE BROUGHT POVERTY INTO THE INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT.

In Australia, the launch of the White Paper and the Prime Minister's decision to double the aid program to around \$4 billion by 2010 have shone attention on the aid program. Many Australians will be aware that the aid program is growing – and even that it is changing – but comparatively little is known about the changes going on within AusAID to ensure the agency can deliver what the Government requires: a larger and more effective aid program.

So how is AusAID changing? And how will AusAID ensure effectiveness and value for money as the aid program grows? The answer is through a substantial program of reform that is rapidly changing the way the agency operates.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

AusAID is developing a larger, more complex field presence, with more staff working overseas in more varied roles. This process of 'devolution' has been underway for several years. During 2004–05, for instance, there was a 96 per cent increase in the number of personnel deployed overseas. Now in-country offices are taking on increasing

responsibilities for things like program design, implementation and management, dialogue with partner governments and local communities, and the measurement of performance. These new arrangements increase AusAID's capacity to respond to the local environment – a crucial element of improved aid effectiveness.

The work done by AusAID staff is also changing. New ways of delivering aid, including programs delivered directly by partner governments, require a greater level of discussion with those governments. In Solomon Islands, AusAID staff, along with representatives of other Australian government departments, work within the Solomon Islands Government to assist it in managing its budgets and improving administration. In Papua New Guinea, AusAID staff work in the provincial administrations of Eastern Highlands, Central and East New Britain Provinces, as well as the National Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs. In many cases, AusAID staff are directly implementing programs – jobs previously done by contractors. The days of simply contracting out the program are long gone.



INCREASING ACCESS TO TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

With AusAID staff working in increasingly complex roles, the agency is exploring new ways of accessing the technical expertise it requires. AusAID now employs nine principal advisers – internationally recognised experts in their fields – who provide analysis of development prospects in the region and cutting-edge technical guidance to staff. AusAID also has more specialist advisers at posts, working with partner governments to ensure aid is targeted to local conditions. A range of thematic ‘task forces’ have been created in areas of priority to the White Paper: health and HIV/AIDS, education, infrastructure, environment and rural development. These task forces develop aid activities and improve the performance of the aid program by providing relevant, up-to-date technical support to program areas.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

One way to ensure access to the best available expertise is to build partnerships with the best experts and institutions in the world. AusAID is doing this through an expanded research program and a range of strategic partnerships with institutions and other donors. Working with the British Department for International Development, for instance, AusAID is developing a health resource network that will provide access to first-class health expertise and information from within and outside Australia. Through a health and HIV/AIDS research program and a set of long-term partnerships with Australian and international health institutions, the network will provide the information and expertise required to guide and help implement Australia’s significant investment in health across the region.

New partnerships in aid delivery are also a focus. AusAID is finalising an agreement with Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development that will result in cooperative programming in Asia. Depending on who has the comparative advantage in a particular area, either AusAID or Germany will take responsibility for aid delivery. AusAID is also working with the large multilateral development banks, encouraging the Asian Development Bank to become more engaged in anti-corruption work and using the size and resources of the World Bank to improve infrastructure

in the region. Links with Australian non-government organisations are also evolving and the private sector is increasingly engaged through initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS. Working creatively with partners and leveraging their strengths and expertise is characteristic of the new approach.

SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE

Increasing levels of recruitment are changing AusAID’s staff profile and opening the agency up to a range of new influences and ideas. Virtually all staff entering AusAID have tertiary qualifications, compared to a public service average of 63 per cent¹. Recent senior recruitment rounds have brought in people with experience in areas such as indigenous affairs, law and justice, performance measurement and the private sector. AusAID is an employer of choice, providing a mix of generalist and specialist career streams and an expanding range of overseas opportunities.

Support mechanisms for staff are vital in the new environment and upgraded training and professional development programs are building the agency’s analytical capacity, its knowledge of countries in the region and its sectoral, governance and capacity-building expertise. AusAID recently created a human resources branch with a dedicated learning and development section. Support functions including public affairs, finance, human resources, administrative services, property, and information technology are being significantly upgraded as the agency equips itself to deliver a much-expanded, more complex program.

NEW AID PROGRAM: NEW AUS AID

A new aid program requires nothing short of a new AusAID. Change within the agency will accelerate in the coming months and years as AusAID implements the White Paper in partnership with other government agencies. Delivering a larger and more effective aid program is a significant challenge. AusAID will continue to reform itself to meet this challenge and achieve its underlying objective – assisting developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, in line with Australia’s national interest.

1 APS *State of the Service Report, 2005–06*