

To Australian Government Aid Review Team

Dear All,

I am very happy that the Australian Government has commissioned an independent review of Aid Effectiveness. I welcome the opportunity that this review brings for a diverse range of people to feedback into how our aid program runs.

As a concerned Australian taxpayer who has engaged with our Aid program formally and informally (especially in PNG and the Pacific) over a number of years, I would like to make the following points for your consideration. I have restricted my comments to larger issues rather than specific points, though I have many practical examples to illustrate my points. My comments could be summarised under three main areas: they involve concerns about

1. assumptions in our aid program,
2. accountability and decision making in our aid program, and
3. processes of our aid program.

To elucidate these concerns a little further, I have made some dot points below...

- **Unclear, and sometimes contradictory, underpinning assumptions in aid program aims and design (and consequently delivery) compromise effectiveness.** We know that "endogenous, internally driven local development delivers results which endure over time, when compared to central government imposed, exogenous development (Putnam 1993, 2000)" (cited in presentation by John Martin and Ron Faris, 2004 about building learning communities). That is, if we know that better and long term development outcomes occur when local people and communities are setting and implementing agendas, we need aid program design and assumptions that make this a reality. It would involve different positioning and perspectives which would substantially shift the starting spaces of aid programming. If we start in the wrong place we end up in the wrong place. (eg if you only listen to men's voices, you wont be responding to how situations may be for women)
- **Partnership.** For all the aid program marketing and talk mentions and goes on about partnership I have not seen much real evidence of it on the ground. It is a fundamental principle in working together for long term outcomes and involves genuine listening and engagement and an understanding and redress of power imbalances (eg perhaps we could be doing program design in *tok pisin* in PNG rather than assuming english?) Let's be brave enough to really explore what that might mean. We seem to have our aid program positioned as a one way street (from "us" to "them" and in fact here in Australia we have much to learn from people from around the world). There doesnt seem to be much evidence in the work on the ground that shows that we really think about and acknowledge power dynamics.

- **Neoliberal and capitalist assumptions.** What is the ultimate goal of our aid interventions...? To get societies and communities to 'look like' and 'act like' mainstream western ones? That may not be a goal for those communities, nor in their (or indeed the planet's) best interests. Can't we hold different aspirations in our heads and hearts as we work to support outcomes that we might not recognize or may look very different to what mainstream Anglo society expects?
- **Privatization of aid delivery.** I find it very offensive when AusAID contract out what I would consider essential work of an Aid program, especially monitoring and administrative roles such as occurred with the Incentive Fund program in PNG. I want to have confidence that my government bureaucracy is taking responsibility to get the best possible outcome for my tax dollar and impact and I just think this accountability gets messed up when the bottom line (ie money only) drives the agenda. To whom and how is our aid program accountable? To the communities and countries with whom we work? To (the select group) of private contractors/AMCs in the field. To the 'woman in the street' like me? We need to be thinking a bit more smarter and more ethically about to whom, and how, our aid program is accountable. Privatization of our aid program also brings into focus concerns I have around decision making...it seems like a slippery snake sometimes....figuring out just who and how decisions are made.
- **Cross sectoral learning.** Australian Government support for indigenous communities in Australia also suffer from some of these same concerns. Aid works in silos and lessons from public education and health and local community development work for example don't get shared or built upon in our aid program. Can't we have some better synergy between good work in communities regardless of who funds it?
- **Respect.** A no-brainer really, but so often I have seen pure racism and lack of respect abundant in how our Australian aid occurs...from language, dress, timing (we need to give these things TIME in order to really listen and engage), (dis)ability, sexism etc. We need to build a genuine engagement based on respect and that takes mindfulness of discussion, time, place and people. I'm with Patrick Dodson who has articulated a way forward for a new dialogue with indigenous and non indigenous Australians being grounded in **respect, equality and love**. Imagine the aid program we could build and deliver if it was grounded in these principles?

I would be happy to discuss any of these areas further with the team and I look forward to receiving feedback about the review.

Yours Sincerely,

Debra Chapman