



ActionAid Australia's submission to the Australian Government's *"Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness"*
2 February 2011, Sydney

"The world faces a crisis of civilisation, a systemic crisis, a complex and inter-connected crisis of the economy, of the local and global architecture of power, of values and of the environment" Candido Grzybowski (ActionAid International Board Member)

Poor and excluded people suffer the greatest fall-out from the multiple global crises that face humanity and in this context ActionAid welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia's Aid Program. This document highlights key comments and recommendations made by ActionAid Australia based on the submissions sought by the Australian Government Aid Effectiveness Review. We have deliberately focused our submission on the first three components of the review's terms of reference.

1. The structure of the program including its geographical focus, sectoral focus, relative focus on low and middle income countries and relative costs and benefits of the different forms of aid.

- Greater attention should be paid to the needs of poor and excluded people, regardless of their geographical location, when determining the Australian aid program's priorities and focus. There is a need to shift the program's focus from "poor countries" to "poor people" as identified in recent reports from the Institute of Development Studies in the UK. This would lead to an increased AusAID focus on countries with high proportions of poor and excluded people. Over a billion people today live in absolute poverty, the majority of them in middle income countries where the unjust distribution of resources is an acute violation of human rights. For example if Australia focused on "poor countries" there would be a substantial increase to a country such as Zimbabwe that scores lowest in the human development index whereas by looking at "numbers of poor and excluded people" would see an enhanced focus on countries with the most poor and excluded people which could be a middle income country such as India. Enhancing the co-ordination of all aid (from government as well as non-government sources) going into a region is critical to maximizing positive development outcomes and the partner government should play the lead coordination role.
- The underlying causes of poverty and injustice are gendered. The fact that women are living in poverty because of their socially ascribed roles have less access to land, education, networks, technology, transport, cash, decision-making or control over their bodies and safety, keep them poorer. Violations of women's human rights are the most pervasive to the extent they are perceived as normal. There should be a specific focus on women's

- Within a few years, in many parts of Africa, half the population will be under 20 years old. This could be a catalyst for rapid economic take off, if investments are made now in education and job creation, but it could equally lead to millions of disaffected youth, contributing to instability and the potential failure of States. Increasingly those struggling with poverty and injustice are concentrated in urban areas, living in often unsafe illegalised slums without basic services, facing unemployment or under-employment and being confronted with the constant threat of forced eviction. In many countries, the aid business, working in the name of poverty, continues to be part of the problem, undermining democracy, fragmenting efforts and contributing to privatisation processes. The focus of the program needs to shift from an economic growth paradigm to a paradigm that focuses on equity and justice, particularly between men and women, taking into account the vulnerabilities of people that have not benefited and/or have been further marginalised by existing aid and MDG efforts.
- Supporting governance reform is imperative and vital to poverty eradication. In too many countries, there is an active shrinking of democratic space for effective citizen engagement, through terrorism laws, legislation against civil society, a backlash on women's rights, constraints on access to information and the curtailing of the freedom of the press. AusAID should engage both institutions and civil society to expand democratic space and promote accountability from governments, and from ANGOs, to poor and excluded people. Governance reform efforts should not focus on states alone but rather on a variety of actors, including but not limited to, electoral commissions, the media, women's groups, human rights groups, and civil society organisations.
- Humanitarian protection should be made a priority in both conflict and natural disaster situations. The establishment of a Humanitarian Protection Unit within AusAID would enable the development and implementation of a humanitarian protection policy and framework that reflects Australia's international obligations to protection of civilians, as well as supporting the complementary work of mandated and non-mandated protection actors in humanitarian emergencies. Government response to humanitarian protection should ensure the integration of protection objectives into all humanitarian programming, as well include preventive and responsive programming for particular groups in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, for example SCRs 1325, 1889 and 1612.

- Aid should be programmed in partnership with civil society organizations and bi-lateral/multi-lateral institutions that have a long-term presence in the country/region, and work within strong program frameworks and alliances.

2. The performance of the aid program and lessons learned from Australia's approach to aid effectiveness

- Evaluation and ongoing participatory monitoring are crucial to assessing the quality of AusAID's interventions. AusAID programs should be reviewed by partner countries (including a range of stakeholders such as partner governments and local communities) and scored on the quality of their outcomes. This would provide a benchmark, which Australia could use to demonstrate improvements on an annual basis. This review would provide a good opportunity to improve country leadership and mutual accountability to both poor and excluded people and the Australian taxpayer.
- ActionAid recommends instituting an independent aid commission/ombudsman to regularly evaluate the positive and negative impacts of Australian aid.

3. The aid program's approach to efficiency and effectiveness and whether its effectiveness is maximised

- The aid program should articulate more clearly its development aim and theory of change that will enable objectives to be met (regionally and nationally). Monitoring and evaluation against this theory is crucial to evaluate effectiveness of efforts and/or to determine which components are efficient and effective (both in relation to cost and impact) in bringing about change. For example ActionAid has recently articulated its theory of change as follows "when people struggling with poverty and injustice are empowered and connected, and they work collectively with organisations and movements campaigning together across the globe for structural and behavioural change, inspired by rights-based alternatives, they will be able to achieve and enjoy their rights and overcome injustices. Building from the strengths of our direct engagement with people in poor communities, our role is to catalyse people and peoples' movements to confront the causes of extreme poverty and injustice".

It is critical to ensure AusAID's interventions in partner countries are co-ordinated at national level and ensure that they have equity as an overall objective, and utilise a human rights based approach. Such an approach should empower poor people (rights holders) to claim their rights and to hold accountable those people and institutions (duty bearers) meant to deliver on these rights. In helping poor people claim their rights organisations using a human rights based approach should:

1. Help people organise, build capacity, develop rights awareness, become conscious of their marginal position and the reasons underlying this, and meet their most basic needs to enable them to advocate for their rights (rights holder empowerment);

2. Campaign alongside rights holders for structural change and
 3. Act in solidarity, and mobilise others in civil society, including sponsors and supporters to align to the rights struggles
- Strengthening of education, health and agricultural systems should be prioritised, particularly their ability to reach and deliver for the most vulnerable and excluded. New, innovative and more flexible modes of delivery should be considered – taking into account new forms of electronic media and differential access and control over resources by men and women.
 - Results need to be measured qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The results framework should always be rights based and answer questions such as: to what extent a particular intervention has helped to further the achievement of the right to education, for both boys and girls, in a given country; or to what extent an intervention has positively or negatively impacted on women’s empowerment and gender equality.
 - Australia should support investment in national capacities, including the development of partners’ national statistical capacity, across sectors. Again it is important to bear in mind that these results can take a long time to manifest. It is essential therefore to take a long-term perspective.
 - ActionAid strongly supports the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and urges the Australian Government to exercise leadership in developing the IATI standard to the highest level. Improved transparency enhances information sharing and helps governments in developing countries to manage aid more effectively.
 - The National Interest clause should be removed as an objective from the Australian Aid program.