



Australian aid: Volunteering through the aid program



VOLUNTEERING IS A GREAT SOCIAL AND PUBLIC GOOD AS WELL AS PROVIDING BENEFITS TO THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED. IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, IT CAN ADD ENORMOUSLY TO COMMUNITY WELFARE. IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES VOLUNTEERS CAN MAKE AN EVEN GREATER CONTRIBUTION – SOMETIMES PROVIDING THE ONLY SOURCE OF HEALTH OR EDUCATION SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES AND UNDERPINNING EFFORTS TO REDUCE POVERTY.

THE FACTS

Volunteers are individuals who offer their services willingly, without consideration of financial gain, to make a contribution to the community. In developing countries, international volunteers work with partner organisations to ensure that the services provided respond to locally identified needs.

The United Nations, through its UN Volunteers Program, has acknowledged that efforts on the part of national governments and donors to meet the Millennium Development Goals will have limited impact without significant voluntary efforts. In addition, research on volunteering suggests that it contributes to the development of social capital, defined by the OECD as ‘the networks, together with the shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups’. Social capital is increasingly seen as crucial for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

In developed and developing countries, volunteer work is promoted as something that benefits both society and the individual. In many developing countries with inadequate health and welfare systems, voluntary care is the only form of support available. This support is largely provided by women.

While volunteering mostly benefits the society and individuals involved, careful consideration needs to be given to the balance between the time people have available for volunteering and other important activities such as generating income or producing food. A recent UNIFEM report, *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*, highlights a development activity in Uganda where it was assumed that community members (mostly women) could take on the role of caregivers to people with AIDS. A study of this activity found that as a result of volunteering, the caregivers had less time to grow their own food – leading to volunteers having the same food and other needs as the people they were caring for.

This example highlights an important issue in societies where women are responsible for the majority of subsistence production. It also illustrates the importance of taking women's other work roles into account when planning development activities that rely on their voluntary involvement. Examples such as those mentioned in the UNIFEM report highlight the need to include men more in activities such as care-giving, which may be considered by some to be 'women's work'.

Australian people have a strong record of volunteering. There is evidence to suggest that, while many developed countries around the world are experiencing falling volunteer numbers, volunteering is increasing in Australia. In 2000 approximately 4.4 million Australian adults volunteered, contributing 704 million hours (this figure excludes the Sydney Olympics volunteers). In 2004 the number of volunteers had risen by around 2 million, with over a third of all adult Australians engaging in volunteer work, contributing approximately 863 million hours. Volunteer rates in Australia compare favourably with those in the United States and Canada where the most recent figures are 29 per cent (2003) and 27 per cent (2000) respectively.

Australia's strong record of volunteering is illustrated by the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Disaster. In January 2005, with Australian Government support, Australian Volunteers International established a call centre at its Melbourne office to manage a national volunteer hotline for Australians to register their interest in volunteering in tsunami-affected communities. The centre received over 10,000 calls and registered more than 5000 potential volunteers in the months the hotline was open.

The Australian Government has assisted about 10,000 volunteers to participate in overseas development activities through respected Australian institutions since the 1960s. In the financial year 2005–06, about 860 Australian volunteers will be funded through the Australian aid program.

VOLUNTEERING THROUGH THE AID PROGRAM

The Australian Government values the significant contribution of Australian volunteers working overseas, and considers their contribution to be integral to the Australian Government's overseas aid program. To contribute to mutual understanding between Australia and countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and to make a positive contribution to targeted country development, the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program was launched by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1998. This program funds talented and highly skilled young Australians aged between 18 and 30 to undertake short-term volunteer assignments in Asia and the Pacific.

In recognition of the AYAD program's success, in August 2004 the Prime Minister announced a doubling of the program by 2006, allowing around 400 young Australians each year to

work on development assignments in the region. There will be an associated increase in funding from \$7 million in 2004–05 to \$14 million in 2006–07. To date, over 1,400 young Australians have undertaken assignments overseas with the AYAD program.

Support for volunteers through the Australian Government's overseas aid program focuses on obtaining tangible development outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region. It seeks to:

- > optimise the contribution of volunteers to meet the Australian aid program's priorities;
- > build the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities in partner countries through sharing skills and knowledge;
- > foster links and partnerships between organisations and communities in Australia and those in developing countries, and
- > raise public awareness of development issues and the Australian Government's aid program in the Australian community.

Examples of the value of volunteers in the Australian Government's overseas aid program follow:

Volunteering allows for fast responses to emergency needs such as humanitarian relief operations. However, responding effectively to emergencies or disasters is a specialist skill and is best carried out by trained people operating within recognised agencies.

Since 1995, the Australian Government through AusAID, has supported the Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief (RedR), an organisation that specialises in selecting, training and providing competent and effective personnel to humanitarian relief agencies worldwide. RedR has standby staffing agreements in place to provide technical services to United Nations' agencies.

RedR provides comprehensive training, partly funded through AusAID, to prepare its members and other humanitarian workers for the field. Participants are introduced to the complexities of the humanitarian relief system, international humanitarian law, camp planning, logistics, cross-cultural issues, personal health, security and communications.

In response to the Indian Ocean Disaster in December 2004 and the earthquake in Nias in March 2005, RedR Australia – with AusAID funding – deployed 21 personnel to **Indonesia**. These people had a range of skills including logistics, water and sanitation engineering, civil engineering, structural engineering and site coordination. More recent work by RedR on behalf of AusAID has included organising a team of four engineers to do critical infrastructure assessments in Pakistan following the October 2005 earthquake.

In the **Maldives** the Australian Government's overseas aid program funded the deployment of volunteer teachers to help get children back to school after the 2004 tsunami. Fifteen volunteer Australian teachers were sent through Australian Volunteers International to work alongside local teachers in the worst affected areas. In addition to helping re-establish a normal school routine, these teachers helped affected children develop coping strategies to deal with the traumatic event. A team of engineers was deployed to work with the Ministry of Planning to assist in reconstruction efforts.

Volunteers can provide specialised skills in places that otherwise may not be able to access them.

In an effort to improve medical services and health care for the people living in Pacific island countries, the Australian Government's aid program, AusAID, in partnership with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, has provided specialist medical care and clinical training since the 1990s. This has involved volunteer doctors

and nurses travelling to **Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu** and other **Pacific island countries** to operate on patients who cannot access specialists or afford cardiac treatments. These volunteers have also been sharing clinical skills and running teaching sessions for local health practitioners.

AusAID has also provided support to Interplast Australia to send volunteer doctors and nurses to developing countries to provide plastic and reconstructive surgery to patients who otherwise would not be able to access such specialist care. The cases treated include cleft palate and other deformities, and serious burns. The 25 voluntary surgical medical teams perform around 950 operations a year. The results of such surgery transform the lives of the patients and are highly regarded. In 2000 Interplast Australia was the recipient of the Australian Humanitarian Award in the field of health.

Building capacity in developing countries is challenging and requires innovative approaches to delivering volunteer programs.

In the **Pacific islands**, Australian Business Volunteers are providing business training to young people through the Young Entrepreneurs Scheme. The three-week courses focus on issues such as business planning, financial management, marketing and promotion, customer service and human resource management. In addition, the courses offer one-on-one coaching to provide participants with assistance on any business issues they may be facing. Participants in the courses are usually running small to medium sized enterprises and micro businesses in small communities throughout the Pacific. In recent months the course has been presented in **Solomon Islands** and **Tonga**.

In **Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu** and **Solomon Islands**, Australia funds a trainer in each country's Family Health Association. The trainer teaches local volunteers to provide accurate and accessible information on sexual and reproductive health to their

own communities. The volunteers are also trained to engage their communities in discussion of the social, cultural and ethical issues surrounding sex and reproduction.

In **Fiji, Samoa** and **Vanuatu**, through an activity managed by UNICEF, volunteers in villages are trained as facilitators in the Pacific Children's Program. The volunteer facilitators help parents, teachers and other community members build on and extend elements of traditional culture that serve to protect children from abuse and neglect. This primary prevention approach aims to protect children from harm by increasing family, community and national responsibility for their welfare. This approach is unique to the Pacific.

In **Cambodia** an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development is working as the Disabled Sports Development Officer with the Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled) Organisation. The national standing volleyball team is now ranked no. 1 in Asia–Oceania. The league has 14 teams around Cambodia with 168 disabled athletes participating in the program. The goal of the organisation, which works predominantly with landmine victims, is to aid in the physical and social rehabilitation of Khmers with a disability. The Australian Youth Ambassador involved works closely with local staff, coaches and athletes and promotes the benefits of sport as rehabilitation. In addition to its focus on sport, the organisation encourages its athletes to seek employment, with over 50 per cent of its athletes employed in some capacity.

Long-term relationships with host organisations are features of successful volunteer programs and can help provide sustainable outcomes in development activities.

In **Papua New Guinea** a relationship that spans more than three decades has developed between Australian Volunteers International and Papua New Guinea's Institute of Medical Research. Over this period volunteers funded through

the Australian Government's overseas aid program have worked in research, information technology, community education, statistics and training positions. The program is considered to have contributed to the development of the institute as a well-run and highly regarded institution in Papua New Guinea. This is attributed to Australian volunteers working alongside their counterparts and being accountable to PNG line managers and the institute.

Without the participation of women from within the community on a voluntary basis, many aid activities would not be possible.

In **Indonesia**, Australia is supporting a women's health and family welfare program called Desa Siaga in more than 50 villages that involves local volunteers, mostly women, called village volunteers or village organisers. These volunteers are working to promote birth preparedness and complication readiness to assist in preventing maternal and neonatal mortality during delivery.

Placing volunteers within broader development activities can be a cost-efficient approach to providing highly motivated workers.

In **Indonesia**, Islamic schools or madrasah are home to some of the poorest students. It is estimated that at least 15 per cent of school-age children in Indonesia are enrolled in schools within the religious education system, equating to about 5.7 million children enrolled in madrasah and a further 2.7 million enrolled in Islamic boarding schools.

The Australian Government's overseas aid program, AusAID, through the Learning Assistance Program for Islamic Schools (LAPIS), is using volunteer Australian teachers for English language teaching. The Islamic Schools English Language Program has progressively placed 17 Australian volunteer English language teachers/trainers in selected Islamic junior secondary

schools in East Java. The primary role of these volunteers is to reinforce the capacity of Indonesian teachers to teach English as a foreign language.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

AUSTRALIA'S POLICY

AusAID, Volunteers and Australian development cooperation <www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/volunteers.pdf>, Canberra, August 2004.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERING

www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham (Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development)

www.abv.org.au (Australian Business Volunteers)

www.australianvolunteers.com (Australian Volunteers International)

www.vidavolunteers.com.au (Volunteers for International Development from Australia)

OTHER INFORMATION

www.unvolunteers.org (United Nations Volunteers)

www.worldvolunteerweb.org (information on volunteerism worldwide and on the contribution of volunteers to achieving the Millennium Development Goals)

www.globalvolunteers.org/internationalvolunteers.htm (information on volunteerism around the globe)

INFORMATION ON DOMESTIC VOLUNTEERING

www.volunteeringaustralia.org (information about volunteering in Australia)

www.facs.gov.au (information on programs funded through the Department of Family and Community Services to assist the work of volunteers in Australia)



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AUSTRALIAN AID

Further information about the Australian Government's overseas aid program is available online at www.aid.gov.au

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FRONT COVER IMAGE: Australian volunteer teacher Mark Betheras working with grade one students in the Maldives. Mark was one of 15 Australian volunteer teachers sent to the Maldives to help schools affected by the Tsunami. PHOTO: Will Salter

BACK COVER IMAGE: Australian volunteer plastic surgeon, Mark Moore examining a young child suffering from cleft palate in the Pacific. PHOTO: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

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www.aid.gov.au