

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF AID EFFECTIVENESS: SUBMISSION BY ROBERT CANNON

Objective

This submission is concerned with Australian aid commitments to basic education development in Indonesia. The submission seeks to establish that current development proposals, as reflected in AusAID's document, *Australia's Education Partnership with Indonesia*, October 2010, have not established the necessary, evidence-based conditions for the effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's 'flagship education program' in that country.

The submission also seeks to support and to clarify an article I wrote for *The Australian*, 10 January 2011, that created significant interest and comment: Cannon, Robert, "That's No Way to Aid Indonesia" (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/thats-no-way-to-aid-indonesia/story-e6frg6zo-1225984624088>).

Background

The submission is based on professional experience in educational development since 1971 in a variety of organisations including the Royal Australian Navy (1971-74), The University of Adelaide and numerous foreign universities including the University of Indonesia (1974-2001), and in both long and short-term consultancy work in educational development, particularly in Indonesia, since 1987. Indonesia experience has included continuous experience since 2001 in several leadership positions with AusAID, USAID, ADB, The World Bank and UNICEF.

In late 2008, the World Bank on behalf of its partners, including AusAID, commissioned me to evaluate the evidence of the success of aid delivery strategies used in improving the quality of basic education in Indonesia. The report, *Review of Education Development Models: Lessons from Models and Strategies for Increasing Access to Quality Basic Education in Indonesia* can be made available to the Review Panel and members of the public if required. An email address to which requests may be addressed is provided at the end of this Submission.

AusAID's documents for its new Indonesia strategy suggest that it has overlooked the findings of that evaluation. The findings were explicitly intended to provide a sound, evidence-based approach for future aid delivery. In fact, the current proposals for Australian development assistance in Indonesian basic education are the antithesis of the findings from that evaluation. Australia's proposals also deny a sound observation expressed in the *Jakarta Commitment*, paragraph 1(b) that "As an emerging middle income country with considerable development success, Indonesia has much to share with other countries in the region". What Indonesia has to share about successful educational development has not been appropriately built in to the Australian proposals. Significantly, what Indonesia has learned about effective and efficient school change and development can be shown to reflect international best practice in the transformation of schools (Caldwell and Spinks, 2008; Cannon, 2010).

Personal Values

This submission is based on the firm belief that support for the development of Indonesian education is a sound development strategy and one that has important strategic importance for Australia. Such support should continue. Nevertheless, support should be based on the evidence of what works best to ensure the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the educational development support provided.

Evidence

Findings from the World Bank evaluation concerning the links between strategies and development support the following conclusions:

- First, certain 'pre-conditions' have to be met for effectiveness. These include project design and management approaches being aligned with the context of decentralization, being simple in approach, and well managed.
- Second, aid is effective when it works with existing 'communities of practice'.
- Third, project effectiveness is enhanced when it is based on a clear and focused framework built on the principles drawn from proven education and development theory and practice.
- Finally, aid is effective when project achievements are sustainable and when results can be disseminated beyond the original beneficiaries (Cannon and Arlianti, 2008, 13).

These findings are based on a literature review, Government of Indonesia (GoI) and donors' own reports, field studies, interviews, and direct field experience in Indonesian education.

With respect to these four key findings in relation to the current proposals, it is submitted that:

- Pre-conditions: The current project design is not strongly aligned with the context of decentralization in Indonesia. The interventions appear to be more strongly driven by broad-brush development ideologies to the neglect of more discipline-specific, proven, decentralized school-based and District led development.
- 'Communities of practice': the proposed training of principals and District officials in the new design is the antithesis of recent lessons learned about effective and efficient development through whole-school and District-based development consistent with the concept of decentralization.
- Education and development principles: contrary to the clear finding in the World Bank evaluation, current proposals are not based on educational principles but rather on economic analyses and by the rhetoric of international development agendas such as the *Jakarta Commitment*.
- Sustainability: having demonstrated strategies for successful change in Indonesian basic education, donors seem curiously blind to the need to study the longer-term impact and sustainability of their support and implementation efforts. One excellent example of sustainability was found in the World Bank evaluation and it arises from AusAID's earlier development support in East Java, the *Indonesia-Australia Partnership in Basic Education*, yet the clear lessons of this outstanding work are now ignored. It is now emerging that effective and efficient dissemination of good practices in education is being led by Provinces, Districts and schools that have participated in recent development partnerships supported by USAID and by UNICEF and by using their own resources to do so.

Conclusion

The conceptual and technical quality of present proposals for educational development in Indonesia suggests that the current aid program systems, policies and procedures do not maximize effectiveness and efficiency. Australia's large 'flagship program' is not likely to lead to sustainable outcomes. An education proposal that is neglectful in its conception of students, the quality of their learning, and of their teachers is one that is a cause for serious concern.

Effectiveness

Relative ineffectiveness from the proposals is predicted on the basis of the evidence we now have about effective educational development in Indonesia and from educational research.

Information that enables us to make evidence-based decisions about improving the quality of education is now more freely available than at any time in the past and the Bank evaluation I completed is a recent synthesis of this evidence from Indonesia. Another very recent example of this evidence is the large international study prepared by McKinsey and Company on improving school systems (Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010). The study shows that it is not money or 'uninformed reform' that makes schools better; it shows that many school systems not showered with extra money actually did better than others where more was spent but where standards have slipped. What does make schools better is strikingly similar across the 20 different education systems that McKinsey studied. Successful strategies depend very much on a system's current stage of development but, unsurprisingly, educational interventions such as curriculum revision, teachers' skills, and the assessment of learning figure largely.

In this finding, the McKinsey study echoes other large studies such as the 2007 International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools discussed in the important Australian book by Caldwell and Harris, *Why Not the Best Schools?* (2008). That Project concluded that no single strategy or collection of strategies could be successful unless there is an alignment of change efforts and the focus is on the student.

To stress a point introduced previously, effective and efficient educational development is based on sound educational principles. Educational principles are missing in the current proposals.

Efficiency

Large school construction programs are not an efficient use of development resources. This is partly because of the high risk of corruption and weak technical supervision, all issues raised in the *Independent Completion Report* (May 2010) of the Australia Indonesia Education Program, and because of limited sustainability from that kind of support. The *Report*, in paragraph 63, discusses 'financial leakage' and implies that a 5-10% leakage may be acceptable! From the \$222 million for construction, a leakage of \$11-\$22 million dollars would fund a modest, but high impact project of the kind completed by USAID in 2007 and UNICEF last year. School building programs do very little for long-term, sustainable development. Technical know-how for on-going maintenance programs and the funds to carry out the maintenance work are essential. Is there commitment from the Indonesian government to do this? Unless this commitment is guaranteed, Australia's investment will not be sustainable and thousands of Australian-funded schools will be in poor condition within 5 years and need rehabilitation.

Similarly, support for an accredited training program for all school principals and officials will be inefficient and wasteful with further financial leakages highly likely during implementation.

This narrow training concept is not based on evidence of successful educational change strategies to which Australia has been a significant contributor – the whole school and whole District model.

Recommendations

1. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of future educational development in Indonesia, strategies need to be based on the best available evidence of what works. This will require more support for high quality, independent educational research and evaluation in Indonesia, something that at this time is a limitation on development. To further enhance the quality of development planning, future draft proposals should be available publicly to encourage input from a wide cross-section of the community.
2. Australia's educational development support should, in future, be more clearly based on clearly articulated educational principles and research and less on economics, broad generalisations, and development rhetoric from various aid 'declarations' and 'agendas'. There is now a serious imbalance away from specialist, contextualised disciplinary understanding in education. This recommendation is likely to be highly relevant to other disciplines in the aid program such as health and governance.

References

Caldwell, B and Harris, J. *Why Not the Best Schools?* Melbourne, ACER Press, 2008.

Cannon, R. *Disseminating and Mainstreaming Good Practices. Volume 2: Technical Support Manual – Second Edition.* Jakarta, UNICEF, 2010. (Available from the author).

Cannon, R. and Arlianti, R. *Review of Education Development Models: Lessons from Models and Strategies for Increasing Access to Quality Basic Education in Indonesia.* Jakarta, The World Bank, 2008. (Available from the author).

Mourshed, M. Chijioke, C. and Barber, M. *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better.* London, McKinsey and Company, 2010.

Submission Details

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