

Coordinator
International Development Policy
Development Policy Section
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
RG Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221
Australia

29 November 2022

Dear DFAT International Development Policy Coordinator,

Re: UTS-ISF Submission to the development of a new International Development Policy

The Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, is recognised for its research and thought leadership in aid effectiveness and international development. Through research, monitoring and evaluation and partnerships we work with governments, donors, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to address the global challenges of sustainable and equitable development in support of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our expertise and services include research and analysis, process design and facilitation, policy and technical advice, independent evaluation, innovation in monitoring and evaluation approaches, training and organisational development. We contribute to development practice, policy and theory across three core areas: development effectiveness; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and climate change adaptation and resilience. Our applied research practice prioritises gender equality, disability and social inclusion and seeks to enable development effectiveness and transformative change through robust and ethical evidence gathering, reflection, learning.

We offer the following responses to the Terms of Reference for developing the new Australian International Development Policy.

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?

We identify key trends in the region that will shape lives and realities for people and will have consequences on Australia's development assistance:

- a) **Climate change** is having a major impact on livelihoods, all aspects of development planning and humanitarian response and recovery. Provision of basic services, such as right to water and sanitation is increasingly strained and has far reaching consequences for health, livelihoods, and economic development of people in our region.
- b) **Inequality, exclusion and injustice** are increasing across the region and exacerbating poverty and denial of human rights. Urbanisation and limited economic opportunities for young populations are putting strain on existing infrastructure resulting in instability.
- c) **Basic services and human rights such as water and sanitation** are severely off-track in terms of reaching SDG commitments. Sanitation is the most off-track SDG with 3.6 billion people without

access to safely managed sanitation, placing an avoidable health burden and lost productivity on societies.

- d) **Inclusive governance** will require increased capacity and roles of sub-national governments and civil society organisations (CSOs). National governance issues are coupled with broader regional agendas, particularly in the Pacific. In our region, the value of regional cooperation between governments, academic organisations (universities and institutes), and CSOs will continue to be of importance to advance development goals. The role of Asia and the Pacific in broader geopolitical agendas will significantly expand in the next 10 years, linked to climate change agendas, global food security, and geopolitics making our efforts to strengthen ties and people to people links all the more imperative.

We identify opportunities for Australia's development assistance:

- a) **Support and leverage strengths and assets** that already exist in the region, together with Australian research, civil society, industry and government partners, and engage and support Asian and Pacific actors to conduct peer to peer learning. Australia has an opportunity to facilitate dialogue and exchange and mutual learning amongst actors engaged in development assistance which is essential for programmatic success.
- b) **Prioritise use of evidence** to bridge development theory, policy and practice. As a transdisciplinary research institute, we know the importance of bringing multiple disciplines, sectors and knowledges together to tackle 'wicked problems'. We also see the importance of local and traditional knowledges guiding responses to current challenges and informing new priorities and agendas. Investing in evidence gathering, research, and meaningful and applied monitoring evaluation will ensure that resources are well targeted, and sustainably build systems and structures required for sustainable development.
- c) Australia has an opportunity **to work with development partners to support local agendas and priorities on inclusion, gender equality and ensuring diverse voices** inform public discourse, policy and practice. Australia has an opportunity to prioritise the **localisation agenda** as a core principle and practice of development assistance. The new international development policy should work with Australian and regional partners to establish and implement decolonising methodologies and partnerships.

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

To respond to the current and emerging contexts, Australia will need the following capabilities:

Development expertise: Increased development expertise is required within DFAT and its partners, with an understanding of the long-term nature of development engagement, partnership and cross-cultural engagement, gender equality and inclusion and decolonising methodologies. Additionally, specialist expertise is needed to strengthen interlinkages and synergies across key sectors (water, health, education, climate change) to maximise opportunities for transformative change.

Evidence generation and use: To deliver evidence-based development there is a need for in-depth research and evaluation capabilities. Such capacity is required at the aid policy level, to assess bigger-picture strategic questions facing the development assistance program to inform long-term policy development, as well as at sectoral/country level, and at program level. Australian university research capabilities are well placed to support and inform this need, in partnerships led by universities in the countries close to the people the aid policy is aiming to support.

Partnership practice: Working in partnership requires specific skills and capacities, including partnership brokering expertise, and approaches to check-in on partnerships throughout their duration to understand how they are meeting different parties' different aims and objectives and how they can be optimised. Drawing on the experience and knowledge of development experts and research institutes is necessary to build effective development partnerships.

Localisation: An understanding of what it means to operationalise localisation in a genuine way and not just as rhetoric will be increasingly important for Australia to be a trusted and effective partner in the region. Care and competency are required to transfer power and resources to local partners, cognisant of Australia's privileges and interests in order to facilitate long-term and transformational change for sustainable development, gender equality and inclusion.

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

Strengths in development research: Australian universities and their research institutes have breadth and depth of expertise in development policy and practice, with broad reach into the Indo-Pacific region and a wealth of experience working with DFAT and other development partners internationally. They act as a bridge between academic research and its practical application. This expertise is an extensive untapped resource to generate new evidence for Canberra and DFAT Posts and development partners and ensure improved and impactful outcomes of Australia's development assistance program and foreign affairs objectives.

Strengths in gender equality, disability and social inclusion and climate change adaptation and resilience: Australia can build on its strengths as development partner leaders in addressing gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) and embed GEDSI in climate change adaptation and resilience investments. Australian climate and disaster resilience investments that are built on long-term, strong and trusting relationships are more likely to be sustainable. Australia should therefore build on its strong partnership approach and continue to value partnerships and relationships that are critical for success in climate change programs and investments.

Strengths in water, sanitation and hygiene: Australia has world leading expertise in water resources management and WASH, including amongst members of the sector umbrella 'WASH Reference Group' (which UTS-ISF co-chairs). Research institutes such as the Institute for Sustainable Futures can support DFAT and the Australian Government in realising the vision it has set out with respect to SDG6 being a key priority. Water management and WASH are central to achieving Australia's diplomatic, regional security, and strategic equilibrium goals.

Strengths in civil society engagement: Australia has a long history of networks and partnerships with civil society organisations in the region and with civil society in Australia. These partnerships and networks should be leveraged to strengthen inclusive development outcomes in the region. The role of civil society is crucial to strengthen accountability and transparency of governments, to advocate for equity and justice, and to ensure inclusive development outcomes are realised for all. Through numerous non-government organisations in Australia, the Australian public are also engaged in development assistance and there is an opportunity to further maximise this cohort to prioritise development assistance and value the outcomes achieved through Australia's partnerships in the region.

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?

Following from the points above related to civil society engagement and partnership brokering expertise, a key foundation for trust and respect is recognising and valuing locally-led priorities and opportunities for

locally-led development. There is a wealth of assets, strengths, resources and capability across the region that can better be leveraged for inclusive development outcomes. Rather than viewing Australia's development assistance program as the 'fix to the problem', our role should be to partner with local priorities, agendas and walk alongside actors who are committed to shared agendas with Australia. This requires Australian development actors to listen with respect and be humble with the contributions that can be made. Prioritising a localisation agenda (informed by rights holder organisations such as Indigenous groups, women's groups, gender equality organisations, organisations for people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities organisations, and environmental organisations) as well as reflecting on past practices and seeking to invite diverse knowledges and perspectives, will be critical to trusted and respected relationships.

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

Australia is an important actor in the region and provides strategic contribution to bilateral and regional institutions. The aid and development program is a vital element of our diplomatic and peace keeping efforts in the region. Lessons can be learnt (from evidence) in relation to which sectors and development priorities we contribute to, as well as development systems and processes: the ways in which we contribute and partner. We can leverage and build upon these lessons if there is increased investment in evidence and learning.

Sectors where Australia's development assistance has contributed significantly in the past include GEDSI, water and sanitation, health, education and agriculture. Increasingly it will be important for sector-based work to integrate GEDSI, climate change and risk-informed development.

Equally important is how Australia works in the region. It is critically important that Australia operationalise aid effectiveness principles, such as donor harmonisation and ensuring that existing systems and structures are employed rather than creating parallel systems. For example, Australia's long-standing partnership with The Pacific Community (SPC) demonstrates good donor practice. Australia provides long-term core funding to SPC to realise the strategic priorities of its members, and SPC has autonomy and agency to manage resources effectively to contribute to development outcomes in the Pacific region. Tapping into, and building on the expertise of relevant sector wide groups such as ACFID and the Australian WASH Reference Group will be essential to build on and leverage Australia's existing strengths.

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?

We recommend that future performance and delivery systems include:

- **Reinstating an independent evaluation function** (such as or similar to the Office for Development Effectiveness - ODE) and ensure strengthened evaluation processes within all significant investments.
- **Reinstating a research section within DFAT** that has oversight of research across the department and can spearhead a new research strategy and investment in this area, including in partnerships between Australian and in-country and regional research institutions in the region. Without strengthened evidence and its application, we cannot have effective development assistance.
- **Strengthen DFAT's Gender Equality Branch** with expertise and resources to implement a feminist development policy and apply intersectional approaches to gender programming that incorporates diversity and inclusion considerations.

- **Conducting thematic-level independent evaluation**, evidence synthesis and targeted analysis and research as part of setting and operationalising a long-range research and evaluation agenda that helps the Australian Government deliver on its development aims.
- **Develop a civil society unit within DFAT** to increase and manage engagement with civil society organisations.
- **Work with DFAT’s Diplomatic Academy** to reshape the development expertise offerings and ensure that Australian diplomatic and development staff are equipped with the latest thinking and practice to strengthen the quality of Australian development support to our partners.
- **Leverage academic and practitioner-based networks in the Indo-Pacific** for strengthened capacity and policy-use, for example universities in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as links to Asialink, Asia Foundation, RDI Network, Humanitarian Advisory Group, Centre for Global Development, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Australian WASH Reference Group, the Developmental Leadership Program and ACFID.
- **Greater appreciation of and investment in qualitative research and monitoring and evaluation** for GEDSI outcomes, and mechanisms to use this in current and future aid and development programming so that negative unintended consequences are minimised, and positive and transformational outcomes are maximised.

Official development assistance (ODA) remains critically important in the region, especially when focussed on inclusive development outcomes, which non-ODA tends to not prioritise. ODA provides an opportunity to connect with diverse sets of actors in bilateral and multilateral contexts and reach to various parts of national and regional contexts. For example, ODA enables Australia to engage directly with women and children’s crisis centres in the Pacific, organisations for people with disabilities, and refugee-led organisations in the region. These direct linkages provide an opportunity to champion local priorities and agendas which are also shared with Australia and advocate for change in local contexts. Through ODA, Australia works as an ally to local actors seeking to address social, economic, political and environmental challenges.

For more information about our work in relation to international development, please visit:

Water for Women Research

<https://waterforwomen.uts.edu.au/>

Institute for Sustainable Futures

<https://www.uts.edu.au/isf>

Enterprise in WASH

<http://enterpriseinwash.info/>

Sincerely,

International Development Program

Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney