

Submission: New International Development Policy, DFAT

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of DFAT's new International Development Policy. This submission relates to DFAT's proposed focus on:

- enhancing states and community resilience to external pressures and shocks, and;
- building effective, accountable states that can sustain their own development.

It addresses the following consultation questions.

- 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?
- 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**?

This recommendation centres on the operationalisation, the 'how', of the policy and the importance of front-line technical teams in humanitarian and development organisations. The technical field teams are the organisational representatives working most closely with the target population and other local actors. They often work semi-autonomously, with responsibility for bringing together the silos of donor and organisational policy, global guidelines, national requirements and traditional knowledge. Working on the front-line, they have the best understanding of the local context and changing reality to be able to adjust the programme, to better meet the government, organisational, donor and global vision, yet lessons learned often don't lead to change in practice. They retain knowledge of local good fit practice, yet it is often lost between interventions or when staff members leave. The teams often have difficulty accessing relevant resources, resulting in them reinventing the wheel. This is particularly challenging for local and national organisations.

This submission recommends that DFAT incorporate the following principles in the new policy.

1. **Recognise and empower the front-line (technical) team**, who are DFAT's closest funded representative to the target population. Giving them improved skills to lead and manage a semi-autonomous front-line team working to impact a complex environment. Though not in a prescriptive way. Providing a structure and enabling environment for the teams to identify their own challenges and develop site-specific solutions that meet their own cultural, contextual and team needs.
2. **Focus knowledge management** on empowering the frontline (technical) team to retain, use and continually improve knowledge at a local level. In a way that best suits the team and can be adjusted by them as necessary. This would strengthen and give critical focus to the current approach to knowledge management within many organisations.
3. **Ensure lessons learned lead to action** to improve current and future practice. Strengthening the team, the organisations and the country's future capacity.
4. **Improve teams access to** global, regional and national **resources** to combine with local and traditional knowledge to develop good-fit practice. In a way that is tailored to meet their needs and not overwhelming.
5. **Improve feed-up** (and feed-down) **mechanisms**, from front-line teams to organisations and to donors. To respect and utilise the knowledge from front-line teams, to adapt and continually improve current and future interventions.

This is expected to have the following benefits.

- Improved outcomes from humanitarian and development organisations, during current and future interventions.

- Stronger local and national organisations, now and in the future, as team members with culturally appropriate team leadership and management skills are promoted.
- Improved trust and respect within the front-line teams, and subsequently with their organisations and donors, to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships.
- Improved transparency and learning within the front-line team, to continually improve their effectiveness. Improving the effectiveness of the organisation and sector-wide actors.
- Improved feed-up mechanisms to continually improve how the organisation and donor meet local needs and enhance community resilience.
- Improved accountability from front-line teams, and their organisations, to donors and the target population.

Especially when this is within local and national organisations, it will enhance states and community resilience to external pressures and shocks, and help to build effective, accountable states that can sustain their own development.

These principles are considered the ‘missing element’

The importance of these principles can be gathered from feedback on an innovative guide which was designed to address them. Sector specialists considered *‘this type of thing is the missing element in everything we’re doing’*, and that it is *‘very, very useful’* and *‘very practical’*. With one senior reviewer saying *‘local NGOs are probably one of the biggest customers’*. The reviewers thought that use of the guide would lead to improved accountability, localisation, quality, sustainability, adaptability, diversity, inclusion, safeguarding, team well-being, the system-wide response and how the team consistently meets local, global and organisational standards. These benefits show the wide-ranging impact of empowering technical field teams and the proposed principles.

The innovative guide, mentioned above, was developed as part of a (nearly complete) PhD, with the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Deakin University. The guide is designed to empower technical field teams, like WASH teams, in humanitarian organisations to improve their impact. The approach combines leadership, management and knowledge management and is tailor-made for semi-autonomous field teams impacting complex environments. It is a holistic approach combining quality, safety, knowledge and the environment. It is adaptable, and teams develop their own site-specific approaches to meet the local cultural, contextual and team dynamics. The same approach could be used with development and other teams.

This submission recommends that DFAT include the importance of empowering technical field teams in the new International Development Policy. Strengthening these teams, especially within local and national organisations, will improve a country’s long-term effectiveness and accountability, and enhance the country’s and community’s resilience to external pressures and shocks.

Kind regards

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Knowledge management specialist: Knowledge and Learning Manager for the Civil Society WASH Fund, 2013-15.

Cluster specialist: Somalia WASH Cluster Coordinator, 2010-12. Recognised as global good practice for knowledge management and information sharing.

Systems development specialist: Project managed ISO accredited ‘bottom-up’ system to reduce silos across eight business units involved in the wastewater process in Sydney Water Corporation.