Volunteers and
Australian Development Cooperation

AUGUST 2004

MAIN COVER PHOTO: Australian volunteer Emma Stone and colleagues Nancy Malu and Rose Teloi inspect vegetables grown at Kastom Gaden in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

COVER PHOTOS:
1. Volunteer, Jen Bartlett, provided advice on establishing eco-tourism in PNG.
2. Horticulturalist Anderson Ifui (L) with volunteer technical adviser, Jack McGilchrist at Honiara Botanic Gardens – Solomon Islands.
3. Ray McDonald, worked in the PNG highlands as a volunteer, training workers in furniture manufacture from local woods.

Ministerial foreword

Australians are known throughout the world as people who are willing to volunteer to assist others. By sharing their skills and giving their time, Australians are working overseas as volunteers, making a difference to the lives of people in developing countries. Australians volunteer from a wide range of professions, trades and businesses and include bankers, mechanics, boat builders, doctors, gender experts, refrigeration engineers, mental health workers and hydrologists.

Each year, around 700 Australian volunteers are funded by the Australian Government's aid program. Working through Australian institutions and with organisations and communities in partner countries, Australian volunteers are building capacity for long-term peace and security in our region. Australian volunteers are working in a diverse range of areas in developing countries, including in mine eradication, small to medium enterprise development, HIV/AIDS, sports development, education, and health and disability.

The Australian Government's new volunteer policy provides a framework for Government support for volunteers. Capacity building at the individual, organisational and community level is emphasised, as are community participation and enhanced partnerships. The policy reflects the need to obtain development outcomes and the delivery of a quality and cost-effective volunteer sending program.

The contribution of volunteers is an integral element of the Australian aid program, based on Australians living and working alongside counterparts in partner countries.

Partner countries and the Australian Government value the contribution made by Australian volunteers. Volunteers share their skills and knowledge, and, on their return, increase awareness of development issues within the Australian community. They also increase the pool of Australians working in development related fields worldwide on completion of their volunteer assignments.

Alexander Downer

Minister for Foreign Affairs

2004

ABOVE: *Larissa Conolly, volunteer teacher at Marianville Secondary School, with some of her year 9 students.*
Located 12 miles out of Port Moresby, the secondary school has 700 female students, a third of whom are boarders. The girls
are photographed in front of a traditional Eastern Highlands dwelling, built by the parent community in preparation for the
school's cultural day. PHOTO: *Rosemary Cassidy*

Contents

ABOVE: *Carolyn Roberts: researching veterinary practices in Thailand and assisting in the training of veterinary students – Thailand (2000).*

Volunteers making a difference

WITH THE INCREASED FOCUS ON QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF THE AUSTRALIAN AID PROGRAM, IT IS TIMELY TO ARTICULATE A NEW VOLUNTEER POLICY.

The long-term vision for Australia's support for the overseas volunteer program is a relevant, high quality and strategic program that builds on the strengths of volunteers and on Australia's strong track record in this field to date. One that reflects key policy directions of Australia's overseas aid program, responds to partner country needs and delivers tangible development outcomes.

The volunteer program will be delivered through Volunteer Service Providers that have the necessary management and financial systems to run an efficient and cost-effective volunteer program. The volunteer program will be based on a partnership model with the Australian Government, one that takes into consideration community values and interests. To ensure this, Volunteer Service Providers will be determined through a tender process.

The Australian Government has assisted over 9000 volunteers to participate in overseas development activities since the 1960s through respected Australian institutions. Both partner countries and the Australian community recognise and value the achievements of volunteers. As individuals, volunteers benefit by learning about another country and culture and acquiring new knowledge and skills. Collectively, they add to the human dimension of the aid program, showing the positive difference that Australians can make to sustainable development, social capital and cross-cultural understanding.

GOAL

Volunteers contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable development in support of Australia's overseas aid program.

OBJECTIVES

Australian government support for volunteers focuses on obtaining tangible development outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region and will:

> Optimise the contribution of volunteers to Australian overseas aid program priorities

> Build the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities in partner countries through sharing skills and knowledge

> Foster linkages and partnerships between organisations and communities in Australia and those in developing countries

> Raise public awareness of development issues and the Australian overseas aid program in the Australian community.

International volunteers are skilled individuals who are motivated to offer their services willingly, without consideration for financial gain, in order to make a contribution to another community in a developing country.

Volunteering involves building people-to-people relationships and respect for cultural differences.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Responsive to partner country needs – Volunteers supported by the Australian overseas aid program are placed with host organisations in the public and private sectors, non-governmental and civil society organisations and educational institutions, in priority areas identified by partner countries and AusAID country program strategies.

Local ownership and sustainability – Volunteer Service Providers work with host organisations to ensure that volunteers supported through the Australian aid program do not replace local staff.

Demand driven – Placement of volunteers is based on thorough consultations with host organisations and on their articulated needs, complementing AusAID country program strategies.

Shared commitment – The placing of volunteers requires a shared commitment by the volunteer and the host organisation.

Community engagement – Current and returned volunteers are involved in public engagement activities, disseminating information in Australia and overseas about the important contribution made by Australian volunteers supported by the aid program and overseas partners.

THE VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTION

Volunteers make a personal commitment to share their knowledge and skills in order to strengthen local capabilities in ways that can generate mutual benefits and strong relations with partner countries. The volunteer experience is life changing. Volunteers contribute to a deeper perspective and understanding within the wider Australian community of other cultures and global development issues. They also add to Australia's pool of experienced development professionals. The contribution of volunteers' time, skills and knowledge extends the reach and impact of Australia's aid program in a cost effective way that complements broader aid program objectives.

SYNERGY WITH THE AID PROGRAM

Partner government development priorities and Australian aid program initiatives influence volunteer placements, improving efficiency and sustainability of development efforts. Volunteer placements will be made within a structured framework provided by country and/or regional strategies developed by Volunteer Service Providers in consultation with AusAID. Integrated program activities, linking volunteer placements to broader programs will also be encouraged.

Around 75 per cent of placements are expected to respond to partner country needs, and be aligned to aid program and whole-of-government policy priorities. Remaining placements will provide flexibility to enable the program to meet a wider range of needs. Countries to which volunteers may be sent will be determined by geographic priorities of the Australian overseas aid program.

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH SHARING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Lack of capacity at all levels in low-income countries is one of the main constraints to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Capacity building is the process of developing competencies and capabilities at the individual, organisation, or country level, in ways that will lead to sustained and self-generating performance improvement. It involves a long-term investment and commitment.

By living in local communities and under local conditions, volunteers develop a strong understanding of local and cultural issues and build effective professional and personal relationships that help them to share their skills and knowledge. Building capacity is challenging and requires innovative approaches to volunteer program delivery, including the placement of a number of volunteers in an organisation or sector, or a sequence of long and short-term volunteers spread over a number of years.

LINKAGES AND PARTNERSHIPS ARE VITAL

Communities around the world are more interconnected than ever before. Volunteers are catalysts for ongoing sustainable linkages and partnerships between organisations and communities in Australia and partner countries. Effective volunteer-based partnerships can foster integrated approaches to strengthening organisations in developing countries, and can take many forms: networks, knowledge-sharing and linkages with Australian organisations.

Long-term relationships and strong partnerships with host organisations are features of successful volunteer programs. Volunteers supported through the aid program are placed with host organisations in the public and private sectors, non-governmental and civil society organisations and educational institutions in partner countries. As part of their commitment to the volunteer placement, host organisations, where possible, provide volunteers with housing and an allowance. The host organisation also ensures that volunteers are assigned a counterpart and are adequately resourced to carry out the objectives of their placement.

ABOVE: *Bronwyn White applies her skills as a volunteer nurse in Port Moresby – Papua New Guinea.* PHOTO: *Syed Haider*

BELOW: *Paul Brooks, volunteer Australian doctor with Grace Lim at the Port Vila Hospital – Vanuatu.* PHOTO: *Peter Davis*

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Volunteers and Volunteer Service Providers can play an important awareness raising and advocacy role for the Australian overseas aid program and development issues. They are often called upon to discuss their volunteer experience with community groups and in the media.

Volunteers are enthusiastic, strongly committed and skilled. Through media exposure they can enhance community participation in and support for the aid program. By describing their volunteer experience, volunteers also help reassure the public about the importance of regional relationships.

AusAID's Public Affairs Group will work with Volunteer Service Providers to help make strategic use of volunteers while they are in country and on their return to Australia. The aid program will support current and returned volunteers where possible through AusAID's public affairs agenda, showcasing the special contribution volunteers make in a broad range of sectors.

SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS – THE FOCUS

The volunteer program will support both short-term (up to 12-month assignments) and long-term (up to 36-month assignments) volunteers from the broad demographic profile of the Australian community, drawing on youth, older persons, singles, and couples (with or without family responsibilities). The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program will continue a special focus on young Australians.

Long and short-term volunteers include experienced professionals, business and tradespeople. Focus of short and long-term volunteers is determined by partner country needs and outlined in volunteer country strategies, developed in partnership between the host, the Volunteer Service Provider and AusAID. Volunteers are used to fill gaps in skills and professional expertise where this is a priority of host organisations.

Innovative approaches, based on lessons learned and international best practice, will be encouraged in order to respond to a range of partner country needs for volunteers. These might include program approaches, or e-volunteering, where volunteers use new technologies to continue assistance after their return to Australia.

Funding for humanitarian and emergency-related volunteers will continue to be provided separately, through Australia's humanitarian program, to several specific humanitarian and emergency-related volunteer schemes.

SECURITY OF VOLUNTEERS

The security of volunteers is a priority for the Government. Volunteer Service Providers and host organisations have a duty of care to ensure that volunteers are not exposed to unnecessary risk. Security issues will be highlighted and integrated into the training and ongoing support mechanisms for volunteers. Volunteers must be made aware of the importance of taking security seriously. Volunteer Service Providers will ensure that effective security support mechanisms are in place, including personal security and safety plans covering health, security and standard operating procedures for emergencies. Policies and procedures for ensuring the security of volunteers will be informed by Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade travel advisories.

ABOVE: *Dimity Taylor, (L), volunteer physiotherapist, working with Finau Latu (R) at the Alonga Centre for People with Disabilities in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. her assignment involves transferring skills to local physiotherapists, training staff and working with the wider community to best help people with special needs.*
PHOTO: *Rob Walker*

LEFT: *Volunteer, Miranda Tetlow, with colleagues at the Tonga National Volunteer Service in Nuku'alofa. Her assignment involves assisting with youth media workshops and outreach programs and a radio program on youth issues – Tonga.*
PHOTO: *Rob Walker*

MORE EFFECTIVE AID: ACHIEVING QUALITY OUTCOMES

The value of volunteer placements as a quality aid mechanism will be assessed through robust monitoring and evaluation at placement, program and management levels.

A realistic monitoring and evaluation framework for volunteer sending will be developed to incorporate lessons learned and international best practice into the program where appropriate. Results measurement will include qualitative and quantitative factors, and will emphasise reporting on development outcomes and impact. The monitoring and evaluation framework will set out realistic performance measures and verifiable indicators. Ongoing refinement of the framework will be undertaken in consultation with Volunteer Service Providers.

Quality outcomes will require Volunteer Service Providers to undertake a number of services:

> liaise with partner countries, AusAID and other donors to develop country strategies;

> work with host organisations in-country to identify volunteer assignments;

> recruitment of volunteers;

> preparation of volunteers;

> management of volunteers when they are in-country; and

> debriefing of and maintaining networks of volunteers on return.

Performance of Volunteer Service Providers in managing volunteers will be monitored and evaluated to ensure quality management systems, policies and financial procedures are established and maintained. The quality of these functions has a considerable impact on the contributions and experiences of Australian volunteers, and in turn contributes to the perception of Australians overseas and of the aid program in the Australian community.

A Volunteer Program Working Group will be established to facilitate sharing of lessons learned and improvements in the delivery of the program. AusAID will also liaise with other donors, and with Volunteer Service Providers from other countries, to keep abreast of international developments in various aspects of volunteering.

THE VOLUNTEER CYCLE

Country strategies for volunteer placements – The development of country and / or other strategies for the placement of volunteers will facilitate a strategic approach to volunteer placements in-country. The strategies will complement aid program country strategies after consultations with AusAID and partner country government agencies responsible for volunteers.

Assignment identification and assessment – The host organisation and Volunteer Sending Provider jointly define the requirements of the volunteer assignment and ensure that counterpart staff and adequate support are available for the assignment. Effective capacity building requires commitment from both the host organisation and the individual. Clarity in assignment objectives and performance measures is vital to successful assignments.

Recruitment – Rigorous recruitment processes ensure each volunteer has the appropriate skills, attributes and knowledge to undertake the assignment. Volunteers need to be technically competent and culturally aware.

Training – Effective briefing and training is essential and will cover personal security, potential risks, health, capacity building skills, the Australian overseas aid program and country-specific briefings covering social and cultural issues. Specialised training and briefings, including language training may also be required.

In-country support – In-country support for volunteers is critical to manage risk, develop the program, cement host organisation relationships, monitor volunteer assignments and to understand the context within which the volunteer is working.

Returned volunteers – Upon their return, volunteers will be encouraged to participate and liaise with appropriate returned volunteer networks and with AusAID's Public Affairs Group.

VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT

As volunteers are regarded as role models in the communities within which they work, Volunteer Service Providers will ensure that volunteers abide by a Volunteer Code of Conduct that sets out standards and requirements with which volunteers must comply. This will ensure public confidence in the integrity of individuals funded through the aid program. The Code will cover issues such as avoiding any form of discriminatory behaviour, child protection, gender equity and understanding the culture of the country in which they work.
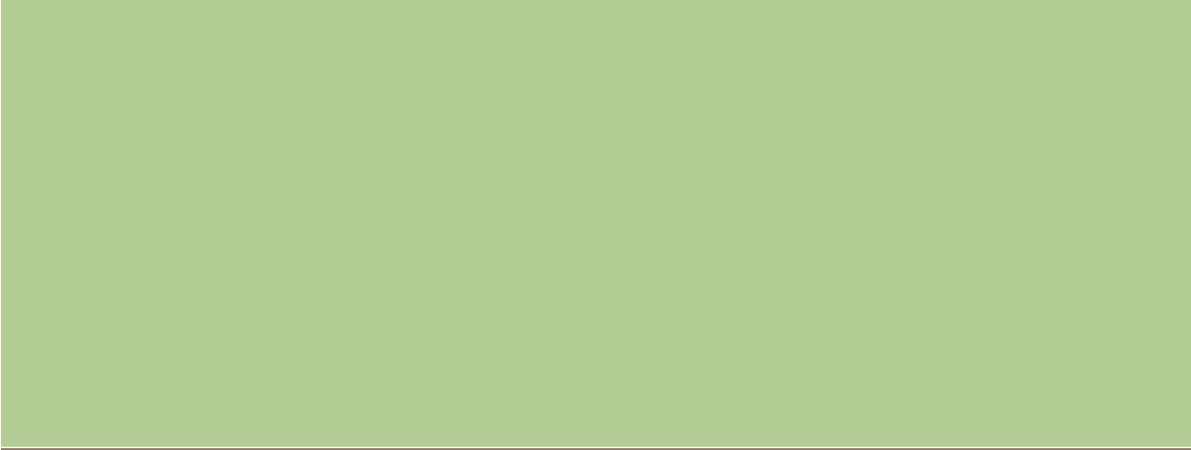
RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers' contributions are highly valued in Australia and in partner countries. The Australian Government recognises this contribution through the Certificate of Appreciation (CAP) program. The CAP program raises awareness in the community about the contribution of volunteers, providing certificates of recognition to returned volunteers, often through Members of Parliament in their electorates.

AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program places skilled young Australians, aged 18-30, on short-term assignment in developing countries throughout Asia and the Pacific. Youth Ambassadors strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and make a positive contribution to development through sharing their skills and knowledge with their counterparts in partner countries. Since its inception in 1998, more than 1000 Youth Ambassadors have been deployed to more than 20 countries.

One of the distinctive features of the AYAD program is the AYAD Partnership Program. Aimed at developing long-term networks with Australian and overseas organisations in the Asia-Pacific region, the Partnership Program enables Australian organisations to initiate volunteer assignments with organisations in countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Participants in the Partnership Program have included private companies, educational institutions, local, state and Commonwealth Government agencies, non-governmental organisations and community organisations. Details of the program are available at **www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham**

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