



Development Studies Association of Australia submission to the Expert Panel to advise the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific for the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade new international development policy

The Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA) represents the community of scholars and practitioners engaged in research, teaching, and training in, and in relation to, Development Studies (<https://www.developmentstudies.asn.au/>). The DSAA is [registered as an Association](#) under Consumer Affairs Victoria under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act of 2012. It currently has over 150 registered members from the academic, student and practitioner communities, many of whom have contributed to this submission. Our members survey and produce knowledge about development: what works, what needs to be prioritised to achieve inclusive development, and what is to be avoided. Our submission draws upon this evidence base to make eight key recommendations.¹

Recommendation 1: Prioritise inclusiveness and achieve it through carefully designed initiatives and programs that are sensitive to local power relations and conditions

With the rise of global inequality both within and between nations, the suppression of human rights, and intolerance towards minority groups, international development has a vital role in promoting the rights and inclusion of marginalised and under-represented groups. Reducing inequalities also has the benefit of lessening violence and social division. Evidence suggests that achieving inclusive development requires policies and practices to ensure that:

- Meaningful and participatory inclusion of minority, marginalised, and under-represented groups, with guidelines on how to protect vulnerable groups from retaliation (especially under more authoritarian regimes or in highly unequal societies with high levels of societal intolerance).
- Tokenism is avoided in aid delivery and related processes (ensure a wide range of diverse groups and genders, including minorities, are represented and consulted in all processes).
- Opportunities are provided for capacity-building and mentoring of these groups, recognising that equal ability to participate may need to be supported.

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- Even where progress has been made to reduce overall rates of poverty and vulnerability, efforts should continue with a focus on disadvantaged regions or vulnerable groups. These regions and groups often lag behind, and underdevelopment is disguised in national averages, particularly in larger and middle-income countries.

Recommendation 2: Deepen the scope of development partnerships, creating opportunities for dialogue on greater aid co-ordination as well as agreement on, and monitoring of adherence to standards

There is a need to have greater complementarities with other countries and development institutes in the region. Australia and New Zealand have a history of cooperation in the Pacific, but more can be done around climate change and humanitarian response as result of climate crisis in the Pacific. There is also opportunity for dialogue among donors and partners in the region (including China) on greater aid coordination. In working with partner countries, it is important to move away from top-down donor impositions and listen to and adopt partner country led principles and visions, that can be shared.

As with regulation of civil society organisations who are implementing agencies, there must be greater scrutiny and monitoring around corruption and unethical practices of the private sector, including DFAT contracting agents (which in the past have been used despite being on the World Bank sanctions list) in order to establish good faith in partner countries. In line with stronger, more equitable relationships with partner countries, it is important to shift from pre-determined, output focussed approaches to more flexible country led approaches. There must also be strict understanding for implementing agencies; adherence to standards (such as human rights, protection of vulnerable groups or sustainable development) are paramount and must be part of funding requirements.

Recommendation 3: Recognise and promote consideration of factors beyond cost and outputs when selecting partners to implement Australia's development program

Evidence demonstrates that factors such as localisation and commitment enhance the inclusiveness, sustainability, and long-term effectiveness of development programs. Further, there is mounting evidence that exclusively output-outcome models have in some cases generated unintended negative consequences, including an inability to adjust to changing conditions in complex situations. To this end, we recommend:

- Reframing of accountability to include downward accountability (i.e. donors and implementing agencies are held accountable to the communities they serve). There is scope to ensure accountability goes both ways and is driven by mutual understanding, long-term relationships, trust, and solidarity. Terms such as ‘mutual obligations’ which are in the current framework, should be avoided given donor recipient power differentials, and to ensure goodwill in the relationships.
- Allowing space for the values of implementing agencies and communities when ‘shared values’ in partnerships are placed at the centre of how DFAT works.
- Allowing local communities to determine their own development pathway, while ensuring that marginalised and under-represented groups have equitable participation and decision-making in this process.
- Reconceptualising the work of the international development sector from a frame of benevolence to one of solidarity, that’s marked out by equality and horizontal relationships.

- Closer partnership between DFAT and NGOs/civil society partners including peak bodies such as ACFID. While the Australian Non-Government Organisation Cooperation Program (ANCP) was tripled to AUD 131 million in 2013-14, from AUD 44 million in 2008-09,² the ANCP has not experienced significant increase since then, with 2019-20 budget estimate for ANCP is AUD132.5 million (according to DFAT website). To increase the reach of vulnerable groups, we recommend that this funding be increased to AUD 200 million with additional AUD 200 million as grants to NGOs for special purposes. This will be for areas in which the NGOs have a natural advantage in, such as community development, social and gender justice, participatory development and human rights.
- Local organisations including NGOs and research organisations should be engaged more, where possible, in the implementation of aid programs and in research and data collection in program design and development.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the adoption of University-led research to inform evidence-based development policy and program evaluation

Australian universities have important roles in the execution of development policy-relevant research. Our development studies research offers practical, evidence-based findings on global and regional aid trends and developments. Thus, universities have much to offer in advising/consulting with DFAT on policies and responses. However, current university engagements with DFAT mainly consists of ad-hoc, consultancy projects and expert consultation of individual academics.

We further recommend that open-call funding of research for development be reinstated by DFAT. Some of the most important research questions for achieving practical social impact are uncompetitive through other funding schemes (e.g. Australian Research Council) due to the lack of theoretical innovation. An open-round of funding would attract proposals that represent cutting-edge research in the field, with direct benefit to DFAT policy and program direction (similar to the previous ADRAS scheme). DFAT could leverage the ARC system to find appropriate peer-reviewers of research proposals, while still giving DFAT the ability to set priorities and select recipients.

DSAA can be the body to facilitate an annual consultation on development and development studies issues with DFAT in much the same way consultations occur with other peak bodies. We have diverse representation of academics, students, researchers and practitioners, as well as extensive national and global networks and partners. Deeper engagement with DFAT can support the overall goal of developing aid policies and approaches that are more inclusive and participatory.

We also call for greater academic freedom in research. At times, researchers are required to sign confidentiality agreements which not only transfers intellectual property but also restricts publications or public discussion of aspects of the Australian aid programs. We recognise that some findings and discussions may have political sensitivity and coordination is needed to decide when and how such data can be released. However, where dissemination of research can benefit the public, it is important that such information is shared in a timely and transparent manner.

² DFAT. 2014. 'Aid Program Performance Report 2013-14.' Canberra: Australian Government Department of <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/ancp-appr-2013-14.pdf> [accessed 2 Feb 2020]

Recommendation 5: Enhance the quality, quantity and stability of aid expenditure

Volatile aid flows are detrimental to aid effectiveness. Australian aid is volatile and subject to change of government's priorities. The Australian Government must commit to longer term aid programs with guaranteed funding flows to enhance effectiveness and planning. Year to year changes in funding agreements must be avoided. In addition, most aid funding is tied to specific activities, whereas more flexible core funding are vital to local recipient organisations' ability to work and plan long-term. We recommend greater support of core funding to local partners in addition to funding for specific themes and activities.

Finally, aid effectiveness requires innovative delivery of aid. DFAT should commit to expand alternative aid delivery modalities that have been successful. The PNG (and Vanuatu) Church Partnership Program has linked faith-based aid agencies from Australia to their Church counterparts in the field. Another example is the Women's Empowerment for Poverty Reduction Program (MAMPU) in Indonesia which primarily works with civil society organisations who receive some core funding support to build their institutions and targeted funding for specific women's initiatives that aim to build women's grass-roots collective action. Modalities of aid should be expanded that have been demonstrated through research to be effective.

Recommendation 6: Accelerate gender equity initiatives

We commend the Australian Government's continuing recognition and support for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including the new Gender Equality Fund from 2019 to 2020. We recommend to achieve these goals, DFAT should consider the following:

- Programs and initiatives that focus on women must be sensitive to their existing and substantial roles and responsibilities, and to avoid taxing project participants further by engaging them in 'unpaid' work which may not have tangible outcomes.
- There should be investment in women's advocacy programs so that they can build their own skills and collective action efforts to champion women's rights and gender equality. It is also important to focus on male-behavioural change programs especially from an early intervention approach of targeting boys and young men so that they can grow into advocates and champions for women's rights and gender equality.
- We note the Government has a target of at least 80% of investments effectively addressing gender issues in their implementation. This target should be 100% so that the vision of achieving gender equality is effectively mainstreamed into all development projects and that the implementation of gender equality policy is evenly applied across all investments (especially in traditionally male-dominant projects such as infrastructure or engineering). In addition, the DAC measure of volume of funding going to projects primary or secondary objectives are gender related in programs increase from the current 50% to 80%.

Recommendation 7: Mainstream the integration of climate change and sustainable development philosophies and practices into all aid programs

The impact of climate change is global, including Australia's own catastrophic bushfires caused by long-term drought and inaction on adaptation and mitigation to global warming. As environmental impact is transboundary and respects no country borders, we call for greater aid given to support our partner

countries in sustainable development, climate change response, and disaster risk reduction. There is also need for greater coordination with national agencies such as ACIAR and CSIRO to utilise their expertise especially around climate change and impact in water-energy-food security of partner countries.

We strongly support DFAT making a stronger commitment to sustainable development, and the need for more rigorous environmental and social impact assessments as part of project design and ongoing M&E process, especially for infrastructure projects. Australia needs a much better climate change effort in the Pacific, not just for aid but for our diplomacy too. To accurately gauge the socio-environmental, long-term impact of initiatives on the ground for communities, rigorous qualitative assessment is required, in addition to prevalent quantitative, outcomes-based assessments.

Recommendation 8: Adopt flexible and socially-aware measurements of development impact

DFAT is looking to revise the 2014 aid performance framework <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/current-work/Pages/current-work.aspx> In the 2014 paper it states that ‘programs not demonstrating improvement after 12 months will be cancelled’. Meaningful impacts are often not evident within short time frames, speaking to both the need to exercise care in evaluating programs as ‘non-performing’, and to the need to capture impacts beyond the project end. It is not just measurement that is important here, but also the need to provide room for flexibility, risk-taking, local-knowledge, and learning in development practice. There needs to be more resourcing of innovative approaches along with research to assess their effectiveness, to allow an evidence base to be built. We recommend the integration of political and social analyses, not only in project design but also in monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, there is scope for the new performance framework to explore where are the knowledge gaps for development themes and countries/regions. For example, what are the differences and opportunities for intervention in low and middle-income countries, what are the emerging trends in geographic regions which currently receive the most overseas development assistance, or the effectiveness of counter-terrorist development programs. Another consideration is to examine what are the challenges of translating evaluation findings into reality, such as project design, M&E, community/stakeholder engagement and implementation. This will support evaluation activities and funding are utilised in an efficient manner.

In sum

We, at the Development Studies Association of Australia, appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to guide Australia’s development policy. The eight recommendations are based on the expertise and experience of our members, and are grounded in the extensive Development Studies literature. As a young association, we would welcome future opportunities to contribute to achieving the aims and remit of DFAT, including through policy guidance.

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