

Dear Secretariat,
Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness.

Via Email
24th Jan 2011

I am an Australian citizen and have been an Vanuatu resident 1991 to mid 2007. I was self-employed in creating export markets for agricultural products and have had first hand experience with the mis-use of Aid money from Australia in Vanuatu.

1. There is no library or documentation of previous projects so we often see a repeat of projects. A single example, is the clay in the area of Wusi (Santo) suitable for pottery use? Two studies and both had the same result. It is not suitable.
2. We have consultants who come and do nothing but sit in a bar or travel to a few areas, interview the completely wrong people or rely on hearsay and come up with completely impractical ideas. Example. I have been an kava exporter since early 1994. Some consultants were sent to find out how to make ease of intra island transport easier. They interviewed no one of any significance in the kava industry and came up with the brilliant idea that donkeys could be used as transport. Donkeys would need a quarantine protocol, would require animal husbandry techniques, clearly no realisation that by crossing another villages land where fees would have to be paid to the land owners that the donkeys were crossing and who is going to provide the food and shelter for the beasts? Vet care and animal health provision? What environmental damage would these animals do if they were not considered as meals on hoofs and eaten?
3. "Someone" will then decide that schools must be built and one size fits all. This is not the case. One area may have plenty of timber, others none. One area may have plenty of fresh water, others none. Access to sand, stone and other materials may be plentiful in one area and not in others. Ask the locals, they have lived there for years, they know the areas that are more frequent to earthquake, cyclone damage, etc., and know where to build safely. Why are when then using a completely overpaid supervisor to co-ordinate all this "one size fits all" when individual consultation would solve the problem? Want to pack material for transport? Put them in the plastic containers with lids on so they can be re-used to store the books and other material safely in times of adverse weather and not only that, as they come in as packaging duty fees are avoided. A single trained safety officer, responsible for the return of materials to avoid theft etc., would be enough. It does not take the Australian army to come in a paint the hospital. That is demeaning. Just provide the paint and materials and build pride, not beggar mentality. Take a drive or a walk anywhere and see the wasted rusted material sitting in the bush, the failed generators as no one was given training on how to maintain the equipment. Broken pumps, wrecked and rusting outboard engines, buildings not used as not finished properly, wasted and destroyed "donations" everywhere or sitting in some coruupt "leaders" home.
4. Every time a new Toyota truck, boat etc., is donated it takes a private operator out of business.

Then the new donated truck/ boat will inevitably be abused and misused as it does not belong to anyone, it is a gift and where gifts come from more will be provided. Cargo cult mentality.

5. The Aid mentality has to include academic training in understand tribal thinking, where nothing is for free. You want to borrow a set of scales of weight your bag of taro, well those scales belong to someone and a small fee is paid. It may not even be cash, it may be a pineapple, but nothing, ever, if for free. By giving things away AID, although Nobel in intention is plain wrong, it just took a small business operator out of his or her business and the Aid donor is considered stupid foOr asking nothing in return.
6. A few years back we had a High Commission who had a monthly lunch, a simple lunch, just sandwiches, some local food, very limited wine but mainly softdrinks and what is wrong with using fresh squeezed local fruits. He had a mixture of local business people who mayt have included a reserve bank governor, an exporter a farmer, a mixture of people who are active in the country and have local knoOwledge that cannot be learned from books or sitting in pubs.
7. Lately, and this is NOT including the recently appointed new High Commission, the bar at the High Com was just turned into an Aussie and a few Nez Zealanders public servants there for a duty free booze up. Not even local Aussie business people were invited unless they were best mates with some overpaid consultant.
8. The short term consultants are treated with disdain by most, and unfortunately with valid reason. There are many University trained Ni-Vanuatu living in the country who are capable and either underutilised or unemployed.
9. The solutions are simple. Learn about how tribal system truly work, united is only united when it suits. Learn that not every chief is a good guy, committees and co-operatives do NOT work and please throw political correctness out the window as not every politician, chairman of a Board or head of a women's group or Church can be trusted to correctly look after finances, fairly distribute goods or employ the right people for the right job. A good High Commission should figure this out in no time.
10. Put in a library or a least a computer system to cross reference every piece of Australian Aid and other style research ever done so we avoid repeats and can actually learn from what has been done before. Be far more fair in who is invited to a simple lunch so we can get a broad cross section with great ideas, unpractical ideas, but ideas that are produced by people who live in the country and have the experience. Ni-Vanuatu are naturally shy, are afraid to "upset" big brother (the tribal mentality) so it should be explained to them clearly that it is only their ideas that we are interested in, and nothing will be held against them.

I can give you many examples of how problems that looked insurmountable to my way of thinking for export problems a were solved with no money, no academic degrees and no fuss. Simply be placing my problem with the locals, allowing them a few weeks to come up with the solutions and returned and got the perfect answer that suited us all.

I would be happy to be interviewed more on this, it is commendable that at long last someone is attempting to top the waste and repitation of projects that fail time and time again.

Regards,
Roxanne Naylor