

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

submission to

**AusAID**

**Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness**

February 2011



# ABC submission in response to AusAID's Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness

## Introduction

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is a public broadcaster with a Charter obligation to 'transmit overseas programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment'.<sup>1</sup> The Corporation delivers extensive audio and screen-based content for audiences throughout Australia and internationally. It also operates facilities and communications infrastructure, publishing and commercial activities, and is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

The ABC has a formal Strategic Partnership Agreement with AusAID through its International Projects group. ABC International Projects is responsible for managing and delivering on the Corporation's international development assistance commitments. Its primary role is to enhance the value that public interest media plays in Asia and the Pacific by developing the capacity of regional media practitioners and related organisations. ABC's International Projects has worked extensively with a range of international bodies to provide training and capacity development assistance to media in the Pacific, Asia, southern Africa and the Middle East. To date, the focus of both bilateral and regional media development assistance managed by ABC's International Projects has been on driving a demand for better governance through developing media capability.

Through its International Projects group, the ABC is working with AusAID on drafting a strategic framework that will provide clear direction to any future effort adopted by the agency in respect to media and communications for development. Given its long association with media in Asia and the Pacific, the ABC has developed a grounded understanding of what can constrain as well as enable an effective, well functioning communications environment. This is especially critical in a fragile states context, and approaches to driving a demand for better governance in those settings. Both AusAID and the ABC are well placed as partners to improve development in this context.

ABC's International Projects is part of ABC International, the division responsible for Australia Network television (operated under contract to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), the multilingual Radio Australia network and ABC International Projects. The division co-ordinates the ABC's active involvement with international media organisations concerned with public interest broadcasting, media development and spectrum management.

## Discussion

### Structure of the Aid Program

#### *Geographic Focus*

The ABC supports a general proposition that Australia's overall development assistance program should retain a **primary** geographic focus on Asia and the Pacific. This focus would include nations such as Papua New Guinea and the island states of the Pacific, the Mekong, Indonesia, Timor Leste and Burma. It may also

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<sup>1</sup> Refer section 6(1)(b) of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 (Cth)*.

include key South Asian nations of Sri Lanka, Pakistan and, by extension, Afghanistan. This geographical orientation reflects not only Australia's long-term national interest as a neighbour but also the respective status of these areas in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other relevant indicators of national development.

The ABC also sees merit in the development assistance program having a **secondary** geographic focus to take account of needs in other parts of the world where Australia may identify a strategic interest or opportunity to contribute positively. These regions may include parts of Africa and/or the Middle East and/or, possibly, some countries on the 'outer fringe' of Australia's region such as Mongolia, Bhutan and the Central Asian republics. An assessment of opportunities to contribute to development in areas of secondary geographic focus would take account of: the situational context and likely impact of an intervention, the presence and nature of other donor activities, and the fit of proposed activities with Australia's overall sectoral focus and expertise.

### *Sectoral Focus – Communication for Development*

In relation to all of AusAID's sectoral priorities, it is critical that the state, civil society, private enterprise and citizenry are all participants in processes that result in positive change and development– social, political and/or economic.

Australia has demonstrated expertise in key sectors of development: Education, Disaster Response and Risk Mitigation, Governance and Health. It has increased its commitment to the mitigation and adaptation to the effects of Climate Change. The ABC acknowledges the critical relevance of all these sectors. However, another key area that is often overlooked the development of a Communication for Development framework to sit as a crosscutting strategic priority for AusAID.

Communication for Development, broadly defined, is a conceptual tool with which to empower the parties – in particular, citizens –with access to information and the 'voice' necessary necessary to enable citizens to influence the decisions that affect their lives'. The communication process may take many forms at micro, meso and macro-levels according to the situational context. It may rely upon local champions and community networks for interpersonal exchanges. It may operate through an expanding variety of technology-based instruments – involving public institutions, mass media (national, community-based, commercial), the internet and mobile telephony, social media and/or the performance arts.

Effective communication is a key requirement across all priority sectors but is not well understood by many policy-makers and practitioners in countries to which Australia provides development assistance. Too often, 'communication' is limited to certain familiar activities such as public relations, corporate communications or journalism training.

Internationally, key institutions such as the World Bank, UNESCO, major donors and NGOs acknowledge the centrality of media and communications to development processes. For example, a report for the British aid agency DFID, argued that they were 'at the very core of poverty alleviation processes'.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, it said Communication for Development contributed to: community participation and empowerment, awareness of public health issues, humanitarian information in times

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<sup>2</sup> DFID, *Voices of Change: Strategic radio support for achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, London, 2006.

of conflict (or disaster), the promotion of good governance and accountability, explanation of complex debt relief processes, and promotion of the MDGs.

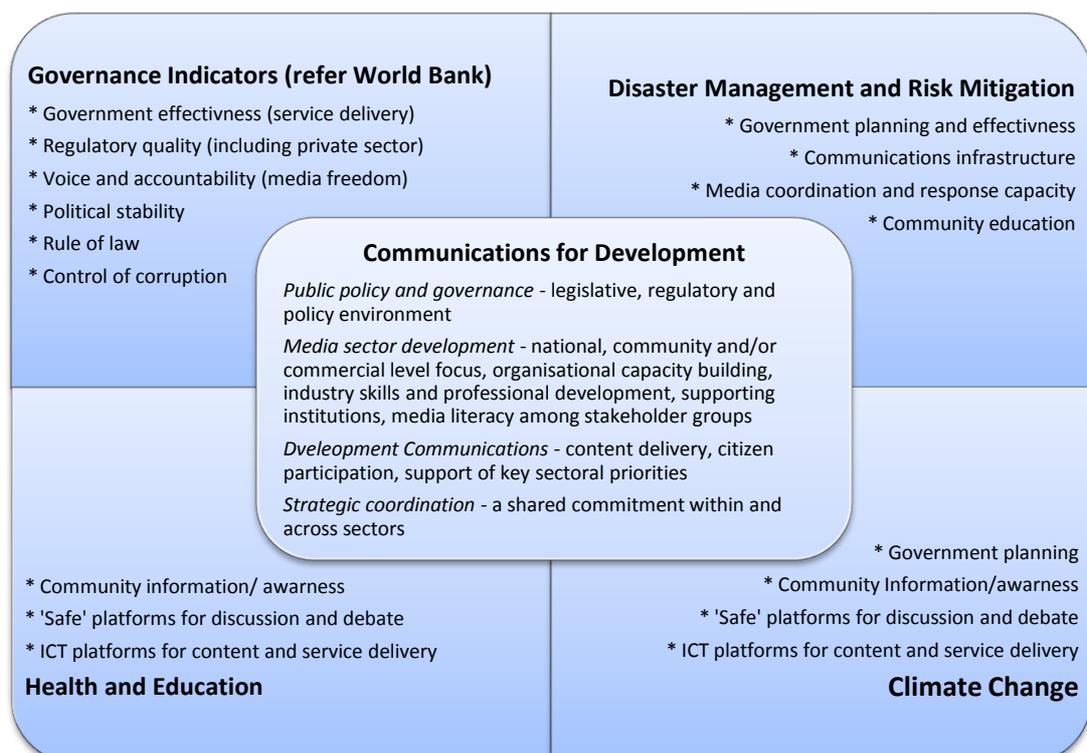
To some extent, Communication for Development may be viewed as an end in itself, not just as a means of transmitting certain messages. Support for communications within a society is by nature a collaborative one. The process of open communications that link communities and individuals with the state may be seen as part of the social infrastructure with which people and groups set their own agenda and pursue their self-help initiatives.

The broad nature of Communication for Development, its multiplicity of potential applications and the fast-changing nature of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) environment, all suggest the need for AusAID to develop an appropriate policy framework.

The objective of such a policy would be to situate Communication for Development within the Agency's overall strategic perspective. It would help in identifying the crosscutting role of communications in development assistance and the kinds of intervention that might be prioritised. Importantly, the adoption of a policy framework may, as a matter of course, lead AusAID and its partner organisations to undertake focused research and to improve methods of monitoring and evaluation of impact the adoption of such policy.

The potential scope of a Communication for Development framework may be demonstrated with reference to existing sectoral priorities of the Australian development assistance program. Each sector has its own components and inter-dependencies. Each sector is dependent on Communication for Development and communications can be seen as an effective tool by which to improve and enhance development assistance programs across all sectors.

**Chart 1. Communications for Development Matrix**



The ABC, through its International Projects group is well placed to collaborate with AusAID on the development of a Communications for Development strategy. In recent years it has placed increasing emphasis on research, evaluation and learning for greater aid effectiveness, especially in the media and communications development sector. ABC International Projects continues to develop processes for maximising performance and accountability in the implementation of projects. As a strategic partner, the ABC would welcome the opportunity to participate in the policy development process and enhance aid effectiveness in this way.

The ABC notes that such collaboration would be consistent with the outcomes of the recent Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) Review<sup>3</sup>. The Review noted that, while there were strong governance arguments to support Pacific media, 'PACMAS suffers from a lack of clear direction from AusAID about the Agency's policy aims and objectives in supporting communications for development'. Accordingly, it is recommended that AusAID and its whole of government partner (the ABC) develop a policy on Communications for Development.

#### *Relative Focus on Low and Middle Income Countries*

The ABC will limit its submission to the area of its experience and expertise, which is specific to assistance in all areas of broadcast and media-related organisations, from overall organisational capability and strategic management to content production and resource management.

It takes a long time to evolve standards of governance and delivery of public services that optimise development outcomes. The achievement of an appropriate communications environment will only arrive after a long-term process of systemic and cultural change.

As countries advance towards middle-income status, they may demonstrate a graduated scale of development needs in the area of media and communication. At the low end of the scale, for example, a relevant aspiration may be to develop at least one media platform (probably a government-owned broadcaster) that has national reach. This platform will support the improved delivery of government services, public information and educative content for remote communities. However, it is unlikely to take on the role of 'public sentinel' in holding public officials to account for their conduct. At a higher point on the development scale, a country may have a more established and sustainable media system, yet still one with a limited capacity for editorial inquiry, quality and professional integrity in the public interest.

The ABC believes there is merit in partnering with organisations to help achieve long-term cultural development. Often this may be in the context of addressing defined business imperatives, which partners identify, while advancing the public interest. Such opportunities may arise when countries approach or achieve middle-income status – a point at which some other development activities begin to tail off. They should be considered seriously for AusAID support.

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<sup>3</sup> Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) Phase One Review Draft, 20 May 2010.

### *Relative Costs and Benefits of Different Forms of Aid*

The ABC's primary concern is that development assistance programs are underpinned by appropriate research and clarity of goals and expectations. These should inform decisions about program structure and design.

### **Performance and Lessons Learned**

To date, little work on the assessment of media-related development programs has been done in the Asia-Pacific. By comparison, considerable research and development work continues in the United States, the UK and some European nations on improved measures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such programs.

The ABC submits there is an opportunity for AusAID to work with the Corporation as its strategic partner to initiate and coordinate such work with relevance to this region. There is also merit in strengthening relationships with similar organisations globally to benefit from mutual learning in this field.

### **Efficiency and Effectiveness and Future Organisational Structure**

The ABC holds the view that a commitment to a Communications for Development framework would contribute to the aid effectiveness agenda, especially in respect of achieving Millennium Development Goals and disaster response and risk reduction [.

A strategic cross-sectoral approach to Communications for Development, via a planned framework, would enable lessons to be shared, success captured, methodological discipline reinforced and sound experience built within AusAID. This approach is in line with global best practice approaches by donors, multilaterals and practitioners.

This model offers considerable potential for the two organisations to share expertise and learning in the interests of improved long-term development outcomes. It should be strengthened through a greater level of direct engagement at the impact level and through direct staff exchanges, which would enhance mutual operational and strategic understanding between both organisations.

Communication for Development recognises the pivotal role of communication strategies to maximise development effectiveness. At a base level it is about informing people so they are empowered to make better choices. It is also about helping people, especially the poor and most marginalised, to participate in governance processes, decision-making processes, policy dialogue and the benefits of new forms of communication.<sup>4</sup>

A local Pacific example where Communications for Development has played a significant development role is through the television series *The Love Patrol*, that was produced by the Wan Smolbag Theatre, Vanuatu. The television series *Love Patrol* is edutainment which aims to increase awareness on socially significant issues including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, crime, gender inequality, family breakdowns and violence. The generally low literacy levels of the Pacific teamed with the geographic isolation of many Pacific Island Countries called for a medium with reach. A Wan Smolbag Theatre production, this *Love Patrol* is a first for the Pacific. The series has been funded by the Australian Government (including

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<sup>4</sup> AusAID Communication for Development Framework Discussion Paper - A Strategic Approach

through the Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project – PRHP), Nga Hoe Tuputupu-mai-tawhiti (NZAID) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), with additional support from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The *Love Patrol* series has been broadcasted on television throughout the Pacific in countries including: Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, American Samoa, Kiribati, Samoa and the Solomon Islands. The ABC's Australia Network has also licenced the rights to broadcast *The Love Patrol*.

Both the qualitative and quantitative components of the research undertaken suggested changes in knowledge and attitudes once participants had viewed the series. The research also draws out participant's intent to change risky behavior. Love Patrol has been successful in exposing viewers to issues rarely talked about in the Pacific. The use of the soap format has brought 'tabu' topics into people's living rooms and raised discussion about HIV and other important social issues amongst ordinary people in many Pacific countries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Appropriateness of Current Arrangements for Program Evaluation**

As suggested above, the ABC advocates the need for AusAID to undertake specific research and evaluation of aid effectiveness relevant to Communication for Development.

The ABC believes that a strategic framework would provide a more explicit, coordinated approach and therefore be more effective in terms of consistency and aligning to the broader aid policy objectives. A strategic framework guiding media and Communications for Development by AusAID will contribute to broader inter-country relationships and diplomacy.

A strategic approach to Communications for Development would also ensure strong engagement at a civic level. When people contribute through Communication for Development processes to shaping their institutions and country's development, it promotes sustainability through that ownership. Local ownership is a cornerstone of development effectiveness.

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<sup>5</sup> LOVE PATROL Series 1: Evaluation Report.