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## **SUBMISSION TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF AID EFFECTIVENESS**

### **Background**

Asialink is Australia's leading centre for the promotion of public understanding of the countries of Asia and of Australia's role in the region and has over 20 years experience as a key provider of information, training and professional networks.

Asialink is a non-academic centre of The University of Melbourne and as such wishes to provide further support for the University's cover submission.

In summary, Asialink's submission provides evidence for the inclusion of two overarching themes of long-term investment and a commitment to mutual respect and true partnership. Specific recommendations follow that place the Asia Pacific as the central focus for Australia's overseas aid and development budget and upscale existing models in school education and mental health and include a new focus on the arts.

### **General Principles**

The following recommendations to the review build on the recommendations and priorities articulated at the Asialink Asia Society National Forum, *Mapping our Future in the Asian Century* held at Parliament House on 25 May 2010. The forum brought together 130 Australian leaders, specialists and stakeholders from business, the arts, government, academia and the health and development sectors.

The forum was unanimous in its support of the following key principles for effective Australian engagement with the Asia Pacific region. Asialink submits that these principles should underpin the structure and performance of the Australian overseas aid program. They are as follows:

#### **1. Effective engagement requires long-term commitment**

Effective engagement relies on the strength of relationships and a deep sense of trust. This cannot be achieved without long-term commitments. Also, Australia's overseas aid program aims to break the poverty cycle through institutional change, and here again projects are endangered by their dependence on funding that is tied to annual budget cycles. Without investing in the building of long-term relationships across all stakeholder groups involved, the complex institutional change required will not be achieved. Australia's aid program therefore needs to focus on the provision of long-term aid investments in priority areas identified by in-country recipients and stakeholders, working with established and trusted partners.

#### **2. Need to emphasise networks of mutuality**

Australian engagement with Asia requires a new paradigm – a shift in our mindset from “aid” to “collaboration”. To achieve successful outcomes, Australians engaging with the Asian region now need to convey a commitment to mutual respect and true partnership.

For the aid and development sector this means moving from the traditional client/patron model of aid delivery to an emphasis on building “networks of mutuality”. Equal partnerships with equal ownership of aid projects require serious investment in listening respectfully to partners’ needs and challenges (especially when it is not particularly comfortable to do so), and employing local knowledge and talent at all stages of project development and delivery.

The China-Australia Health and HIV/AIDS Facility (CAHHF), a partnership between the Government of China and AusAID has provided a model for new ways of working with donor countries. Asialink has direct experience with the model as a partner in the CAHHF-managed collaboration between the University of Melbourne and Peking University in mental health service development, resulting in the development and adoption nationally of human resource management protocols for psychosis treatment and management. Lessons learned regarding best practice in cross-cultural and international partnerships are currently being applied to Asialink’s work with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare India.

The model has shown that it is possible after some initial teething problems to develop a hybrid donor/recipient culture that best suits the needs of all involved and provides an excellent and readily transferable partnership model.

### **Specific Recommendations**

Within the context of the above principles, we would like to offer the following practical suggestions related specifically to the structure of the aid program as set out in the Terms of Reference.

#### **Appropriate geographic focus**

The aim of Australia’s aid program is to assist developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Poverty remains the most pressing issue facing Asia and the Pacific today, as the region is home to two thirds of the world’s poor. Countries of the Asia Pacific are also Australia’s close neighbours and our largest trading partners.

In line with Australia’s national interests the logical focus for an increased aid budget should be the Asia Pacific region. Our proximity and on-going long-standing existing strong relationships in Asia are key enablers of effective development assistance in the region.

Protecting Australia from emerging global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, national security flashpoints will require well-established strategies and mechanisms. In particular we need to build a sense of community with our nearest neighbours in the Asia Pacific, strong ties that will only work when people already know each other.

The aid program should concentrate on strengthening these relationships for an effective delivery of aid with long-term outcomes, while also strengthening our economic and strategic ties with these nations.

## **Broadened sectoral focus**

While Australia's aid program priorities must reflect those expressed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and those more recently articulated by WHO and other global institutions, Asialink suggests a broadened sectoral focus, employing a fresh approach to capacity building and in-country training.

In particular, the aid program should focus significant resources to scale up model programs that creatively engage school children and their teachers, to build culturally appropriate community mental health services that bridge the ever-widening treatment gap in mental health, and to develop creative industries to generate economic and social gains.

### **1. School education**

A sustained commitment to education initiatives that facilitate people-to-people and institutional links should continue to underpin AusAID's approach to capacity building. The Australia-Indonesia BRIDGE project, jointly funded by AusAID and The Myer Foundation, is an example of a successful initiative that is building capacity in school communities in both countries through the direct exchange of skills, worldviews and cultural understandings. Project models of this kind have great capacity to build the social capital of young people across the region and lay the foundations for longer-term collaboration involving the development of knowledge and networks.

Underpinning the above is the need for the Australian community to know and understand the rationale and benefits of Australia's aid program and our broader engagement in the region. The most appropriate place for this to occur is through the formal education sector.

### **2. Mental health service provision**

The World Health Organisation 2010 report on *Mental Health and Development* noted that "given their extreme vulnerability, it is paradoxical the people with mental health conditions have been largely excluded from the development agenda". Of the estimated 200 million people in Asia suffering from mental illness the vast proportion do not receive adequate, or in most cases any, treatment at all.

Opportunities for Australia to provide a leadership role in this sector in the region are evident, and many successful examples of collaboration and capacity building have been documented (see the Asia-Australia Mental Health Network submission). Long term relationship building, culturally appropriate and sustained engagement, and shared experience of close cooperation with projects are the key to aid program effectiveness in the mental health sector.

### **3. Development of creative industries in areas such as arts management**

The United Nations *2010 Report on the Creative Economy* concluded that "creative products and cultural activities have real potential to generate economic and social gains in the developing world". The production and distribution of creative products can yield income, employment and trade opportunities, while fostering social cohesion and community interaction. Asia has enjoyed strong growth in creative industries, yet there is still a strong need for infrastructure development and capacity building to reinforce and promote creative entrepreneurship.

Australia has world-class experience in arts and cultural management across all sectors of the creative industries, including museum, performing arts and festival management. Specific needs have been identified already in China, India, the Philippines and Vietnam.