



30 November 2022

Dr Joanne Loundes

Office of the Deputy Head of Mission
Australian High Commission
Locked Bag 129 Waigani, NCD, PNG

BY EMAIL: Krishni.Goonesena@dfat.gov.au

Dear Dr Loundes,

Re: Written Submission on Design of a New Development Policy for the Australian Government

We thank you for the letter of invitation of 16 November 2022 from your office to provide a written submission on the subject policy.

The Voice Inc (“TVI”) is a locally-grown and led Papua New Guinean citizen movement established as an organization more than 15 years ago and now operating in all major tertiary institutions and has established presence in a number of provinces throughout the country. Our programmatic approach is influenced by our deep understanding from our work with PNG’s young leaders over many years who are active citizens and change agents in their communities. Our innovative Local Leadership for Collective Action Program (“LLCAP”) which comes under the Building Community Engagement in PNG Program (BCEP) builds on our key competencies as a leading and dynamic civil society organization playing a critical role in building a genuine people’s movement in contributing to a more democratic and stable PNG state.

TVI is happy to offer its unique perspective and experience on the opportunities and challenges within PNG that we believe should frame Australia’s engagement in PNG, and to some extent the Pacific region. We provide our written submission in the format of question and answer as guided in the Terms of Reference document. These are **enclosed** as follows:

- a) Annexure A – Written Submission from TVI
- b) Annexure B – Further Illustrations of TVI’s Understandings

If you have any questions regarding our written submission, please do not hesitate to contact myself on +675 71059674 or by email to msasingian@thevoicepng.org.

Yours faithfully,

THE VOICE INC

Maliwai Sasingian
Executive Director

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The Voice Inc

Annexure A – Written Submission from The Voice Inc

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?

Key Challenges: PNG faces a series of challenges which need to be paid attention to and these include: a) a very complex political landscape leading to loose public policy development and implementation b) cultural diversity contributing to disengagement by the people to mobilize based on shared interests c) 60% of population under 25 who continue to be marginalized, d) deteriorating state of gender inequality and gender based violence, e) unsustainable population growth rate; f) declining standards of quality education across all levels; g) lack of economic opportunities outside of the extractive sector and h) a growing climate crisis.

Risks: These exacerbates the following risks: a) lack of accountability, an ineffective state and worsening state of corruption, b) misunderstanding and culturally inappropriate solutions to address complexities of PNG society, c) a growing frustrated youth bulge with limited pathways to opportunities; d) people's voices not heard in public policy, e) increasing lawlessness and reduced protection for the ordinary PNG citizen especially the vulnerable in society e) increased public pressure on limited State public goods and services, f) growing illiterate population and young people not adequately trained to be future job-ready g) increasing gap and tension between wealthy and middle/lower class and h) climate shocks set back development.

Opportunities: TVI sees the following opportunities a) strengthen working relationship with non-state actors (e.g. TVI) to build a strong people movement to demand increased State accountability, b) work more with local partners (inc TVI) to increase their capability for wider reach to build strong coalitions across the country and region for long-term sustainable impact, c) enable the capacity of non-state actors to work in Australia to mobilize the PNG diaspora and interested stakeholders by recognizing democratic building activities in PNG as activities that qualify for Deductible Gift Recipient status in Australia, d) engage more with NGOs that work with youths under 25 (including TVI) for pathways to opportunities for meaningful engagement in society, e) engage with NGOs that understand the social determinants that can maximize opportunities , and e) support regional and national climate action (e.g. through youth leader) f) strengthen investments in digital technologies and freedoms to enable open transparent dialogue

Annexure B **enclosed** contains further illustrations of TVI's understanding.

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

Australia can support PNG through:

(1) **cultural competency** - developing 'cultural competence', i.e. listening to local stakeholders (not just Government but also young people and women), understanding the issues and challenges, and working in partnership to support local solutions. We note plenty of 'skilled experts' have passed through PNG over the years and the need to rethink this approach by utilizing people with either a deep understanding of the PNG context and/or a willingness to listen to Papua New Guinean voices in targeting development approaches and investments.

(2) **build local capacity** - investing more in strengthening the capacity of locally-led civil society organization to build capacity of those organizations. There should be an increased understanding that long term sustainable impact can be achieved through and by the people themselves not by intermediaries and sub-contractors and international NGOs;

(3) **University twinning arrangements** - resurrecting, implementing and strengthening linkages between Papua New Guinean and Australian Universities through Twinning arrangements. There should be increased recognition that universities are Institutions from which future leaders emerge; and

(4) **Flexible funding mechanisms** or programs that are able to support locally led reform where and when it is working

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

Australia's biggest strengths are its proximity to PNG, size of market, people-to-people links, and mature civil society. Australia can utilize the following key strengths to deepen meaningful engagement with the people of PNG by helping with:

- a. **Access to Australian markets** (goods, services and people)
- b. **Helping PNG meet Australian regulatory standard** (for workers and exporters)
- c. **Fostering links between Australia and PNG people and civil society** for example, recognizing democratic building activities in PNG as activities that qualify for Deductible Gift Recipient status in Australia as an incentive for organisations such as TVI to expand our work in Australia to improve engagement and visibility with the PNG diaspora and the Australian people; and
- d. **Leverage Australia's political power** to take a stronger stance on climate change. This will be critical for PNG, which is already suffering from increasing natural disasters.

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?

Review how DFAT Aid program works through managing contractors by making better use of local expertise and knowledge. This can be achieved by:

- a. **Increasing the level of transparency** of the aid programs, so there is more visibility of local sub-contractors and grantees and incentivize this (e.g. as a specific requirement in the Request For Proposals).
- b. **Recognize that local partners** have a comparative advantage in understanding politics, cultural diversity and finding local solutions.
- c. **Commit to investing in local NGOs, universities, think tanks and contractors** as a long-term strategy. This approach will lead to increase in aid effectiveness, build the PNG's capacity to be more effective, efficient, accountable and transparent.
- d. **Consider more relationships direct to PNG** (and perhaps regional) organizations. And that these relationships be built on trust and flexibility. Genuine partnerships where local partners are able to renegotiate plans and ideas as they work together with Australian support on solutions to messy problems; and
- e. **Consider longer term partnerships with local organizations.** Understanding that trust in each other and ways of working takes time to build. And that change takes even longer is in often unexpected places or directions.

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

Probably the biggest lesson from Australia is that despite investing billions of dollars in aid projects, the development impact has been very small. Australia should not be afraid to completely re-think its approach and decide for itself what lasting legacy it wants to make.

We offer that working directly with the people of PNG (not only the Government or Australia's sub-contractors) but through meaningful support of locally-led initiatives overtime will strengthen the capacity of the people themselves to demand better for themselves and from their Government and their country. Australia should consider taking up some of the ideas above, rather than stick to business as usual, if it wants a different result. Australia is doing well in some areas and there is a need to continue and expand these support, for e.g.:

- a. Continued and increased support of **strong locally-led development organization** as genuine partners who have responsibility and who have to be empowered and seen as leaders in driving development in their own country;
- b. To commit **Australian support for programs for a longer term** not only 3 or 4 years; and
- c. Australia is doing very well in PNG Incentive Fund model.

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?

- a. **Shared Learning:** The aid program already has quite extensive performance management systems. A challenge is that there is very limited transparency (e.g. reports aren't published). As a result, large AMCs have a huge repository of information (held internally) that they benefit from, but which cannot be accessed by small, local partners. This in turn perpetuates an uneven playing field, limits scope for learning, and reduces scrutiny of the large AMCs. In addition to increasing transparency, there ought to also be independent evaluation of aid programs, including thematically across countries (again to strengthen accountability and learning).
- b. **Co-Designing:** The performance and delivery systems should be designed with local colleagues in the manner that they have the capacity to continue and take full ownership of it;
- c. **Independence from PNG Politicians:** The AID program for public consumption to be independently accessed from the PNG's political influence in similar manner as the PNG Incentive Fund; and
- d. **Public Access:** Publication of the AID programs, funds available and committed to be publish transparency and accountability to be available for public consumption.
- e. **More conversation** about the challenges and length of time it takes for change, a focus on having a good process in a partnership and learning from mistakes and being open about it.

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

The new development policy should consider ODA and non-ODA measures holistically and consider the interconnections between countries (e.g. PNG), the region (Indo-Pacific) and the world more generally. Shocks such as financial instability, wars and stagflation impact on us all. Countries such as Australia can play an important role at national, regional and global level to help mitigate these, more so, if they are acting in concert with regional governments and bodies.

In PNG, if looking at a complex problem, for example youth unemployment/ youth bulge, Australia can consider ODA program interventions that tackle the problem but also other tools at its disposal like adapting trade rules to expand markets for SMEs/ increase employment opportunities. Or modifying regional trade agreements, Australian migration laws, or labour mobility opportunities, seen as part of a range of efforts to address different dimensions of a problem.

For instance with TVI's LLCAP program, the objective is to see positive changes in PNG policy, laws, guidelines. But this can be seen alongside (and perhaps supported by) other non ODA efforts like regional or international diplomacy (on similar reform issues) to create space for that reform from the outside.

Annexure B – Further Illustrations of TVI’s Understanding

TVI believes the following factors frame Australia’s engagement in PNG, and to some extent the Pacific region. Risks and opportunities are noted in each segment below;

- (A) **Political and governance landscape** lack of strong political parties continues to undermine the strength of the country’s democracy and the quality of debate and accountability on public policy matters. PNG Politics is volatile and subject to corruption. This creates an opportunity for Australia to continue to strengthen state accountability programs through supporting Non-Government Organizations as locally-led citizens voice to demand increased in accountability and transparency from the State through well-developed awareness programs.

Attempts to **decentralize** government power and service delivery in PNG also have a long history and underpin the political and governance landscape. Development support can continue to think about how to support effective decentralization, with opportunities to build on provincial and local level governments who are interested in change (eg. through LLCAP approaches).

The NGOs as locally-led citizens movements working with and supported by the Australian Government shall have the capacity to educate people about the importance of electing Members to Parliament who are committed to serve with sound ethical values. By working NGOs like the Voice Inc, the Australian Government reduces the risk of being accused that it is interfering in PNG’s internal affairs as the work will be done by the PNG NGO for PNG and with PNG citizens.

The NGOs as the locally-led citizens movements if assisted by the Australian Government shall be able to offer educational programs to grow new and future leaders.

- (B) **Cultural Diversity** PNG is a culturally heterogenous society and has autonomous clan or tribal based entities¹ that are isolated and fragmented due to the rugged topography. This results in more powerful informal systems of organizing (through tribalism, wantok system) undermining the capabilities of the State and its Institutions. However, the liberalization of the telecommunications market in PNG has connected millions of Papua New Guineans and enabled access to information giving people the ability to participate in dialogue around national issues through various social media platforms.

The Non-Government Organization/s as the locally-led citizens movements working with and supported by the Australian Government will be in a good position to develop quality of contents aiming at educating people and contributing to the national awareness thus leading to unification of the country.

Making a better use of the telecommunication systems in PNG the following could be achieved:

- a) To develop and to co-ordinate implementation of digitalized special programs and activities in the field of non-formal education.
- b) To promote actions of information, seminars, studies, training courses and research in the practice and policy of no violence against women, criminal and antisocial behaviors of the youth or climate change.

¹ <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p55871/mobile/ch22.html>

- c) To organize in partnership with Australian colleagues workshops, seminars, training courses and conferences for workers, directors, policy makers, politicians and scholars in relationship to the above issues.
 - d) To develop and to co-ordinate implementation of digitalized special programs and activities in the field of formal education at Higher Education Institutions.
- (C) **Youth Bulge and Employment** – Youth unemployment is an increasingly pressing social and economic problem in PNG. Studies suggest that young people under the age of 25 make up anywhere from 58 to 67 per cent of the country's population. Only 10% finish Grade 12 and 11,000 out of 30,000 make it into higher education institutions every year. Moreover, the labour market has not grown fast enough to absorb the increasing number of youth that are available to work, especially those with limited skills and experience. Noting this there is a need to support young people with the attainment of skills demanded by the labour market and to influence public policies to consider the youth 'bulge' dimension. There is opportunity for increased participation by engaging more people in trade opportunities in commodities and goods through facilitating market access for various agricultural products. There is also the need to take an expanded view of skills development to see it as including technical, vocational, entrepreneurial, scientific and technological aspects. This means that curriculum and program development must be informed by a selection of content and design considerations that cover low-level, intermediate-level and high-level skills hence providing clear pathways between each level.

Related to this is the increase in labour mobility opportunities for the region. PNG will need work opportunities for its youth both in and outside PNG and the remittances that flow to rural areas will be an important part of rural development opportunities including flow on local employment creation that can occur (eg. using remittances to start a small business). Work overseas presents income and skills opportunities for young people in PNG, but also risks that can emerge in both the process of selecting workers (fueling existing tribal and municipal fractures) and in the social costs of family members leaving for extended periods of overseas work.

TVET curriculum must be competency based and should be largely driven by industry requirements. Curriculum in each trade area is part of a Training Package which consists of Course, Units of Competency, Learner and Trainer Guides, Learner and Assessment Guides. The 'curriculum' should be developed Nationally and indeed, be sourced from existing overseas Training Packages as the core competencies for each trade area are similar internationally. Australian Training Packages are available under creative commons i.e. free if used for educational purposes and not for profit. Again, the Non-Government Organization/s as the locally-led citizens movements working with and supported by the Australian Government will be in a good position to facilitate scholarships for TVET training in Australia and assist PNG's TVET Colleges to review its current curriculums. There is enormous potential risk, if the issues of young unemployed, unskilled people is not address we could expect a social unrest in PNG.

- (D) **Gender Inequality and Gender-based Violence** Gender inequality and gender-based violence are ongoing development challenges for PNG². Women comprise 48 percent of the population yet they are underrepresented in the formal economy, community leadership and national politics³. The government has made policy interventions to promote the protection and equality of women however, the issue still remains a critical development challenge for PNG. There continues to be opportunity to strengthen ability of individuals to participate meaningfully in the economy by allowing access to markets through increased

² See Section Six for further information.

³ <https://auspng.lowyinstitute.org/issue/gender-equality/>

trade opportunities. The current Government laws and policies need to be implemented and this is only possible if Papua New Guineans are able to understand those laws and policies. Hence, the Non-Government Organization/s as the locally-led citizens movements is in a good position to develop locally understood programs to start the process of implementation.

PNG has some of the highest rates of violence against women with an estimated 2 out of 3 women experiencing violence in their lifetime.

The following could be achieved to address this issue: Develop in young people a positive and Christian values and character by implementing the following goals:

- a) Decrease or eliminate criminal and antisocial behaviors
 - b) Develop responsibility and respect/care about others
 - c) Desire to contribute to one's own community
 - d) Develop leadership abilities
 - e) Prevent youth from participating in gang activity, criminal activity, and other juvenile behaviors
- (E) **Digitization of work and communication technologies- PNG and the region** Risks exist in the unequal access to the internet across PNG and the region and the implications of this on education, health and employment. Yet, as mentioned above in relation to diversity, opportunities for local organisations to develop innovative local products that match the environment and can reach people who have struggled to previously have access to services and critical information- eg. on sorcery accusation related violence, literacy and numeracy, on elections
- (F) **Climate change and Natural Disasters:** PNG and other parts of the region are highly exposed to increasing natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. These will potentially increase rural isolation and challenge development progress in remote areas as services like roads, power and water are affected by disasters. Preparation for this needs to be factored in to thinking on development interventions in all areas from governance, health, education. Again, digital and communication solutions have promise but the infrastructure is also at risk from disasters. PNG is facing challenges related to climate change such as:
- a) climate change refuges
 - b) unmonitored deforestation
 - c) pollution of the ocean
 - d) corrupt practices emerging from carbon markets trading in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Like any market, are at risk of exploitation through criminal means and therefore require proper monitoring and enforcement to ensure environmental and financial integrity.
 - e) shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale which effects PNG. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costlier.