

ENGAGING THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

ANALYTICAL REPORT FOR THE WHITE PAPER ON
AUSTRALIA'S AID PROGRAM

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Executive Summary

1. To date, the Australian Government's engagement with the Australian community has been primarily through its relationship with program implementers, particularly development contractors and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). The more recent whole-of-government approach to development has expanded involvement in aid delivery by other organisations, including Australian, state and local government agencies.
2. Participation in the White Paper process included targeted seminars and consultations. It involved think tanks, the corporate sector, sectoral specialists, and civil society, and confirmed there is an extensive community of interest in overseas development, beyond traditional development partners.
3. New directions for Australia's aid program may identify gaps in the level of expertise and experience of those delivering services and point to the need for new partners. There may also be new and innovative ways in which existing development practitioners can work together. Given the long history of Australian community engagement in the aid program, it is likely that future partners are already known in the development community and possibly engaged in development in the region, although not necessarily directly involved with AusAID.
4. In seeking to enhance capacity to deliver strategic development outcomes, the aid program must move beyond dealing with Australian partners—current and potential—only as implementers and develop new approaches that build on, and leverage off, the extensive development knowledge and capability that exists within the Australian development community.
5. A concerted effort is needed to capture knowledge and experience and share the learning of development practitioners. This requires investment in infrastructure—to support knowledge management—and also an openness and sustained commitment to seeking new ideas. A more active approach to community engagement also implies placing value on Australian practitioner knowledge, welcoming contestability of ideas and engaging with critical thinking.
6. There is a high level of congruence between the interests of the Australian public in reducing poverty and the current direction of the aid program. However, there is a need for a communication strategy that improves the level of understanding by the Australian public about the new approaches to aid delivery being adopted by the Government. Extended community engagement needs to be supported by a refocused and proactive public affairs strategy with sufficient flexibility and resources to support the evolving aid framework and engagement with both existing and new players.
7. Effective ongoing community engagement presents considerable challenges. It requires leadership and strategic decision making by AusAID to determine the priorities for engagement, and sustained commitment to relationship-building. It should be accompanied by a clear message that the aid program cannot be all

things to all people. It must remain focused on long-term, strategic development outcomes.

8. This paper identifies opportunities for more effective engagement with the Australian community. It recommends establishment of a three year Community Engagement Program, specifically focussed on maximising the expertise and experience offered by its various partners; identifying new partners with skills relevant to new and emerging development issues, and sustaining high public support for the aid program.

Process

9. The Australian aid program has been subject to extensive review three times in the last 20 years. The Jackson Review (1984), the Simons Review (1996) and this current White Paper have all been broad-ranging in their community engagement. The White Paper, in its search for input to the 'medium term strategic blueprint for the Australian aid program in the Asia Pacific region' has demonstrated a new and expanded level of community engagement on thematic, country and process issues.
10. Consultation with targeted thematic groups, experts, representatives of the media, parliamentarians, the corporate sector, community based organisations, think tanks, and longstanding partners in development has brought a broader perspective to the debate. This process suggests a high level of congruence between the interests of the Australian public in reducing poverty and the current direction of the aid program.
11. This paper is based on a desktop audit and review of current Australian Government engagement with the Australian community; research and analysis of relevant publications and policy documents; and consultation with Australian participants in the aid program. The Australian public has participated through four Town Hall meetings (Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney) convened by the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs. See Attachment A.
12. The consultation process confirmed that the term 'community' is, as it often described, 'a nebulous and difficult concept' (Winter et. Al., p.16). It is generally used to refer to a group of people who share something in common, be that location, interest, culture, language, values or tradition. The word community is used here to encompass the broad range of active interest and participation in Australia's overseas development program.
13. Not all people or organisations that might be considered participants in the development community are directly engaged with the Australian Government's aid program. Within this notional development community individuals and organisations can be members of many communities and wear a variety of hats. (Adams, 2005) In this paper, the development community is distinguished from the broader population of the Australian public which has a significant, but less active, interest in the aid program.
14. The words 'partnership' and 'community engagement' are part of the development lexicon. The words are often used interchangeably within the development community to refer to almost any interaction with the Australian public, service deliverers or recipient countries. Generally, this terminology is used without specific definition and to acknowledge that effective relationships between the Australian Governments, the general public and key groups in the development community are critical to achieving the goals and objectives of the aid program.

Why Community Engagement?

15. The groundwork for the changes in the way the aid program is managed and delivered was laid out in the 2005 Ministerial Statement *Australian Aid: An Integrated Approach*. The key changes have been:

- a sharper focus, both financially and intellectually, on our immediate region and on governance
 - a more robust Australian Government approach including increased engagement by key agencies
 - a stronger policy framework backed up by a commitment to implementation
 - changes in managing the aid program (13th Annual Statement to Parliament).
16. The Government relies on the Australian community to inform and implement its aid program. The Government also recognises that effective partnerships with key groups will be critical to achieving the program's medium-term goals and objectives.
 17. While public support for overseas aid is relatively high in Australia, the Government is mindful that scrutiny of aid has increased as aid budgets have increased, and that the recent public response to the Tsunami is accompanied by a heightened demand for accountability.
 18. The question posed in the *Guide to the Core Group* is: 'How should Australia's aid instruments, approaches and partnerships evolve to effectively deliver on its medium term strategic outlook?'
 19. Strengthening the relationship between the aid program and the Australian community should be purposeful and strategically managed, to support the two primary objectives of community engagement:
 - to enhance Australian Government capacity to deliver strategic development outcomes
 - to increase public understanding of the Australian aid program.
 20. The following sections identify existing patterns of engagement and focus specifically on how institutional, academic, people-to-people, and community links can be engaged more effectively to facilitate and enhance the aid program.

Existing Structures for Community Engagement

21. Bilateral or government-to-government aid makes up the bulk of the aid program. Within Australia, there are two main avenues for community engagement—service delivery and public information.
22. Australian service delivery has been primarily through Australian private sector contractors and NGOs. The main means of engagement with Australian partners has been through various contracting and funding mechanisms used to engage them in service delivery. This relationship is supported by consultations, other forums and information sharing activities which involve technical experts, public sector institutions, universities, research institutions, private sector international development firms, and NGOs. Attachment B outlines the mechanisms which currently exist to engage the broad Australian community.

23. The Australian aid program draws upon the many areas of comparative expertise in Australia, 'whether that involves financial management, agricultural research or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) responses. The government also fosters integration between different sources of aid personnel, particularly volunteers, youth ambassadors and NGOs with bilateral programs, to strengthen the focus of our efforts and make more cost effective use of resources' (2002 Statement, p. 60).
24. In recent times the Australian aid program has played an important role in the whole-of-government responses to issues in our region of trade, environment, immigration, conflict, and transboundary issues such as disease, drugs and crime. This has brought with it an increased role for the Australian Public Service in policy development for and delivery of the aid program, as another area of comparative expertise.
25. The Australian Government is committed to 'ensuring that the community is informed about and supportive of the aid program' (2002 Statement, p. 61). The public is informed about the Government's aid program through a comprehensive public affairs strategy which seeks to 'ensure high quality, effective participative communication with the public and stakeholders.'

Engagement with Development Contractors

26. The Australian Government's current engagement with the private sector in relation to overseas development is almost entirely with development contracting companies involved in implementing the aid program.
27. A significant proportion of the program is delivered by a relatively small number of Australian and New Zealand players. The top ten contractors to AusAID account for 65 per cent of contracts by value. This appears to reflect the impact of larger and fewer activities, and the capacity of larger firms to meet aid program requirements for financial securities.
28. Development contractors claim to bring a wealth of delivery experience and knowledge to the aid program. For example, international development company ACIL has 35 years experience in international development and managed more than 400 projects funded by AusAID, World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 63 countries including countries in Asia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean (ACIL Presentation on Development, 6 April 2005). Many other contractors indicate similar experience and capability.
29. While partial untying of the aid program has increased competition between contracting firms, it appears also to have created a degree of fluidity as various contracting companies merge or are subsumed to form larger companies. At the same time, there is widespread support for further untying of commercial contracts, to encourage internationally competitive tendering. Most development contractors believe they are competitive and ready for such a move.
30. While there have been some new entrants to the market place in recent years such as Deacons, it is considered relatively difficult for a new contracting company to enter the market place. Some relatively new players described the aid program as a

- 'closed shop'. The difficulties were variously attributed to a perceived 'lack of invited interaction', the challenges posed by the 'regulatory and administrative regime', and the large up-front financial commitment. These assertions will need to be addressed in order to attract new players.
31. The small-to-medium size of the largest Australian aid consulting firms limits their ability to dedicate resources to research or policy analysis. However, during the consultations it became evident that there is a wish by both AusAID and the contracting firms for knowledge sharing and dialogue on development policy issues. In contrast, it seems that the main thrust of dialogue between AusAID and the contractors in recent years has been about tendering, implementation and performance issues.
 32. The Development Contractors Forum is an opportunity for engagement but it tends to focus on the nuts and bolts of the program. Consequently, engagement between the key firms and AusAID remains caught in the details of the activity mindset. This focus is understandable. The tender process is considered strict and rigorous and in 2004–05, the aid program let 1 300 new contracts with an approximate value of \$812 million. Nevertheless, this focus appears to detract from opportunities for knowledge sharing and diminish the opportunities to learn from experience.
 33. The development contractors indicated a willingness to collaborate with other players in delivering the aid program. They are often experienced in working with the multilaterals and the UN system and at working with carefully selected agents and local representatives. There are increasing examples of collaboration between development contractors and NGOs, to extend development impact and to achieve mutually compatible goals. Anecdotally, the development contractors and NGOs ascribe high levels of success to these collaborative efforts, despite the difficulties in bringing together staff from differently structured organisations.
 34. **Breaking down the silos in which AusAID engages with its partners and bringing practitioners, experts, researchers, and others together in high-level thematically focused forums would encourage sharing of knowledge and experience, contestability of ideas and input to policy development. It is also suggested that incentives for documenting learning in the field would encourage contribution to development related research by development contractors.**
 35. **Commercial contracts should be further untied, to encourage internationally competitive tendering.**

Engagement with Non-Government Organisations

36. The Australian Government and development NGOs have worked together for many years to implement Australia's aid program. The Government recognises that 'NGOs play a valuable role in the delivery of Australian aid. In particular, their strengths in garnering public support for the aid program, developing links with communities in developing countries, and flexibility in working in difficult environments' (11th Annual Statement to Parliament p. 58).

37. NGOs also believe that their contribution, while relatively small in relation to the total bilateral program, plays an important niche role in supporting the aid program. NGOs see themselves as:
- well positioned to respond to humanitarian crises and rapidly able to deploy people who are experienced in humanitarian and emergency relief work
 - able to harness the Australian public support for development assistance
 - able to work effectively, on a people-to-people basis with poor communities in developing countries
 - sometimes able to work outside a bilateral context, such as in Burma, where there is no government-to-government aid program
 - able to work with civil society to facilitate demand-led governance.
38. Less than ten per cent of the Government's funded aid program is implemented by NGOs. Government funding comprises around 15 per cent of the total funds managed by the NGO sector. More than one million Australians claim to give their time or money to overseas aid each year. Financial support from the Australian public has grown at about 12 per cent per annum (excluding Tsunami fund raising) and continues to provide the largest proportion of funds for overseas work undertaken by Australian NGOs.
39. The effectiveness of NGO work relative to bilateral aid is subject to ongoing debate. The significant difference is one of scale. Most of the research into the effectiveness of foreign aid has been in response to macroeconomic inputs. Evaluations of NGO aid have been conducted mainly at the project level and there is very little hard evidence on which to base scaling-up proposals. Nevertheless, a recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) Working Paper (Masud & Yontcheva, 2005) shows that while NGO aid reduces infant mortality and does so more effectively than official bilateral aid, the impact on illiteracy is less significant. Masud and Yontcheva also test whether foreign aid reduces recipient government efforts in achieving development goals and while finding some evidence of a substitution effect between bilateral aid public sector expenditures, conclude that NGO aid does not affect social spending in the recipient country.

Accreditation and accountability

40. There are currently 122 NGOs eligible to give tax deductions for donations to their overseas aid programs. Forty four organisations are accredited to receive AusAID funding through the AusAID-NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The ANCP and accreditation (the process by which Australian NGOs gain access to funding from ANCP) demonstrate the long-term relationship between the aid program and development NGOs in Australia. ANCP and accreditation are unique to the Australian aid program and should be maintained.
41. The Committee for Development Cooperation (CDC), established in 1975, is a joint AusAID/NGO advisory and consultative body whose functions relate to accreditation and the development of policy to underpin the ANCP. In previous years, the CDC considered both funding and broader aid policy and was the main interface between the Government and NGOs interested in overseas development. The role of the CDC is under review and it is expected it will be reduced in size and its mandate confined to accreditation and ANCP.

42. As international NGOs and other civil society organisations 'have become increasingly visible and influential actors in national and international arenas on issues such as sustainable development, human rights, environmental preservation and economic justice questions have been raised about accountability' (Brown, Moore & Honan, 2004, p. 31). The Australian Code of Conduct is highly regarded internationally and is seen as a practical manifestation of the challenge facing all NGOs world wide 'to show that they can put into practice the [accountability] principles that they campaign for on others' (Edwards, 2000).
43. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak industry association representing some 80 NGOs, is committed to aid effectiveness and to accountability and has cooperated with the Australian Government to institute a rigorous approach to assessing NGO capability and evaluation of performance. Strengthened AusAID accreditation criteria and processes, together with the standards of governance, organisational integrity, finances, communication, and management practices demanded by the ACFID Code of Conduct, demonstrate a high level of shared commitment to continual improvement in development standards and to openness and transparency in reporting.
44. While NGOs also claim that their values base is a critical factor in discussing NGO accountability and performance, this does not lessen the fact that scrutiny of their accountability is right and proper. Accountability has been described as 'primarily about securing a level of confidence and trust in an organisation's legitimacy' (Stewart-Weeks 2003). It is essential, and in the mutual interest of the Government and NGOs, to collaborate on matters of accountability as a contribution to maintaining public credibility. This approach has been effectively demonstrated in the joint Tsunami reporting.

Policy dialogue

45. NGOs also engage with the official aid program through meetings, workshops and forums. These include broad policy dialogue between AusAID and ACFID, high level discussions at the CEO level, and country- or issue-specific discussions with relevant accredited NGOs. In terms of policy dialogue this is sometimes effective and sometimes submerged in contractual and administrative consideration.
46. ACFID seeks to be strategic in its contribution to the policy debate and, like the development contractors, claims to have a wealth of practitioner knowledge to bring to the table. However, the NGO capacity to document the action learning that takes place in the field is similarly limited and, without systematic and long-term data capture and analysis, field experience does necessarily or readily translate into policy.
47. On the other hand, the fairly recent ACFID research on development effectiveness which identified a series of field based standards for practice has the potential to contribute to development practice (Roche & Kelly 2003). It is important that this work be subject to further field validation and the findings captured and debated as a contribution to lessons learned.
48. In the current dialogue between NGOs and AusAID on policy matters there seems to be little middle ground between development advocacy on the one hand, and

examples of grassroots development practice on the other. While some of the larger internationally based member organisations, such as World Vision, Care Australia and Oxfam do have some capacity for research and policy analysis, ACFID is limited in its ability to engage at the high level required for substantive discussion and robust debate in policy dialogue because of its lack of research capacity.

49. ACFID seeks to represent the views and interests of its heterogeneous membership to Government and other key stakeholders and in doing so, seeks to influence government policy. At the same time, it is engaged by AusAID on a fee-for-service basis in relation to AusAID-NGO cooperation and representation issues, statistical survey data and the Code of Conduct. The twofold nature of this relationship between ACFID and the international aid agency is bound to result in some tension.
50. **As the aid program responds to changes both within the broader development context and the region, it is timely for AusAID and ACFID to reconsider their relationship with a view to engaging in more productive and mutually effective ways that enhance policy dialogue and contribute to aid effectiveness. It is proposed that AusAID and ACFID cooperate in long-term empirical research aimed at confirming the Australian NGOs' claims of effectiveness with a view to scaling up where appropriate.**
51. **The Australian Government should reaffirm the importance of ANCP and Accreditation as the primary tools for engaging with Australian professional development NGOs.**

Volunteers

52. The aid program has a significant engagement with the Australian community through the Australian Volunteer Program. *Volunteers and Australian Development Cooperation*, the aid program's 2004 volunteer policy statement notes 'Volunteers are catalysts for ongoing sustainable linkages and partnerships between organisations and communities in Australia and partner countries. Effective volunteer-based partnerships can foster integrated approaches to strengthening organisations in developing countries and can take many forms: networks, knowledge-sharing and linkages with Australian organisations.'(p.3) The *Guide to the Core Group* maintains that 'the growth in volunteering amongst all ages of the population is one of the most practical and substantive avenues for growing Australian understanding of aid and development issues'.
53. There are more than 27, 000 volunteers contributing their time to ACFID member agencies through membership, boards and governing bodies, campaign or education work, and as office volunteers. In addition there were 4,600 Australians work overseas with Australian NGOs in 2004-2005, many of them engaged through an Australian Government supported volunteer program (ACFID Annual Report, 2004-2005). The Government supported Australian Volunteer Program comprises the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program and a core program which features Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) and Volunteers for International Development from Australia (VIDA).

54. Volunteer engagement in the aid program extends well beyond the individual volunteer. The Australian Volunteer Program also provides opportunities for Australian organisations of every kind to participate in development. Australian organisations can use the volunteer program to generate or extend their own links to organisations overseas by developing a volunteer assignment, identifying an opportunity for a member of staff to volunteer and/or supporting community based volunteer organisations.
55. Community participants at the Town Hall meetings recommended developing a framework to coordinate Australian industry, NGOs and volunteers to create closer links and greater synergies between development participants (White Paper Forums, Summary of Public Input, www.ausaid.gov.au).
56. Volunteering is not only a tool of aid delivery, it is also one of the most visible means of community engagement. It provides opportunities for the young to participate in development, and uses the skills and experience of older people including families. Volunteers contribute to development and bring a vital and unique community experience to their development work and to their home community in Australia on their return.
57. **Support for volunteering should continue, as volunteering is a valuable form of community engagement. Moves to increase the volunteer program should be considered in light of the White Paper and recent increases, such as doubling of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program and increased funding to the Australian Volunteer Program.**

Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

58. Partnership arrangements and networks within the development community have evolved over many years. Today, there is extensive civil society interest, beyond the traditional development community, in engaging with the aid program. There have been calls to extend civil society engagement through Community Based Organisations such as Rotary, Lions, professional and specialist groups (such as medical practitioners) and local government organisations.
59. The PNG Church Partnership Program (CPP) is an innovative approach to building the relationship with existing partners, by expanding engagement with the local church partners of faith-based development NGOs. This is consistent with calls during Town Hall meetings for increased engagement with community groups and NGOs, including churches, in development work and the facilitation of community-to-community engagement (White Paper Forums, Summary of Public Input, www.ausaid.gov.au).
60. CBOs may participate in the Australian Volunteer Program and many already work with a diverse range of organisations including national and international NGOs, churches and academic institutions. However it is evident that they are seeking additional opportunities to participate more actively in implementation of the aid program. While usual contracting processes offer solutions for purchasing services from specialist groups, existing mechanisms for both funding and consultation can exclude CBOs and other specialist groups.

61. To date, AusAID has engaged with CBOs on a fairly ad hoc basis based on themes or sectors of relevance to the aid program (such as HIV/AIDS), or when driven by a specific event, like the Tsunami. These themes and events can create an interest among CBOs who normally have a domestic Australian focus, or who may implement activities internationally, but without government aid funding. The strength of CBOs appears to be in their belief that they have something of value to offer to overseas development, and in their people-to-people contact.
62. A distinction needs to be made between more formally established CBOs who have experience in-country on development issues and interested individuals and loosely associated groups who may be identified as a CBO. The former may well have development experience that complements the aid program. The latter's experience is frequently through people-to-people services based on personal or professional contacts, which, while important, do not necessarily contribute to the long-term development objectives of the aid program. Sometimes this individual interest is manifested in offers to donate goods or services, particularly in times of crisis.
63. **If service delivery partnership opportunities are extended to CBOs, then new and different rules of engagement will be needed. Such arrangements, while more flexible, must also have sufficient provision for accountability to provide a level of confidence in an organisation's capacity to contribute to the specified and agreed development outcomes. Such mechanisms should not be introduced simply as opportunities to fund good intentions and good ideas. Shared accountability and commitment to long-term development effectiveness is a prized asset. It contributes to the high levels of community support for the aid program and should not be compromised.**
64. **Rather than seeking to include the full range of these CBOs in the aid program, it may be more efficient to put them in contact with other organisations active in service delivery through a brokering facility. This could be similar in concept to the Industry Capability Network, which facilitates business partnerships for the purpose of local supply, access to global supply chains and local business growth. Another alternative would be to better promote the Direct Aid Program and Small Activities Schemes that operate at Diplomatic Missions, with a view to enabling the local counterpart of an Australian group to apply for assistance. Given the number of approaches to AusAID, consideration needs to be given to establishing a cost effective process to evaluate ideas and offers of goods or services. To avoid raising expectations there will need to be absolute clarity about how far the door is open.**

Engagement with the Corporate Sector

65. The business community is keenly aware that a stable, prosperous and secure region is important for business investment. Private sector investment has a major impact on the prospects for ending poverty and a number of Australian based companies have operations in Asia and the Pacific that might well be described as having a development component. It appears that AusAID has had little direct involvement with the corporate sector, although recently AusAID has strengthened

- its engagement with the corporate sector on HIV/AIDS prevention activities in the region.
66. The *Guide for the Core Group* refers to 'a strong international consensus that broad based economic growth is central to reducing poverty'. Consistent with other donors, the Australian aid program, particularly in recent years, has concentrated on improving the environment for private sector development. The corporate sector, particularly companies with investment interests in Asia and the Pacific, should be encouraged to take a more active role in identifying ways to generate investment and growth in the region.
 67. Corporate Responsibility (CR) reporting has been increasing since the early 1990s and has expanded from purely environmental reporting to include social and economic sustainability. The KPMG 2005 International Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting confirmed that CR reporting in industrial countries has clearly entered mainstream reporting. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) has developed a guide to help businesses assess and report on how their activities are contributing to the development of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Some 40 Australian organisations are identified as using the GRI tool, including BHP Billiton, Visy, Westpac, and Western Mining Corporation Resources Ltd.
 68. The Prime Minister's Community Business Partnerships (PMCBP) program recognises that 'just as they have always needed to run their affairs in a fiscally responsible way in order to remain viable, many businesses now believe that they need to take into account social, economical and environmental impacts to remain sustainable into the future' (PMCBP website, www.partnerships.gov.au).
 69. Development NGOs have shown considerable initiative in building relationships with the corporate sector. In the past NGO and corporate sector partnerships focused mainly on fund raising. One of the most successful partnerships is the Qantas/UNICEF Australia Change for Good program which has raised more than \$10 million since its inception in 1991 and also communicates a development message to thousands of airline passengers each week. NGOs are now moving beyond fundraising activities in their relationships with the corporate sector and giving greater attention to 'knowing better how business works so that we can work effectively with them'. This approach is seemingly motivated by efforts to adapt to a rapidly changing world in which the private sector now accounts for the bulk of investment in developing countries.
 70. As one example, Oxfam Australia recognises that the private sector, operating on the basis of market forces, is the most important source of economic growth in almost all developing countries. In support of this approach Oxfam Australia has established the Corporate Community Leadership Program which in recent years has taken senior BHP Billiton and Newmont executives to India 'to improve the company's capacity to respect the rights and enhance the livelihood of communities it works with around the world'. Oxfam asserts that 'poorly designed or regulated private sector investment can further marginalise and impoverish the poor' and identifies its role as 'working with the corporate sector to find policies and practices which benefit both the corporations and their host countries and their people' (Oxfam News 2003).

71. All member countries of the International Mining Council (IMC) have signed up to the MDGs as part of their commitment to sustainable development. The Mining Council has called for a 'more coordinated approach between governments, industry and international agencies' to ensure that mining investments foster both economic and social development (Mitchell, 2005). While suggesting that 'There are some NGOs with which a dialogue about how to put in place world's best practice social and community sustainability strategies is a waste of time', Barns (2005) identifies Oxfam Australia, with its mining ombudsman process and code of conduct for Australian mining companies overseas, as having 'the skills and networks throughout the world that can help companies to avoid the pitfalls of being caught up, wittingly or unwittingly, in civil unrest'. Clearly not all NGOs are inclined to, or capable of working with, the corporate sector at this level.
72. **As a matter of priority, AusAID should identify and engage with companies with investment interests in the region with a view to creating partnerships and alliances that strengthen development outcomes. Other opportunities for engaging with the corporate sector include working through the PMCBP to encourage CR reporting by Australian based companies with operations in Asia and the Pacific; giving profile to improved engagement with the corporate sector by creating an overseas development award linked to the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnerships; and supporting NGO efforts to work effectively with the corporate sector towards a shared understanding of sustainable development.**

Engagement with the Public Sector

73. As well as whole-of-government initiatives referred to previously, the aid program draws upon federal, state, territory, and local governments for specialised skills. Programs such as the Public Sector Linkages Program (PSLP)—\$8 million in 2005-06—have encouraged relationships between public sector institutions at federal and state and territory levels, and the program was recently expanded to include public universities.
74. Public sector linkages have been encouraged at the state, territory and local government levels, in the interests of aligning government service delivery to an appropriate and affordable level for developing country governments. For example, the Local Government Partnerships Program in PNG (2002-06) aims to facilitate and promote the effective, responsive and accountable delivery of local services, especially to poor and disadvantaged groups. The program supports sustainable partnerships between individual local authorities. This model may be useful in other country programs to support such linkages.
75. The *White Paper Roundtable with Parliamentarians* reinforced the notion of 'right sizing' technical assistance for improved development outcomes. Public and private sector collaboration is evident at different levels, reflecting these calls for right sizing. An example is the collaboration between development contractors and government authorities such as Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation and Hunter Water in the Solomon Islands.
76. **The aid program should expand its efforts to engage with state, territory, and local governments to identify appropriate partners. The aid program**

could benefit from coordinated and ongoing linkages to state organisations such as the Queensland International Aid and Development Business Unit, as well as other state departments and agencies. Current engagement with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) should be continued and strengthened. Consideration should also be given to expanding the PSLP to other public sector organisations such as public hospitals.

Engagement with Universities and Research Institutions

77. AusAID has substantial and long-term linkages with universities and others doing development related research in Australia and overseas. AusAID engagement with key research centres and collaborative research networks is strengthened through research partnerships on topics of strategic importance to Australia's development cooperation program such as with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project. The aid program has also supported relevant international research on humanitarian and conflict assistance such as Overseas Development Institute (ODI) research on humanitarian and conflict assistance. It is important to maintain these research partnerships.
78. Alongside the more traditional sources of development research, such as the Australian National University (ANU), privately funded think tanks, such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Lowy Institute, are providing new policy focused analysis and research relevant to the aid program. There is clearly a synergy between the Australian Government's aid program focus on the Asia-Pacific region and the Lowy Institute interest which should be developed to help inform future directions.
79. **In view of emerging policy priorities, for example transboundary issues, governance and water, as well as the continuing drive for aid effectiveness, it is important to extend the range of research partners, particularly within Australia. The emphasis of these partnerships should not only be on producing high-quality research products, but also on founding long-term institutional relationships and developing pools of expertise that can be accessed as needed in an efficient and flexible manner. Consideration should be given to identifying and supporting designated research fellows or organisations to conduct research specifically relevant to the overseas aid program.**

Development studies

80. In addition to the established research links with the aid program, 13 Australian universities offer Development Studies at a range of levels.¹ Other universities offer courses that, while not badged as Development Studies, are relevant, including medicine, engineering, environment and marine studies, particularly in

¹ The following institutions offer Development Studies: Australian National University, Melbourne University, University of New England, Armidale, Deakin University, Flinders University, La Trobe University, Edith Cowan University, Macquarie University, Monash University, Murdoch University, Northern Territory University, RMIT, and Southern Cross University. In addition, other universities, such as Victoria University, Sydney University and Curtin University offer courses that, while not badged as Development Studies, produce graduates with relevant, often cross-disciplinary skills.

universities that have a research focus in these areas. There is no comprehensive definition and catalogue of courses that might be considered Development Studies and it is difficult to assess accurately the number of students in such courses. However, an informal survey of eight institutions suggests there are approximately 3 500 students currently enrolled in Development Studies.

81. At the same time there is a perception that numbers of students undertaking Development Studies have declined over recent years. During the consultations reference was also made to the diminishing capacity of many Australian universities to train adequate numbers of language and country specialists; and diminished interest/numbers in South-East Asian Studies.
82. **The university sector plays an important role in preparing development practitioners and advocates. However, there is seemingly little engagement between the aid program and university teaching programs. Consideration should be given to extending the suitability and availability of development education materials to the tertiary education market.**

Scholarship Program

83. Beyond the research engagement and development studies, a selected number of Australian universities each year host some 2 500 scholarship students from developing countries. The role of scholarships as a form of aid is not specifically within the scope of this paper. However the scholarship program was a recurring theme in consultations, especially with the university sector.
84. There is a very broad base of support for the Scholarship program and it is seen as one of the most significant tools of the aid program for direct people-to-people engagement. It is generally recognised that scholarships for study in Australia can play a useful human resource development role by providing priority training in fields where developing countries do not have capacity. They build enduring links between people and their communities, and between institutions and the future leaders of the region and Australia.
85. Clearly there are opportunities for improving and refining the Scholarship Program. However, from an Australian community perspective scholarships are seen as one of the main opportunities to engage with the aid program. Scholarship students interact with the Australian community through the formal academic community, work placements with Australian business, state, territory or local governments, or community groups, and social engagement.
86. **The Scholarship Program and the links it creates are highly valued and consideration should be given to both widening and deepening it to introduce new learning modalities including work experience and exchanges in a broader range of disciplines, and ongoing mentoring programs.**

Development education

87. AusAID's Global Education Program supports the professional development of primary and secondary teachers across Australia and funds the development and

production of curriculum material for use in Australian schools. The website (<http://globaleducation.edna.edu.au/>) provides curriculum material on important aid related issues such as globalisation, human rights, developing economies, HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, landmines, refugees, and the environment. Most recently, a new resource 'The Tsunami Disaster—Australia Responds', a joint AusAID and *The Canberra Times* colour education supplement, was added to the website.

88. Teachers in primary and secondary schools are the main users of the Global Education Website, with students accessing activities and resources predominantly under the guidance and direction of their teachers. Secondary audiences include global education professional development providers, students in pre-service teacher training in Australian universities, and teachers and students located in countries in which materials are published on the site. Global Education can build a constituency of support for the aid program based on improved awareness and understanding 'of international issues, development and poverty among Australian school students'.
89. The Caritas Australia submission on the White Paper specifically suggested extending the concept of 'Pacific our Neighbour' by fostering partnerships between schools and education departments in Australia and the Pacific. Caritas Australia believes there to be 'vast opportunities in a program that supports teachers from the Pacific coming to Australia, possibly through school linkages, to...observe and learn different teaching methodologies and approaches. A matching program could support Australian teachers to have an exposure to the issues facing the Pacific'. There could be some synergies between this idea and the Australian Volunteer Program.
90. **Development Education is a fundamental building block for development awareness and constituency building, and could provide a focus for greater collaboration between AusAID, development NGOs and government and non-government education agencies.**

Engagement with Parliamentarians

91. Members of Parliament (MPs) serve in a number of capacities relevant to the aid program. They represent the interests of their constituents and can be a supporter or critic of aid, as well as serving to inform the broader public on the role and achievements of Australia's aid program. A comprehensive kit on the aid program is provided to all MPs by AusAID, and is updated regularly to keep them informed of key developments.
92. From time-to-time MPs are involved in activities relevant to the aid program such as Certificate of Appreciation ceremonies hosted by Parliamentarians for returned volunteers in their electorates. On occasion MPs also visit aid program activities in country. Some NGOs also have had long and active associations with MPs which serve to inform and garner support from MPs on particular aid issues.
93. At another level, some MPs also serve on key oversight committees on the aid program. These include the Senate Legislative Committee (which oversees budget appropriations), and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and

Trade and its Human Rights Sub-committee which conduct public inquiries of direct relevance to the aid program. Such inquiries and their committees can significantly influence the aid program.

94. Discussions with MPs during the White Paper process confirmed the opportunity to build more substantive links between them and the aid program. This could include using MPs as a key source of advice to their counterparts in the region. It may also be appropriate to encourage backbenchers, individually or as groups, to develop long-term relationships, particularly within the region, with a view to creating a knowledgeable group with longer term links to the region. Longer term relationship building would address criticism by partner governments of ‘in- and-out’ visit patterns.
95. **Relationship building with MPs should continue and be used to identify activities which both build a constituency of interest and contribute to the aid program. The opportunity exists to extend and deepen the interest of MPs in Asia and the Pacific, and in the aid program in particular.**

Engagement with the Australian Public

96. There appears to be a high—and growing—level of public support for the Australian Government approach to aid in the region. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of Australians personally contributing to overseas aid, a large increase in the strength of approval for overseas aid, greater belief in effectiveness, a small shift towards more Australians believing Australia should spend more on aid, greater awareness of NGOs, and an increased community preference for long-term as opposed to emergency aid. Humanitarian or moral reasons continue to be the key motivation for aid. (Newspoll Survey, 2005)
97. Nine out of ten Australians regard reducing poverty as either ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ important issues facing the world today, along with improving health, ensuring world peace, improving education, safeguarding the environment, and combating HIV/AIDS. Around 70 to 80 per cent of Australians rate promoting human rights, strengthening regional security and relationships with neighbouring countries as ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ important. Significantly fewer (around 40 to 45 per cent) see opening world trade and slowing population growth as very important. Community belief in the effectiveness of both Australian Government and non government aid has increased from 53 per cent in 2001 to 71 per cent in 2005. (Newspoll Survey, p. 6,7).
98. Through the AusAID Public Affairs Strategy 2005–2007 the Australian Government seeks to ‘ensure high quality, effective and participatory communication with the public and stakeholders’. This strategy takes into account Australian public opinion research and includes media engagement, the AusAID website, publication of Focus magazine, publication of other key reports, and a development education program targeted at schools. Attachment B outlines the main programs with some statistics giving a brief overview of impact.
99. It is important that the Australian Government builds on this high-level of public interest and support and clearly demonstrates to the public how the current aid

- program—with its broad ranging emphasis on the MDGs as well as ‘security for development, innovative approaches to engaging with fragile states, and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS’—contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development. These are appropriate foundations for the aid program which should be communicated to the Australian public.
100. As the Simons Committee commented, ‘...it is not only legitimate for public funds to be used to inform the public about the aid program, but AusAID has a responsibility to do so’ (*One Clear Objective*, p. 295). Similarly, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (DAC) observed that ‘Greater attention to the impact of development actions on the overall objective to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development will bring clear benefits in terms of engaging the Australian public/political constituencies’.
 101. AusAID’s media and public affairs strategy has been effective but fairly traditional in its approach. A multi-dimensional and targeted community engagement program would extend the fairly passive structure of the strategy. This will have resource implications. Person-to-person communication is expensive, but essential, if the intent is to build Australian community interest in, and support for, long-term development in the region. The value of this approach is demonstrated by the Aid Advisory Council, established in 1998 to provide a forum for broad based discussion by community and industry leaders on aspects of the aid program (See 11th Statement to Parliament, 2002).
 102. An opportunity also exists to build on the success of the Town Hall meetings conducted by the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs (see Attachment A). The Town Hall meetings were well attended and well received. It is also consistent with calls at the Town Hall meetings to ‘encourage public interest and expertise...including through the media and campaigns like *Make Poverty History*’ (White Paper Forums, Summary of Public Input, www.ausaid.gov.au).
 103. **Extended community engagement needs to be supported by a re-focused and proactive public affairs strategy with sufficient flexibility and resources to support the evolving aid framework, engage with new players and maintain existing public engagement. The AusAID public affairs capacity should be aligned more strategically to both program changes emerging from the White Paper as well as the proposed Community Engagement Program. It should be research-based and aim to impact on stakeholders who influence the aid debate and, in turn, the public.**
 104. **It is proposed that the Australian Government put in place a three-year program of Town Hall meetings to inform the Australian public about developments in the aid program and invite feedback and ideas. The purpose of these meetings should be clearly identified and the success reviewed annually.**

Media

105. The Australian media is identified as having an important role to play in maintaining a more engaged community. The *Guide to the Core Group* for the White

Paper defined media as ‘groups and journalists that serve to critique and educate the public on development issues and influence government’.

106. Engaging with the media through the consultation process highlighted what seems to be a relatively low level of interest in the aid program except for stories which will hold reader interest in a competitive market. This contrasts with evidence that in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, media is more actively involved in generating and extending debate on development issues.
107. Generally, humanitarian assistance stories dominate Australian media coverage of overseas aid. This was particularly evident in the wake of the Tsunami. The Australian response to this massive destruction was mobilised very quickly to meet the immediate needs of the people in affected areas. People could see through the media a real and immediate outcome from aid to Tsunami victims. As time passes, it is critically important that the Australian public receives regular and comprehensive feedback on progress with the much longer term reconstruction efforts and, in particular, what has happened to the money.
108. Despite the high level of public interest in knowing how and where the Australian contribution is being spent, the media response to the two joint press conferences held to date has been minimal. This points to the importance of a multi-faceted approach to ensure the Australian public is informed about the aid program. Development, as it is often said, is risky and long term. Without an effective and long-term communications strategy aimed at keeping the public engaged, both the Australian Government and NGOs are vulnerable to significant loss of public support for overseas aid should reporting focus on less than successful interventions.
109. At a broader level, the media is an important element of civil society. Linkages between media groups and journalists in Australia and those in our region could assist significantly with capacity building and strengthening civil society and governance. ‘A strong and free media, together with an effective parliament and an independent judiciary, is an essential part of a democracy. When people lack access to information relevant to their lives, or a participatory voice within a democracy, they are denied an important means for determining their future...In contrast, a strong media can help to create the ‘demand’ for good governance.’ (Extract from the ‘Media for Development Initiative Project Design Document’, 2004).
110. **To generate greater media coverage of the longer term and substantive policy issues surrounding the aid program, there needs to be a targeted media communications strategy aimed at engaging significant and credible media players in dialogue about development. Options for additional linkages between Australian media and media practitioners in our region should be further examined as a part of efforts by the aid program to strengthen demand-led governance.**

Knowledge management

111. The AusAID Strategic Plan 2001 defines knowledge management as ‘the process through which an organisation’s lessons from past experience are combined with the information and understanding of its employees to improve organisational

performance and adaptability to change.’ This provides a necessary and understandable internal focus for knowledge management. It is equally important to capture and share the knowledge that exists in the broader community.

112. AusAID’s knowledge management system includes the:
- Information and Research Services Unit
 - AusAID Knowledge Warehouse (AKWa)—see below
 - AusGuide—a guide for AusAID staff, contractors and others engaged in delivery of aid
 - Country Program Infoshare – a tool for collaboration and knowledge sharing across AusAID, especially between Canberra and posts
 - AidWorks, an integrated platform for AusAID knowledge systems
 - Australian Development Gateway—see below.

(From DAC Review Presentation by Assistant Director General, Office of Review and Evaluation, 6 July 2004)

113. AKWa is a database aimed at improving the quality of the Australian overseas aid program. There are two versions—an internal version that contains more than 600 documents and an external version (a subset of the internal version) containing more than 200 documents. AKWa aims to improve the quality of Australian aid. It contains only documents considered to be of direct relevance to project and program quality. AKWa typically receives about 200 internal visits and 3 500 external visitors per month.
114. The Australian Development Gateway is part of the World Bank Development Gateway network of more than 50 country gateways. It aims to ‘support members of the development community in their efforts to reduce poverty and enhance sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region’ by providing development professionals with the opportunity to share information (www.developmentgateway.com.au). The site focuses on seven sectors—agriculture, disaster management, education, governance, health, information and communication technologies, and water. Partners provide quality assurance services and content for the site.
115. In the past few years there has been a growth of interest in knowledge management within the Australian Public Service. The definition and understanding of knowledge management has improved and expanded over time: ‘Knowledge management is a multi-disciplined approach to achieving organisational objectives by making the best use of knowledge. It involves the design, review and implementation of both social and technological processes to improve the application of knowledge, in the collective interest of stakeholders’ (Standards Australia 2003, p. 3).
116. The 2001 AusAID Information Management Study concluded that the culture within the organisation is predominantly oral. Much of the detail on ‘how things are really done’ lies in the heads of AusAID staff, leaving the agency vulnerable to loss of corporate knowledge as people leave. An oral culture is not necessarily a learning culture and can hamper productive knowledge transfer. An oral culture also lacks the rigour and objectiveness of evidence-based data, and information and knowledge essential to critical thinking and analytical capacity.

117. The consultation process revealed a sense of frustration amongst development practitioners in relation to information sharing. This is evidenced by the strong call for AusAID to facilitate improved inter-sectoral and inter-agency knowledge gathering and sharing as a means of overcoming the perceived absence of opportunities to publicly identify or acknowledge innovative and effective contributions to sustainable development. Development practitioners want to share ideas and approaches to implementation and benefit from 'knowledge sharing of our key learning'.
118. While people seemed generally aware of the availability of the tools on the AusAID website there was a desire for AusAID to move from information giving to a more interactive mode of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation. The aid program can only benefit from improvements in AusAID's knowledge management systems and a robust approach to knowledge sharing which encourages contestability of ideas.
119. AusAID's approach to knowledge management has been to strengthen formal and informal systems. To encourage information sharing and provide the appropriate environment for knowledge creation there needs to be investment in building and promoting the existing knowledge management infrastructure. While improved information and communication technology will provide the means of facilitating a sharing environment, new and upgraded technology will not itself guarantee a learning culture or that knowledge will be shared.
120. A significant challenge will be to encourage a culture in AusAID that values sharing of information. Based on the experience of other government agencies, there will need to be changes in cultural and business processes to encourage trust and openness, collaboration, shared purpose, and value sharing (refer www.oit.nsw.gov.au).
121. **It is timely for AusAID to review existing systems and business processes to develop and implement a Knowledge Management Strategy which improves access to information, experience and expertise within the agency, improves business processes and enhances policy and analytical capacity. Improved knowledge management within AusAID, together with improved knowledge sharing with the development community (as a part of improved community engagement) will contribute to improved aid effectiveness.**

Networks and forums

122. Knowledge sharing also needs forums in which people can discuss theories, issues, contexts, methodologies, and case studies. Existing opportunities include:
- the Development Studies Network, which provides broad based opportunities for exchange of knowledge of global issues and development related research
 - the Centre for Democratic Institutions which aims to harness Australian and international best practice in support of developing countries' needs for democratic governance
 - national and international conferences which bring together specialists (for example, on HIV or agriculture).

123. During the consultation process development practitioners, researchers, experts, and others strongly favoured engaging in dialogue and sharing knowledge and experience—the lessons learned—through thematically focused forums and networks. The DAC Report also proposed that ‘AusAID should reinforce its investment in development education in order to foster a broader and better informed public debate on international development issues, including where appropriate supporting civil society organisations’ (2004 DAC Report, Executive Summary).
124. There is a high level of enthusiasm in the development community for sharing knowledge and experience in forums that cross the boundaries of existing silos, to enable development practitioners and others to make contact and build communities of practice where interested participants can regularly engage in sharing and learning.
125. As well as improving policy dialogue, creating communities of practice could also provide opportunities to improve designs and methods of peer review. Return on investment could also be improved, especially if such communities of practice can engage the practitioners employed by development contractors, who seem especially shut out by current dialogue that focuses on contractual matters and is limited by perceptions of commercial confidentiality.
126. **AusAID could add value to the current range of opportunities by facilitating the coming together of selected specialists to address development themes or issues. Convening such forums and networks could be outsourced to universities, think tanks, ACFID, or other organisations with the capacity to identify and maintain a level of interest.**

Future Directions

127. The Australian Government will continue to rely on the Australian development community to inform and support the medium-term, strategic outlook for the aid program. Further strengthening of the relationship between the aid program and the Australian community should be purposeful and strategic in support of enhanced Australian Government capacity to deliver development outcomes and increase public understanding of the Australian aid program.
128. The need for engagement of new partners in the aid program will be determined by the final outcomes of the White Paper. New directions for the program may identify gaps in the level of expertise and experience of those delivering service and point to the need for new partners.
129. The aid program must maintain and extend delivery arrangements as well as identify new partners. In seeking to enhance its capacity to deliver strategic development outcomes, the aid program must move beyond dealing with its Australian partners—current and potential—solely as implementers and develop new approaches that build on, and leverage off, the extensive development knowledge and capability within the Australian development community.

130. New players are best identified through a long-term and strategic approach to community engagement which specifically seeks to identify potential new partners and build on the capacity and willingness of existing partners to participate in 'innovative approaches to alliances and partnerships across the development sector' (ACFID Submission, p. 4).
131. An important feature of engaging with new partners will be to identify program priorities and then target key partnerships that can deliver key outcomes. These could include whole-of-government and country/regional priorities, tapping into the ideas market through strengthened development forums and networks, and appropriate cost benefit analysis of new engagement strategies. Above all, AusAID must be strategic with its partnerships and activities. It cannot be all things to all people.
132. A new approach to community engagement which seeks both to ensure that the community is informed about and supportive of the emerging aid program as well as extending partnership will present significant challenges.
133. Effective community engagement needs to be strategic, long term, valued, and supported. It will require deliberate, considered and mutually determined collaborations with the purpose and limits of engagement clearly identified and agreed. Being clear and upfront about the purpose and extent of engagement gives interested groups the opportunity to determine their willingness to participate. It will also require substantial commitment of resources, both time and money. Community engagement is time consuming and may not produce significant results immediately.
134. A more active approach to community engagement also means valuing Australian practitioner knowledge and being ready to welcome contestability of ideas and engage with critical thinking. A challenge for AusAID will be to look beyond the immediate, pragmatic and action oriented approach which characterises the current mode of engagement to longer term, more interactive engagement with partners that stimulates the contestability of ideas.
135. There needs to be concerted effort to capture knowledge and experience and share the learning of development practitioners. This requires not only investment in infrastructure to support knowledge management but also an openness and sustained commitment to seeking new ideas. Without this investment, much of the effort which goes towards community engagement, will, over time, become a disinvestment. AusAID should also create high level forums/roundtables and cross-sectoral dialogue opportunities to encourage knowledge sharing and contestability of ideas.
136. There is currently an inherent weakness in the management of community engagement in the Australian overseas aid program—it is neither systematic nor strategic. A strategically focussed program is needed to build on the current broad ranging approach to community engagement and to support new and emerging directions in the aid program.

Recommendation: A Three-Year Community Engagement Program

137. **It is recommended that the Australian Government establish a three year Community Engagement Program, specifically focussed on maximising the expertise and experience offered by its various partners; identifying new partners with skills relevant to new and emerging development issues, and sustaining high public support for the aid program.**
138. The goals of a refocused and more strategic approach to community engagement should be to:
- build on the capacity and willingness of existing partners to participate in innovative approaches to enhance development outcomes.
 - identify priorities for new partnerships and relationship building
 - introduce more flexible approaches to engagement that encourage new and different partnerships
 - strengthen and deepen the constituency of interest and support for the existing aid program
 - capture the knowledge and experience of lessons learned, particularly from development practitioners, to contribute to knowledge creation and sharing
 - encourage contestability of ideas through further investment in research and forums engaging a broad spectrum of interest and experience— including other government agencies, the corporate sector, think tanks, universities, and practitioners
139. A refocused and strengthened commitment to community engagement needs to be underpinned by upgraded support for knowledge management and a pro-active public affairs strategy.
140. Strategies to assist in achieving the goals of the proposed three-year community engagement program have been identified throughout this paper and are summarised in Attachment 1.
141. This program should be evaluated and reviewed after three years.

Note of Thanks

142. The authors would like to thank all those who gave generously of their time and views to inform this paper. We commend the Secretariat and the Public Affairs Group for their support and for coordinating the Town Hall meetings.

Appendix 1. Strategies for Community Engagement

Engaging with Development Contractors

Breaking down the silos in which AusAID engages with its partners and bringing practitioners, experts, researchers, and others together in high-level thematically focused forums would encourage sharing of knowledge and experience, contestability of ideas and input to policy development. It is also suggested that incentives for documenting learning in the field would encourage contribution to development related research by development contractors.

Commercial contracts should be further untied, to encourage internationally competitive tendering.

Engaging with NGOs

As the aid program responds to changes both within the broader development context and the region, it is timely for AusAID and ACFID to reconsider their relationship with a view to engaging in more productive and mutually effective ways that enhance policy dialogue and contribute to aid effectiveness. It is proposed that AusAID and ACFID cooperate in long-term empirical research aimed at confirming the Australian NGOs' claims of effectiveness with a view to scaling up where appropriate.

The Government should reaffirm the importance of ANCP and Accreditation as the primary tools for engaging with Australian professional development NGOs.

Volunteers

Support for volunteering should continue, as volunteering is a valuable form of community engagement. Moves to increase the volunteer program should be considered in light of the White Paper and recent increases, such as doubling of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program and increased funding to the Australian Volunteer Program.

Engaging with CBOs

If service delivery partnership opportunities are extended to CBOs, then new and different rules of engagement will be needed. Such arrangements, while more flexible, must also have sufficient provision for accountability to provide a level of confidence in an organisation's capacity to contribute to the specified and agreed development outcomes. Such mechanisms should not be introduced simply as opportunities to fund good intentions and good ideas. Shared accountability and commitment to long-term development effectiveness is a prized asset. It contributes to the high levels of community support for the aid program and should not be compromised.

Rather than seeking to include the full range of these CBOs in the aid program, it may be more efficient to put them in contact with other organisations active in service delivery through a brokering facility. This could be similar in concept to the Industry Capability Network, which facilitates business partnerships for the purpose of local supply, access to global supply chains and local business growth. Another alternative would be to better promote the Direct Aid Program and Small Activities Schemes that operate at Diplomatic Missions, with a view to enabling the local counterpart of an Australian group to apply for assistance. Given the number of approaches to AusAID, consideration needs to be given to establishing a cost effective process to evaluate ideas

and offers of goods or services. To avoid raising expectations there will need to be absolute clarity about how far the door is open.

Engaging with the Corporate Sector

As a matter of priority, AusAID should identify and engage with companies that have investment interests in the region with a view to creating partnerships and alliances that strengthen development outcomes. Other opportunities for engaging with the corporate sector include working through the PMCBP to encourage CR reporting by Australian based companies with operations in Asia and the Pacific; giving profile to improved engagement with the corporate sector by creating an overseas development award linked to the PMCBP; and supporting NGO efforts to work effectively with the corporate sector towards a shared understanding of sustainable development.

Engaging with the Public Sector

The aid program should also expand its efforts to engage with state, territory, and local governments to identify appropriate partners. The aid program could benefit from coordinated and ongoing linkages to state organisations such as the Queensland International Aid and Development Business Unit, as well as other state departments and agencies. Current engagement with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) should be continued and strengthened. Consideration should also be given to expanding the PSLP to other public sector organisations such as public hospitals.

Engaging with Universities and Research Institutions

In view of emerging policy priorities, for example transboundary issues, governance and water, as well as the continuing drive for aid effectiveness, it is also important to extend the range of research partners, particularly within Australia. The emphasis of these partnerships should not only be on producing high-quality research products, but also on founding long-term institutional relationships and developing pools of expertise that can be accessed as needed in an efficient and flexible manner. Consideration should be given to identifying and supporting designated research fellows or organisations to conduct research specifically relevant to the overseas aid program.

Development Studies

The university sector plays an important role in preparing development practitioners and advocates. However, there is seemingly little engagement between the aid program and university teaching programs. Consideration should be given to extending the suitability and availability of development education materials to the tertiary education market.

Scholarships

The Scholarship Program and the links it creates are highly valued and consideration should be given to both widening and deepening it to introduce new learning modalities including work experience and exchanges in a broader range of disciplines, and ongoing mentoring programs.

Development Education

Development Education is a fundamental building block for development awareness and constituency building, and could provide a focus for greater collaboration between AusAID, development NGOs and government and non-government education agencies.

Engaging with Parliamentarians

Relationship building with MPs should continue and be used to identify activities which both build a constituency of interest and contribute to the aid program. The opportunity exists to extend and deepen the interest of MPs in Asia and the Pacific, and in the aid program in particular.

Engaging with the Australian public

Extended community engagement needs to be supported by a re-focused and proactive public affairs strategy with sufficient flexibility and resources to support the evolving aid framework, engage with new players and maintain existing public engagement. The AusAID public affairs capacity should be aligned more strategically to both program changes emerging from the White Paper as well as the proposed Community Engagement Program. It should be research-based and aim to impact on stakeholders who influence the aid debate and, in turn, the public.

It is proposed that the Australian Government put in place a three-year program of Town Hall meetings to inform the Australian public about developments in the aid program and invite feedback and ideas. The purpose of these meetings should be clearly identified and the success reviewed annually.

Media

To generate greater media coverage of the longer term and substantive policy issues surrounding the aid program, there needs to be a targeted media communications strategy aimed at engaging significant and credible media players in dialogue about development. Options for additional linkages between Australian media and media practitioners in our region should be further examined as part of efforts by the aid program to strengthen demand-led governance.

Knowledge Management

It is timely for AusAID to review existing systems and business processes to develop and implement a Knowledge Management Strategy which improves access to information, experience and expertise within the agency, improves business processes and enhances policy and analytical capacity. Improved knowledge management within AusAID, together with improved knowledge sharing with the development community (as a part of improved community engagement) will contribute to improved aid effectiveness.

Networks and Forums

AusAID could add value to the current range of opportunities by facilitating the coming together of selected specialists to address development themes or issues. Convening such forums and networks could be outsourced to universities, think tanks, ACFID, or other organisations with the capacity to identify and maintain a level of interest.

Attachment A: Town Hall flyer



Australian Government
AusAID

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

White Paper on Australia's Overseas Aid Program

The Australian Government is developing a White Paper, to be tabled in Parliament in early 2006, which will be a strategic blueprint for the future direction of Australia's overseas aid program.

As part of this process, the Government, through AusAID, is consulting a broad range of specialist groups. The Government seeks the views of interested members of the Australian community on the future directions of the aid program.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Bruce Billson MP, invites members of the public interested in aid and development issues to have their say at a special public meeting in Sydney on 21 September 2005.

Through the overseas aid program, Australia helps our neighbours reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. For example, the aid program was a central component of Australia's response to the December 2004 Indian Ocean disaster.

Our aid program supports poverty alleviation around the world with the main focus on the Asia Pacific region, particularly our immediate neighbours.

Date: 5:30 – 7:30pm, Wednesday 21 September
Venue: City Recital Hall, Angel Place, Sydney (between Pitt and George Streets, near Martin Place)
RSVP essential – rsvpnsw@horizoncommunication.com.au or Claire Dean 02 8572 5600

For more information on the White Paper including methodology and discussion papers visit www.ausaid.gov.au

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Attachment B: Existing mechanisms for community engagement

Business and industry activity	Description	Participants	Frequency
Development Contractors Forum	To discuss policy and operational issues and brief contractors on latest developments in AusAID.	AusAID management and contractors wishing to do business with AusAID	Six monthly
Access AusAID seminars	Occasional seminars held around Australia to advise private sector how to access AusAID business	Open to all	As requested by business associations or state and territory governments
International Development Contractors Group Meeting (IDC)	To discuss issues of concern to their members and AusAID	Members of the IDC Executive and AusAID management	Six monthly
Contractor policy dialogues	To discuss contemporary policy issues whether they are operational or development based.	AusAID management and selected contractors	As required
Business Councils	Australian/developing country business councils	AusAID officers sometimes attend to provide information on particular issues	As required
Activity type / development NGO activity	Description	Target participants	Statistics/frequency
Committee for Development Cooperation	AusAID/NGO advisory and consultative body—policy input to accreditation and ANCP	Six elected NGO representatives and six AusAID representatives	Three times per year
Top 11 meetings	AusAID/NGO discussions on current events and issues	Selected NGO CEOs, AusAID Director General, other AusAID staff	Twice per year
Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) NGO consultants	Discussion on WB/IMF/ADB policy	Selected NGOs, AusAID and Treasury staff	Twice per year
AusAID/ACFID annual consultation	Discussion of policy and operational issues	ACFID members and selected AusAID staff	Annually
NGO policy dialogues	Discussion of recent developments and significant issues	Relevant Deputy Director General AusAID (DDG) and Accredited NGOs (ACFID also)	Two to three times per year

ACFID Working Groups	Sub group discussion of areas of interest eg. performance, country specific	AusAID and NGO reps with interest in area	As required
Media/ public diplomacy	Description	Target	Statistics
Internet	General aid information through to specific activities	All interested in any aspect of program. Starting point for those interested in more detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.091 million hits during 2003–04 ▪ 70 000 publications downloaded each month
Media liaison	Media inquiries and proactive approaches, media visits, press conferences, media briefings, editorial, media releases, MP briefings, documentary development, community service announcements	General media and specialists with a view of accessing interested public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 525 media releases ▪ 549 media requests ▪ 371 speeches during 2003–04
Global Education	Development education material and curriculum, separate Global Education website, teacher training	Educational institutions in all states and territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15 000 teachers trained ▪ 8 000 curriculum docs ▪ 558 482 hits to May 2004
Community engagement	Shows, industry days, community events, exhibitions, displays, public meetings, conferences, seminars, sponsorship	General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 5.1 million audience during 2003–04 ▪ 140 MPs involved
Publications	Extensive range of general and specific publications, including <i>Focus</i> , AusAID's flagship magazine, agency policy and program analysis publications	All interested in aid program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 19716 subscriptions to Focus ▪ 83 600 publications sent out 2003–04
Other activity	Description	Participants	Statistics
Australian Development Gateway	Internet site sharing development knowledge	Development practitioners (domestic and overseas) focus Voluntary contributions from Australian organisations	Over 24 000 hits per month in July 2005, long-term trend upwards

Mechanisms by which AusAID accesses Community expertise

Mechanism	Eligibility	Value
ANCP	Accredited NGOs in a pooled funding arrangement.	\$25.5 million (Budget 05–06)
NGO Cooperation Agreements	Accredited NGOs; competitive process.	Various commitments— no current summary total available
Contracts/ Tender process	Implementation activities: firms must carry on business in ANZ or be local firms in the recipient country. Exception is LDCs which are open to any organisations worldwide. No restrictions apply to procurement for individuals.	1300 new contracts/ value approx \$812 million (actual 04–05) Annually AusAID manages about \$3 billion in contracts
Public Sector Linkages Program (PSLP)	Departments, agencies and statutory authorities from the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and public universities.	\$8 million (Budget 05–06 from relevant country programs)
International Seminar Support Scheme (ISSS)	Assists participants from developing countries to attend development-oriented seminars in Australia; sponsor/co-sponsor must be an Australian organisation.	\$1.2 million (Budget 05–06)
AusAID Development Research Program	A flexible, competitive fund to facilitate cross-agency research, as well as strategic partnerships with selected research institutions.	\$2.3 million (Budget 05–06)
Australian Volunteer Program	Individuals are eligible to apply to be volunteers through the Core Program (contracted to AVI, ABV and Austraining) and the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program. In addition, Australian organisations can become Partner Organisations in the volunteer program.	Core Volunteer Program \$16 million (Budget 05–06) AYAD \$10.5 million (Budget 05–06)

Attachment C: Contributors to consultations

The following list is not exhaustive. It does not include all who participated in some group consultation meetings. Our thanks to all who made time to speak to us.

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Attachment D: Reference list

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Glossary

ABV	Australian Business Volunteers
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ACFID	Australian Council for International Development (formerly ACFOA)
ACFOA	Australian Council for Overseas Aid
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AKWa	AusAID Knowledge Warehouse
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
ANCP	AusAID-NGO Cooperation Program
ANU	Australian National University
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AYAD	Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development
CDC	Committee for Development Cooperation
CPP	PNG Churches Partnership Program
CR	Corporate Responsibility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
DDG	Deputy Director General of AusAID
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMC	International Mining Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISSS	International Seminar Support Scheme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	non-government organisations
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PMCBP	Prime Minister's Community Business Partnerships
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSLP	Public Sector Linkages Program
VIDA	Volunteers for International Development from Australia