

Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness submission by Dr Peter Devereux

I am very grateful for the opportunity to comment personally on the independent review of Australian Aid Effectiveness and am very glad that the review is being conducted. I think it is very timely and very appropriate to focus on aid effectiveness and see the 5 Paris Principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability as a crucial and indivisible package.

My long standing interest in the Australian Aid program is heightened by my thirty year involvement with Oxfam Australia and practical experience working in international development first with my partner of our own volition for two years as international volunteers in Nicaragua working as university lecturer/environmental adviser and occupational therapist respectively. This was followed by 5 years spent as international volunteers in Nicaragua facilitated by Overseas Service Bureau or the now Australian Volunteers International (AVI). On our return to Perth I worked until 2003 with Australian Volunteers International in its Perth office recruiting, briefing, and debriefing volunteers. I took leave from my work between 1999 and 2001 to work as a UN Volunteer Program Officer in the Pacific. In the AVI state office we encouraged returned volunteers to cultivate and maintain institutional and people to people links between Australia and where they had volunteered as well as sharing their development insights from their time overseas with the general public and through institutional and policy fora in West Australia. Indeed I believe the more than 12000 returned Australian volunteers provide an invaluable resource to work as multipliers for helping Australians understand the global context and Australia's potential positive role in it.

I will address key elements of the review terms of reference under their headings.

a. The structure of the program, noting in particular: - the appropriate geographic focus of the program, taking into account partner country absorptive capacities;

I think a focus and priority on our region is important to make use of our geographic proximity with neighbours. However I think in international development we can also learn and build partnerships for development in different contexts. My partner and I volunteered in Latin America with an innovative program started by Australian Volunteers International in the early 1990's with expertise and vision provided by Daniel Knott a Latin America expert. The volunteer experiences and partnerships in Latin America complemented AVI's experience in other parts of the world and provided strong people to people connections between Australians (including expatriate nationals) and Latin America.

Equally Australia's reengagement with Africa, an area of large need, is welcomed and one that, as a West Australian, is off our coast in the same way that the Pacific is off the East coast.

- the appropriate sectoral focus of the program, taking into account Australia's area of comparative advantage and measured development effectiveness results;

Basic needs in terms of health, education and reducing poverty should be a central focus of the aid program. Clearly an area of comparative advantage is its geographic proximity to the Asia Pacific region and this is why it should be a factor in what Australia does and where. In other words low income countries in Africa and Asia should be a priority but this should be balanced with the comparative advantage of working in our region where relationships and proximity are close.

- the relative costs and benefits of the different forms of aid, including the role of non government organisations and the appropriate balance between multilateral and bilateral aid funding arrangements.

The most recent OECD peer review of Australia recognized its growing constructive engagement with multilateral organisations and there is room to increase this as a way of complementing Australia's aid so it is aligned with other donors as per the Paris principles but also sharing with and learning from other world best practice in development effectiveness. There is also recognition for Australia's reaffirmed commitment to supporting neighbours in the Asia Pacific region as well as strengthening its work in Africa. This is important and allows Australia to use as a strength its geographic proximity and historical relationships and friendships at government and community levels. Through stronger multilateral engagement Australia can also encourage attention on the Pacific region and develop more strategic connections between its bilateral program and the multilateral cooperation, as the OECD peer review also recommends.

The OECD peer review recommends "engaging further with NGOs and other partners like the Australian private sector and universities focusing on complementarity of development efforts". I think increased engagement with NGOs is crucial as well as universities and that complementarity is crucial and mechanisms to encourage development cooperation not just competitive tendering should be encouraged.

As a recent ODE report concluded about the situation in countries where Australia is funding large shares of the sectoral budgets. There it said "Australia has to be willing to put a lot of effort into high-level policy dialogue. This means placing senior sectoral specialists in country offices and rethinking the current role of managing contractors, who can become a barrier rather than a bridge between AusAID and partner governments"¹.

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

I believe the aid program is overall positive and improving and this is reflected also by the most recent OECD peer review also. Particular elements that make this evident are the improved strategic focus on the MDGs and poverty reduction, as well as increasing and positive multilateral engagement by the government and the aid program and the renewed attention to assistance in regions like Africa. Other very positive moves are:

- the government commitment to increasing Australia's aid to .5 of GDP by 2015/16 and the increasing proportion of the aid program channeled through NGOs and the new

¹ Service Delivery for the Poor Lessons from recent evaluations of Australian aid November 2009 AusAID Canberra pp2.

partnership agreements that consolidate and cement this through longer term agreed collaboration with a number of large NGOs;

- the constructive work of the Office of Development Effectiveness for example in the annual review of development effectiveness but also more recently its targeted work on the role of civil society organisation's and world best practice in this regard;
- the growing support and encouragement for volunteer programs also strengthens people to people links between Australia and developing countries as well as providing a unique form of technical assistance.

These positive indications need to be consolidated with a specific timeline to reach the UN agreed target of .7% of GDP for aid. They also need to be complemented by solid work on strengthening the constituency for support of aid and development cooperation in the Australian population as highlighted by the OECD peer report on Australia, and NGO involvement in the aid program is one key way to assist this. Two specific areas where I believe there is particular opportunity to do this are in:

1. increased support to global education not just in formal education settings but also community education settings. Global education centres like the One World Centre in Perth are well placed to use their strong community base as a multiplier for global education in the community, and
2. increased support for volunteer programs which provide an opportunity not only for public engagement with development but also an opportunity to respond to development effectiveness principles like mutual accountability as I will explain in more detail below.

c. An examination of the program's approach to efficiency and effectiveness and whether the current systems, policies and procedures in place maximise effectiveness.

Crucial here is to focus on all 5 Paris Principles for aid effectiveness not just "managing for results". This is why I believe we can learn from the experience of international volunteers who provide practical examples for example of mutual accountability in practice because volunteers are most often managed by local organisations, institutions and governments in developing countries.

As the 2009 ODE report makes clear:

"Australia has endorsed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, including the principles of aligning aid with country priorities and working through country systems. However, it has proven difficult to translate these principles into practice. The evaluations point to a number of important lessons for Australia as it considers moving to sector-wide approaches in more countries.

It is important to set realistic goals about what can be achieved in specific country circumstances.

In many fragile states, sector-wide approaches are often pre-empted by the urgent need to prevent the breakdown of basic services and overriding concerns about the risks of using government systems. Under these circumstances, the key is to adopt approaches that get things done in ways that do not undermine government programs and systems and that can lay the groundwork for the development of sector-wide approaches over time....

Much of Australian aid is still delivered in the form of technical assistance. Such assistance is often a short-term response to specific policy or project needs, without overall strategic frameworks. And parallel systems for technical assistance can quickly undermine what limited government capacity exists. A very different philosophy and approach is needed to build up government capacities to deliver good-quality public services.”²

These views were echoed by the 2008 OECD peer review: “AusAID could take further stock of what it has learned through its analytical work and practice, including assessing the impact of its overall approach to capacity development. As well as being for its own benefit, this might help Australia share further its good practice from country-level capacity development experiences within the donor community. AusAID is increasingly aware that, depending on roles and positions, technical assistance can either undermine or build local capacity.”³

A different and in my view complementary approach through international volunteers for development, can provide capacity development and mutual accountability, despite its complexity. This is reflected in a review of the Australian Youth Ambassador program which called for ‘realistic’ short term expectations stating: “there are many factors beyond the control of the AYAD that affect the degree to which capacity development objectives can be progressed...AYADs do not generally have authority over critical resources or decisions”⁴.

While international volunteers can contribute to gradual and long term successful capacity development (and personal development for the volunteer), they may not be able to guarantee short term externally prioritised programmatic development outcomes desired by donors. So while the growing emphasis on outcomes and a programmatic approach may increase the likelihood of some measurable gains, it must be balanced against cultivating local organisation ownership, mutual accountability and capacity development from the process.

As the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade concluded in its 2007 report “Australia’s public diplomacy: building our image”: “public diplomacy is not only about projecting an image; it is about engagement and relationship building”⁵. In one chapter they considered directly “how effectively Australia’s public diplomacy programs build and sustain Australia’s network of relationships with other countries”⁶ and the committee explicitly mentioned the Australian Youth Ambassador volunteer program as a good example of this.

² Service Delivery for the Poor Lessons from recent evaluations of Australian aid November 2009 AusAID Canberra pp2.

³ OECD DAC peer review Pp 20

⁴ C. Bennett & Morrow, 2006 pp. 18

⁵ Javier Noya, 'The United States and Europe: Convergence or Divergence in Public Diplomacy?', The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 13 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

⁶ Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Australia’s public diplomacy: building our image, Canberra August 2007

The 2009 AusAID review of the Australian Government supported international volunteer programs demonstrates strong ownership for the broad results.

It concluded:

“There is strong evidence that Australian volunteer placements...have had a positive impact on host organisations (HOs) and volunteers, in terms of mutual capacity development, cultural exchange and enhancement of personal and professional linkages. Success is vested not just in the volunteer or the assignment, but the whole process; relationships between partners and the volunteer cycle. This approach is most effective where there is long term planning and investment in partner relationships beyond the annual funding cycle, and a program approach to facilitate this process. ...

At the VSP [Volunteer Service Program] and volunteer assignment level, mutual capacity development, and fostering linkages and partnerships have been found to create the greatest positive impact, with a potential for sustainability if supported by long term investment in stakeholder relationships. Assessing AGVP impact on public awareness is more difficult to determine at the broader level of the Australian community, but certainly there is a positive impact on return of the volunteer, at the local family and community level”⁷.

An emphasis on the importance of relationships for aid effectiveness and quality was reiterated by a 2006 British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) report on quality in NGO development projects. The report questioned the “practical and conceptual shortcomings of ‘impact’ as the driver of performance management” and concluded that “the quality of an NGO’s work was mainly determined by the quality of its relationships with beneficiaries”⁸.

Relationships are also highlighted as critical in the Paris Declaration quest for mutual accountability. The 2009 OECD Development Cooperation Report shows that relationships are no longer solely an NGO domain. Noting lessons from recent evaluations, it says that: “Relationships lie at the heart of the commitment to mutual accountability both between donor and developing governments and between governments and their publics”⁹.

Singling out one of the five Paris development effectiveness principles the Paris Declaration evaluation Synthesis Report talks of the importance of relationships and the political importance embedded in them. It conveys:

“A sense that the joint processes for tracking progress and resolving problems fall short of the goals of mutual accountability.... All the commitments carry important political content, but the commitment to mutual accountability is precisely about the relationship itself, and brings into play the political interests, values and priorities of the endorsing governments and institutions, and of their respective constituents”¹⁰.

The Woods et al Paris Principles evaluation asked “Is behaviour changing around mutual accountability?” and concluded that “the joint processes for tracking progress and resolving

7 Kwitko & McDonald, 2009, p. viii

8 Keystone & Accountability, 2006, p. 7.

9 2009 OECD Development Cooperation Report p. 84

10 Wood, et al., 2008 p. 28

problems fall short of the goals of mutual accountability”¹¹. This is reflected in the evaluations case study of Australia where it says “overall, understanding of the first four pillars... is much stronger than for the fifth pillar (mutual accountability)”¹². I believe the experience of international volunteers for development has much to teach AusAID and other donors.

In conclusion I commend the use of international volunteers within the aid program and encourage a larger program that can foster not just capacity development but also positive people to people linkages for international development. I also encourage the government to complement its new Australian Government Volunteer Program with 1. support also for smaller national volunteer agencies facilitating international volunteers and 2. large multilateral agencies like UN Volunteers that can bring global reach, as well as policy and practical advice and coherence to the quest of achieving the MDGs through volunteerism.

I also encourage the Government to consider the linkages between encouraging volunteerism locally within Australia and internationally. Considering the potential synergies between these different jurisdictions could be as productive as between state and national levels. The Australian government circulated a background paper on the development of a National Volunteering Strategy which is to be delivered in 2011 the International Year of Volunteers + 10. It specifically suggests the strategy will “emphasise the value of volunteering to Australia, in particular the role of volunteering” to amongst other elements “responding to the needs of disadvantaged Australians and communities”. The strategy was also expected to complement state and territory based strategies and “provide ways to identify how the work of individual jurisdictions can complement and add value to the work of others; and allow local communities to see the benefits of greater alignment and cooperative effort between jurisdictions.” The paper also emphasizes that “online volunteer referral services can link skills with opportunities as volunteers from anywhere in the world connect with organisations and communities seeking specific skills and expertise. The use of online volunteering programs, or ‘virtual volunteering’ increase availability and flexibility for volunteers so that they can work across geographic and time boundaries”. The linkages are clear and benefits obvious and the aid program could do well to consider other world examples of linking national and international volunteers.

For further information on what I believe is the significant and undervalued development contribution of international volunteering for development I would encourage the panel to access any of the following:

- *International Volunteers: Cheap help or transformational solidarity toward sustainable development, December 2010. PhD Thesis available <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/3551/>.*
- *Impact of International Volunteering: What evidence is there of the cost-effectiveness, cost-benefits, impact (on alleviating poverty and raising awareness of development) and value for money of international volunteering? Governance and Social Development Resource Centre helpdesk query compiled by Andrew McDevitt available <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD626.pdf>*

¹¹ Wood, et al., 2008 p. 28

¹² Wood, et al., 2008, p. 80

- *International volunteering for development and sustainability: outdated paternalism or a radical response to globalization?* Development in Practice 18(3), June 2008