

New International Development Policy

A Submission by the [Development Studies Association](#) of Australia

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The Development Studies Association of Australia

The Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA) represents researchers, scholars and practitioners based in Australia and the region, engaged in research, teaching, and training in the field of development studies. The purpose of the DSAA is to promote critical inquiry, reflection, research, teaching and the value of Development Studies in Australia. The DSAA seeks to facilitate collaborations and engagement within and beyond the academy. DSAA provides a platform for bringing together all those concerned with progressing Development Studies in Australia around core events and activities, and in the context of this review, to provide a voice to government.

Introduction

We welcome the review process towards developing a new international development policy. It is timely given the pressures on the aid budget, and globally in terms of the changing foreign aid architecture, the shift away from the OECD-DAC framework, the growing influence of non-DAC donors, and the need for more meaningful inclusion of voices from the Global South regarding their needs, in terms of development cooperation, from their development partners.

As an overarching principle, policy attention should be given to global challenges: the changing nature of partnership in the Asia--Pacific region and beyond; the importance of social inclusion and voice; climate change, particularly in the Pacific; the urgent need to uphold our human rights obligations by also supporting public services to improve livelihood insecurities; and our commitments to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) must be based on these principles;

We recommend that the program should reflect the 'soft power' that aid policy provides through achieving important outcomes like reducing poverty and inequality, and being more inclusive of marginalised groups particularly of women and girls, and indigenous peoples. These all are essential for a prosperous and secure region. To achieve this the program should expand its focus beyond South East Asia and the Pacific and also include other states in the region, particularly those that are being affected by climate change, but with limited capacity to respond: these may include countries in South Asia and further afield. Part of this is to **increase the volume of aid to 0.5 per cent of GNI** over the forward estimates in order to be a credible donor.

Effective aid requires greater adherence to Aid Effectiveness principles, particularly those about the reliability and predictability of aid flows and local ownership and control. It also requires good quality aid. This demands for instance reducing support for microfinance, which should only be used in a limited way for a well-identified and targeted segment of viable businesses. Instead Australia's poverty reduction aid should focus on cash transfers and grants to partners and communities where appropriate. We recommend combining support for universal entitlements to public services, including water, sanitation, primary healthcare, education and public housing. This could be combined with supporting a coordinated push (with other multilateral partners) towards universal basic income to also address youth unemployment and complement effective public programs to facilitate local community projects.

Below we offer a set of points in response to the specific terms of reference.

1. **Building effective, accountable states that can sustain their own development;**

A key element of this is inclusive development, in particular of those that are currently excluded: in particular indigenous peoples, women, those living with disability, and religious and other minorities. We recommend:

- Increasing the proportion of funding to projects that specifically target women and girls as the primary objective, and work towards ending violence against women. In 2019, this was

11 per cent and one per cent respectively ([DAC 2019](#)). While noting the current commitment for all projects over the \$3m to have a gender objective, this recommendation refers to funding to those as a primary objective. These numbers can and should be easily doubled, and Australia has a role to play in improving DAC performance;

- Having an active program of engaging with indigenous peoples in partner countries and have specific programs in countries where there are high levels of marginalisation, and indigenous peoples are in the minority and/or structurally disadvantaged;
- Ensuring there is a disability inclusion program in all bilateral agreements;
- Taking a multigenerational approach to development programming. The populations of the Pacific and Southeast Asia are marked by large youth populations. It will be vital to the future prosperity of these countries that development and public policy and programming efforts address their needs and capabilities.

Australian aid should not be driven as much as it currently is by geostrategic competition with China. While this is undoubtedly important to Australia's national interest and security, aid programs driven by geostrategic interest generally achieve poor results and outcomes. Indeed, they backfire when projects fail or excessive corruption and/or other locally experienced conflicts emerge in program driven or related contexts. In particular we recommend that Australian aid should be:

- explicitly aimed at complementing what other donors are doing including those where there may be perceived geostrategic competition, and where appropriate have trilateral arrangements, even where they may be geostrategic competitions. This is likely to be well appreciated by the development partners, and also provides opportunity for Australian aid policy to influence, shape and co-determine broader multilateral efforts and programs
- aware of where there are other large dominant donors, and develop support programs for partners to complement that work to avoid possible aid or debt 'traps'; avoid duplication, and *also* avoid association with programs likely to 'fail' communities (see previous point);
- focused on achieving shared goals with aid recipient countries, working towards locally relevant goals. Where appropriate, this will involve aligning Australia's bilateral development assistance with the development plans of individual partner countries but may also include assisting these countries to create and refine such plans in situations where local development plans have been designed to reflect donor worldviews (a common but little acknowledged practice). Committing to a partnership focus aligns with [Australia's Pacific Step-up](#) and recent promises to lead its [foreign policy in the Pacific through listening](#).

2. Enhancing states and community resilience to external pressures and shocks

One of the major challenges facing communities is increasing precarity in terms of livelihoods, due to climate change but also the pressures of globalisation, conflicts that have global ramifications (e.g. Ukraine war on food and energy supplies), and finally the lasting impact of COVID-19, which precipitates future challenges in regional and global health. A key way for improving precarious livelihoods is to develop policies and programs that provide services and support systems as universal entitlements for poorer communities to live in dignity.

In the agriculture sector climate change has led to increased shocks and uncertain yields. Women farmers in particular are most at threat as they may be the principal cultivators when their menfolk migrate seeking paid work. There is also an increase in unsafe migration particularly for poor unskilled women, and this leads to what amounts to trafficking for part, if not all, of the migration experience. In the health sector the effect of COVID is longer term with declining life expectancy,

the uncertain impact of 'long COVID' and overstretched health systems having to divert resources away from public health more generally. We recommend that:

- there be safe migration programs primarily aimed at women in line with the [G-20 Rome Leaders Declaration](#) (clause 35) and Australia's commitment to the anti-trafficking convention, to provide migrating women with information on their rights at work and costs of migration, with capacity building of government and NGOs to support migrant workers; promote regional dialogue around safe migration and the trafficking protocols; push for more controls on and elimination of child migration, child labour and exploitation (e.g. in the fishing industry).
- the agriculture research program through ACIAR, focus on agriculture support and systems that are tailored to women farmers, farm resilience, agricultural biodiversity, soil ecology and nutritionally and ecologically enhanced food systems.
- there be a climate adaptation fund for countries most vulnerable to climate changes, particularly those in the Pacific but also those in river deltas (e.g. Cambodia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh) which are subject to both increased flooding and droughts in what are fragile environments.
- there be a health support program to help rebuild shattered health care systems across the region.

3. Connecting partners with Australia and regional architecture

A new approach to partnership should be at the core of the new international development policy with local voices and local contexts the driver of policy and practice. Local ownership has to be centred on local priorities, community needs, be at the heart of development, and move away from top-down approaches that are paternalists in its tone, often delivering unworkable and unsustainable policy, and program approaches.

A central part of this is 'people-to-people', and the importance of a sense of, if not the reality of, solidarity with the local communities. How this occurs in practice is more difficult, but one route is through dialogue with, and support for, more community-based NGOs, to ensure that they have a voice in the development and other investments that effects their community's lives.

In many countries there are increasingly onerous and restrictive regulatory impositions on local NGOs, which limit their capacity to do their work and represent their constituents in policy dialogue. Part of the program may be to enhance dialogue with local NGOs and their Australian partners, to ensure their capacity to operate freely and engage in policy dialogue.

The DFAT 2015 NGO framework should be reviewed to more clearly articulate the role of local NGOs in policy dialogue, and recognise the threats local NGOs may face in difficult socio/political environments. Likewise, increased funding to Australian NGOs to engage better with partners should be part of the new framework.

Part of the new partnership ought to be increased engagements with Australian universities and institutes that carry out research and teaching on international development, as well as having extensive networks and partnerships in the Global South. While individual Schools and academics have been invited for DFAT consultation or roundtables from time to time, we recommend a more strategic approach to explore some form of university network/research partnership that goes beyond consultancy and *ad hoc* work, to a more formal dialogue.

A recommended avenue is for a formal dialogue through the Development Studies Association of Australia. Likewise Australian universities' research experiences in global development should be tapped with targeted research funding to research and address current development problems.

4. **Generating collective action on global challenges that impact our region.**

The aid program in addressing Climate Change

Climate change is affecting many of Australia's development partners acutely, particularly in coastal regions of Asia and the small island states of the Pacific, as developing countries struggle to respond to the impacts of rising sea levels increased storms, storm surges, and cyclones, as well as greater weather variation leading to increased droughts and floods. The aid program can be used to provide research as well as support to mitigation and adaptations strategies. More can be done in the bilateral program across the Pacific and low-lying countries in Asia to build their infrastructure and capacity to adapt and mitigate the worse effects of climate change and global warming

The aid program in addressing human rights issues.

The human rights issues that are emerging globally are to do with both the growing threat to civil liberties and the effects of growing social and economic inequality. In both cases there has been marked reversal in how countries meet their obligations to address and uphold human rights. A clearer statement in the aid program's principles about recognising the centrality of the two human rights covenants in and for development, as well as conventions on the wellbeing of children would be a critical first step on which Australia could take a leading role.

An emerging issue is state intolerance and persecution against minority groups, as seen for instance in Indonesian government's hostility towards LGBTIQ community, the Philippines Government's killing of so-called drug addicts, and Burmese government's genocide of the Rohingya people. **We recommend** the Australian aid program reflect a stronger position on human rights protection, whether it is aid projects that empower vulnerable groups, or awareness and capacity building of service providers, and within education systems. This should include a renewed commitment to conceptualizing, funding and operationalizing peace-building initiatives in the contexts of deep seated and/or persistent conflict constellations in the region.

A focus on the provision of universal entitlements (as noted above) addresses the objectives of reducing inequalities, meeting human rights obligations, and of reducing social unrest and schism.

Summary Recommendations

1. To increase the volume of aid to 0.5 per cent of GNI over the forward estimates.
2. The aid program focus on the provision of universal entitlements addressing the objectives of: reducing inequalities; meeting our human rights obligations; and of reducing social unrest and schism.
3. To be part of a coordinated push (with other multilateral partners) towards universal basic income to also address youth unemployment and complement effective public programs to facilitate local community projects.
4. Double the funding of projects that specifically target women and girls as a primary objective, and work towards ending violence against women;
5. Engage with indigenous peoples in partner countries, with specific programs where there is high levels of marginalisation, and indigenous peoples are in the minority and/or structurally disadvantaged.
6. The aid program focus on locally relevant development goals.
7. That there is a disability inclusion program in all bilateral agreements;

8. Australian aid be explicitly aimed at complementing what other donors are doing including those where there may be perceived geostrategic competition, without undermining human rights obligations, including trilateral arrangements where appropriate and workable.
9. Develop support programs for partners to avoid possible aid or debt 'traps', duplication, and association with programs likely to 'fail' communities.
10. There be aid support for safe migration primarily aimed as women in line with the G-20 Rome Leaders Declaration (clause 35) and Australia's commitment to the anti-trafficking convention;
11. Ensure that the agriculture research program through ACIAR, focus on agriculture support and systems that are tailored to women farmers, farm resilience, agricultural biodiversity, soil ecology, and nutritionally and ecologically enhanced food systems
12. There be a climate adaptation fund for countries most vulnerable to climate changes, particularly those in the Pacific, but also those on major river deltas (e.g. Cambodia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh)
13. There be a health support program to help rebuild shattered public health care systems across the region.
14. The 2015 NGO framework should be reviewed to more clearly articulate the role of local NGOs in policy dialogue, and recognise the threats local NGOs may face in difficult socio/political environments.
15. There be increased funding to Australian NGOs to engage better with partners should be part of the new framework (see 14).
16. There be a clearer statement in the aid program's principles about recognising the centrality of the two human rights covenants in human development, as well as conventions on the wellbeing of children.
17. The Australian aid program provide greater human rights protection, whether it is aid projects that empower vulnerable groups, or awareness and capacity building of service providers.
18. Australia to take a lead in promoting sustainable development; with reflective and careful engagement with research on the Sustainable Development Goals, associated implementation initiatives, and their social, ecological and political implications.
19. That there be a formal dialogue through the Development Studies Association of Australia, given Australian universities' research experiences in global development,
20. That there be targeted research funding as part of the aid program to address current development problems.