

Response to DFAT consultation on New International Development Policy.

30 November 2022

Monash University's strategy *Impact 2030* is directed towards three global challenges - responding to climate change, achieving geopolitical security, and supporting thriving communities. This occurs, across fields of study and disciplines, through independent and partnered discovery and applied research to inform policy and shape agendas, develop and patent new technologies, understand and influence behaviours.

Monash is driven by international engagement across its network of campuses and its support for students from our region. We are Australia's largest transnational University with campuses in Indonesia, Malaysia, China, India, Italy and a growing international footprint in the Pacific, particularly in Fiji and Tonga. Our partnerships with communities, local governments and research institutions position us to produce exceptional research and education with real-world impacts within the region and globally.

The Monash Sustainable Development Institute supports and monitors global and regional development through a range of research and advocacy modes, including contribution to the [2023 Global Sustainable Development Report](#), hosting [the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network \(SDSN\)](#) for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, organising the higher education input into Australia's Voluntary National Review and [the Australian SDGs Summit 2018](#), the [Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments \(RISE\)](#) program, and Climateworks' [ASEAN Green Future project](#) and Tonga [long term low emissions development strategy](#).

We strongly support the *Australia's First Nations* approach to foreign policy, and the focus on interconnected challenges of climate, poverty, human rights and gender equality, disability and inclusion.

We have responded to specific questions from the Terms of Reference from a higher education perspective and would welcome further engagement as the policy is developed.

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?

1. Intensifying environmental challenges requiring climate change adaptation and associated capacity building, as well as navigating potential climate migrations
2. Climate health and the impact of communicable diseases spread as a result of local environmental conditions
3. Geopolitical tensions including US-China rivalry and competition for influence in the Indo Pacific; the ability of China to adapt to a lower-growth model and consequent impacts of this on its internal stability and its outward projection; and political stability elsewhere.
4. Regional development and expectations, support for spread of sustained economic growth across the region, including digital strategies, and strengthening of regional higher education systems.

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

The Australian approach requires an evidence-based, inter-disciplinary understanding of the region and cultures, encompassing knowledge of history and the practical challenges facing nations in the region. The capacity to form productive transnational partnerships is essential, as is an increase in the number of Australians working in the sector with an Asian language.

Australian development policy needs to support the economic, social and public policy and governance frameworks sufficient to produce workforce that will contribute to regional development, for example, educating in local climate change adaptation and also executive training and legal, financial and other support for local decision makers, policy makers and corporations. Thus, higher education systems across the Asia Pacific will need to play an increasing role in developing workforce and research capacity for responding to challenges at scale. This is discussed further in the next section.

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

Led by DFAT, Australia's international development policy should adopt a whole-of-government mindset to regional development challenges with agencies working in unison. Long-term bipartisan commitments should be pursued to provide consistency for peace and stability.

The Australian higher education sector is a key national asset in continuing to work via sustained partnerships for the development of our regional system, and for ensuring interventions are backed by evidence and research. Monash University's, locations in India, Indonesia and Malaysia provide added in-country insight, capacity, experience and knowledge to inform and amplify shared development efforts.

As an example of higher education partnerships, the Australia-Indonesia Centre's (AIC) Partnership for Australia-Indonesia Research (PAIR) brings together 225 researchers from 11 universities to work with more than 150 policymakers, businesses and community groups to produce evidence that supports sustainable development priorities. Based in South Sulawesi, PAIR is taking a practical, integrated, interdisciplinary, demand-driven approach to its research, linking commodities with transport, logistics and supply chain and young people. In commodities, it looks at how South Sulawesi can innovate its seaweed value chain to benefit farmers and coastal communities. Its transport, logistics and supply chain stream focuses on intermodal connectivity, exploring new ways for farmers and businesses to move goods from farms to port quickly, cheaply and seamlessly.

Navigating climate change impacts and capacity building for climate mitigation and resilience are the big issues. Australia may host COP31 in 2026 and universities can assist with local capacity building and by supporting the mobilisation of leaders and communities across the Pacific.

There is also an opportunity for Australia to initiate dialogues with other countries on issues of sustainable mining and resource extraction. The focus should be on incorporating local voices from the affected communities so that they are an equal partner in any formal developmental initiatives undertaken.

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?

Mutual trust and respect can be built structuring funded activities such that a significant (if not equal) component of funding is directed to local participating institutions, (e.g. to pay the salaries of contributors and the running of operational aspects of the project locally). The funded activities should be generous and strengthen local partners, by providing an opportunity to expand local and professional development. This could be facilitated by multi-year budget allocations to locally based staff and operations, including opportunities for undertaking higher degrees and research.

As the government is implementing a new First Nations Foreign Policy, it can use the ethos of this policy to guide their approach, fostering respectful relationships, clear two-way responsibilities, and reciprocal and accountable relationships in line with the ethos of decolonising development.

Beyond trade and other exchanges between First Nations people and Pacific communities, First Nations approach can influence how engagement occurs bilaterally and multilaterally, e.g.:

- Respecting Pacific institutions, forums and consultative styles rather than bypassing them in the Partners of the Blue Pacific initiative.
- A central self-determined Pacific interest/concern is such as caring for ecological systems to mitigate climate change. First Nations diplomacy and exchange can be encouraged here but should not be limited to single issues.

The government can also support NGO efforts to decolonise and localise practice and urge the private sector contractors to do the same. The government can get all stakeholders involved in delivering aid to around the same table to examine alternative models of engagement and partnership.

Most importantly, the development strategy needs to consider Australia's own performance of the sustainable development goals (<https://www.sdgtransformingaustralia.com/>), not just support SDG implementation in developing countries. This is because Australia's SDG performance has significant spillover impacts on developing countries in the region.

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

Successful development efforts result from collaborative approaches and a commitment to localisation of the development agenda.

The higher education sector has probably been the single most successful and consequential aspect of Australia's development efforts over many years. Partnering and mobility programs are key - Australia's standing and legitimacy in the Indo-Pacific was greatly enhanced by the generation of Colombo Plan scholars who trained in Australia. We encourage long-term bipartisan commitments to investments in transnational capacity for mutual understanding such as provided via the Australia Awards and the New Colombo Plan.

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?

Monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should be embedded in each project in ways that are relevant to the goals and operation of the project.

How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?

As a priority, the new policy should reverse the long-term decline in ODA spending as a proportion of the GDP, which has occurred while other countries are increasing their aid budgets. Australia's expenditure is now well below the OECD average.

Consideration should be given to the complexity and intersectional nature of development challenges, e.g. between climate change impacts and poverty, as well as equity, diversity and inclusion.

We also recommend the exploration of recent innovations in development policies in other countries, such as Canada.