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People are NOT for sale

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on Australia's 'New International Development Policy'.

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ACRATH Background

ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans) is an Australian registered charity with a network that spans across Australia in cities, regional centres, and remote Australia. The network extends overseas including to countries in Asia, the Pacific and Timor Leste, where ACRATH members have worked for many decades and have a deep understanding of local communities and culture.

ACRATH's purpose is to eliminate human trafficking and the harm it causes, in Australia, in the Asia Pacific region and globally. We do this in collaboration with non-government organisations, with departmental officers and with Members of Parliament.

ACRATH has just endorsed our 2023-2025 Strategic Directions. We will continue to:

- offer Companionship to people trafficked into Australia and their children;
- advocate to address issues that adversely impact those who are vulnerable to human trafficking and slavery;
- raise awareness of human trafficking;
- campaign for change.

This submission responds to questions 1 to 6 in the Terms of Reference.

1. What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?

Australia's response to climate change is one of the key challenges that will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years. Climate change is a national, regional and global issue in its own right; it also impacts on our national security. This includes climate induced migration encompassing the displacement of persons due to the impacts of climate related crisis, water and food security.

Poverty in our region is another challenge and it is one of the leading causes of human trafficking and modern slavery including forced marriage. Vulnerable communities are more susceptible to human trafficking, modern slavery and gender inequality. Increased poverty drives child labour, growing gender inequality and gender-based violence.

Labour shortages across numerous sectors is a key challenge for Australia's economy. While labour mobility is a key policy driver to addressing Australia's shortage of workers particularly in the agriculture and horticultural sectors, the challenge for Australia is balancing the benefits to workers and their communities, supporting Pacific Island country economies, as well as meeting Australia's labour shortage. ACRATH works with Pacific Island and Timorese Leste workers in Australia participating in government programs. Supporting partnerships for an inclusive labour mobility program should result in an excellent expression of mutual benefit, a core principle of effective partnerships.

We believe Australia's aid program can do more through implementing programs, that are effective and supported by strong partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. For example, developing climate-resilient approaches to international development with programs and investments that are specific to local community and cultural needs. Placing locally lead approaches at the forefront of Australia's development policy will lead to greater impact and sustainable results.

Australia's international development program needs to be based on a commitment to genuine long-term relationships, through respectful partnerships, especially with its Pacific Island neighbours, and balancing the influence of nation states in our immediate region.

Australia's appointment of an Ambassador for First Nations People provides an opportunity to build trusted partnerships with Pacific Island nations though incorporating First Nations approaches, perspectives, and knowledge to the shared challenges facing our region.

2. What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

To respond to these challenges Australia needs to support a strong civil society sector that has strong local relationships and partnerships in-country. It will be critical that all development program stakeholders including government, civil society, and the private sector work in a coordinated manner with bilateral, multilateral and private donors including public private partnerships.

Australia has strong sectoral expertise in agriculture, education, health, energy, water, technology, and mining. Australia's expertise can be leveraged to respond to the regional challenges including, for example, through the provision of expertise to support innovative agricultural and fisheries programs and small-scale solar energy capacity; these programs will support food security and livelihoods.

Australia has proven whole-of-government capability and that capability should support a strategy for the coordination of Australian programs to meet its commitment to reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals and addressing the challenges of its international development program.

3. How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

Australia's national strengths, relevant to this inquiry, includes its innovative approach to sectors such as agriculture, health and renewable energies, a strong whole of government capability, democratic values, historic relations in the region, and its diverse culture. Our strengths are reflected through government, business, civil society and Australian community values and practices. Australia can for example:

- Deliver multi-dimensional responses to challenges, for example linking development program outcomes with broader government objectives; the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme program is a potential example of this.

- Utilise its position and influence in the Asia-Pacific region to partner with countries to implement effective development programs.
- Platform Australian technologies, innovation and expertise to deliver programs while supporting Australian businesses.
- Capitalise on the full range of capability, expertise and connection in the region of Australia's small to medium NGOs who are not part of, nor have the capacity to engage in, contracts for large aid projects.
 - For example, ACRATH's network across Australia provides support to PALM workers in regional Australia including life skills and community engagement.
 - ACRATH's approach includes connecting workers to local community members, and it has been very successful due, in part, to high levels of trust that the workers have in ACRATH representatives, the church, and the faith community. The one missing piece in this project is the funding for a worker to implement and foster connections.

4. *How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?*

Australia's role as a trusted strategic partner with recipient countries can be achieved through respected and trusted partnerships starting from the highest level. A genuine partnership approach, with a greater understanding of the cultural dimensions of relationships, would then be reflected at all levels between Australian based officials, contractors, NGOs and their respective counterparts and delivery partners.

The new policy should provide greater certainty of funding for organisations developing and delivering programs. For example, ANCP funding as well as grant programs need to have multi-year funding cycles to enable longer term programming and sustainable outcomes.

5. *What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?*

Australia would benefit from leveraging the full range of NGO capabilities to deliver programs and smaller NGOs are sometimes overlooked due to the perceived efficiencies of managing a smaller number of relationships. However, this detracts from the effectiveness of programs where smaller NGOs often have closer relationships with aid recipients. Australia's hierarchical and bureaucratic approach can detract from efforts to deliver program outcomes especially in situations where NGOs have long standing connection with local delivery partners.

The partnership approach should continue to be used and increased, and local partners given agency and resources so that decision-making is devolved, and operating models and behaviour are changed to incorporate this approach.

There is an opportunity to communicate more effectively with the Australian community about the benefits of Australia's international aid program and how it aligns with Australia's strategic objectives particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Greater engagement by the government with the broader Australian community would support greater awareness and understanding of Australia's strategic objectives and an awareness of development issues. ACRATH's advocacy with Australian communities including through its teaching kit to assist secondary school teachers in educating and raising consciousness about the issue of human trafficking has been well received in schools across Australia.

In our recent experience the Government has not given appropriate support and resources to community-based organisations to assist Pacific Island and Timor Leste workers to settle into Australia. From our on the ground experience many workers arrive with only a limited knowledge of Australian culture, of their rights as workers, or an understanding of 'how things are done'. ACRATH is currently working on a project with the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) to prevent seasonal worker exploitation in Australia. This project encourages parishes across Australia to welcome into their communities seasonal workers, focusing especially on those from the Pacific and Timor Leste. Our experience informs us that seasonal workers well connected into local Australian communities are less likely to be able to be exploited.

Departure workshops should be mandatory to assist and inform workers with issues that need to be resolved prior to their departure including final wages, superannuation and taxation refunds.

6. *How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?*

Performance and delivery systems should have a focus on providing more support to local organisations and communities who are best positioned to provide the effective programs to address the structural causes of climate induced migration, child labour, poverty, gender inequality, gender-based violence, and forced marriage. The systems should be designed to provide assistance for partnership brokering support and cross-sector partnerships, and institutional capacity building where assessed as needed and requested by in-country partners and or governments.