

Submission to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness
from Cecily Dignan¹
1st February, 2011

To the panelists:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review. I have commented on some parts only of (a), (b), (d) and (e) of the Scope of the Terms of Reference.

a. The structure of the program

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

- And taking into account most developing countries' needs, then, health, education and food security should be the priority areas for assistance.
- It is much more efficient, effective and sustainable to provide assistance with primary, secondary and vocational education within country, strengthening in-country institutions, rather than providing costly tertiary scholarships to Australia.

(iv) 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.

- Increase the share of development assistance funds delivered through Australian NGOs and skilled volunteer programs which are accredited with AusAID and are signatories to the ACFID Code of Conduct, from the current 7% to at least 12%. These organisations have a wealth of development experience/practice, ongoing local networks, successful outcomes, are highly accountable and well respected by the Australian public.
- Provide much greater support for developing countries' own NGOs for their core funding (for building their organisations), not just funding to implement projects. With better human and financial management skills, will come more effective locally run programs and stronger civil society. Australian NGOs are well placed to assist with this. There has been talk of doing this in the past, but little action.
- With the proposed increase in Australia's development assistance budget there may be the temptation to take an "easy" option by putting too great a proportion of Australia's funds through the multilaterals: development banks and UN agencies, without giving sufficient thought to those organisations' ability to design, implement, monitor and evaluate effectively. AusAID has often wrongly assumed that multilaterals' management systems are always robust. AusAID needs to use its influence to advocate for improvement in those organisations' systems and to

¹ *Background of the author.* I am a recently retired development professional, with over thirty years experience in public health/nutrition, agriculture and community development, working in PNG, the Pacific, SE Asia, Timor-Leste, and Aboriginal health, with a range of organisations: government, regional, NGOs, and Australian Managing Contractors.

ensure that AusAID itself has in place ongoing monitoring protocols for programs which it funds through multilaterals.

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

- Most experienced development practitioners are likely to agree that successful programs require: strong involvement/ownership by local people at all levels (villagers/service users, government officials, local staff/partners), competent, committed development agency/staff usually with long-term involvement, **and time** - programs that stay the course over many years, often a decade or even more.

In order to “stay the course” then we need:

- Multi-party support to the principles and approaches coming out of this review so that we can have a long-term commitment from all sides of politics.
- The Australian public's ongoing understanding of and support for our development assistance program through quality development education which conveys the long timeframes that are needed.
- *Strengths based approach*². I strongly endorse this approach being adopted throughout Australia's development assistance program. This approach builds on decades of community development and educational thought, practice and results/evidence, and rightly puts the local/indigenous partners in the driver's seat – not the donors.

d. The appropriate future organisational structure for the aid program, including:

(i) AusAID's organisational structure for aid delivery

- There is a need to separate Australia's development assistance program from Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is wrong and harmful to Australia's reputation if Australia's development assistance becomes entangled in issues such as offshore refugee settlement or advocacy for Australian positions in world organisations. Given that the size of the development assistance program is set to double, this adds to the case to make AusAID a separate department with its own minister.
- Improve the corporate memory within AusAID. One way to do this might be by actively encouraging staff to stay longer on country programs and sector desks.
- A greater role for AusAID in:
 - commissioning and disseminating the results of operational research, informed by the stated needs of developing country partners

² Rhodes, D and Dureau, C. Submission to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness: *Strengths-based approaches to aid and development*

- fostering links/sharing knowledge and experience amongst all agencies working in ODA: NGOs, AMCs, universities, relevant government departments, and others
- facilitating links between allied health professionals, agriculture professionals, educators, and trades associations in Australia and in partner developing countries to help them develop/strengthen their professional associations. This is a much-neglected area of ODA.

(ii) arrangements for the coordination of ODA across the public service

While I appreciate the advantages of drawing on other government departments and institutions at state and federal level, I have seen cases where part of the organisation wants to be involved but the rest of the organisation lacks an understanding of development practice and the operational abilities which would allow them to function effectively in developing countries. AusAID needs to allocate more resources to liaising and explaining the functions required in order to be able to participate in ODA programs.

(iii) coordination of Australia's ODA with other donors and institutions

Despite the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda and other such fora, which have resulted in some improvements in donor and institutional coordination, there is still a long way to go. Australia should play an even stronger role in advocating for reform within the UN to reduce duplication and competition amongst UN agencies and streamline monitoring e.g. on progress towards the MDGs so that it does not become yet another donor-driven burden.

(e) The appropriateness of current arrangements for:

(i) review and evaluation of the aid program, including an examination of the role of the Office of Development Effectiveness and options to strengthen the evaluation of the aid program

The Office of Development Effectiveness needs to be an independent body separate from AusAID perhaps along the lines of the UK's Independent Commission on Aid Impact. This independent body should make annual reports to the Parliament and provide accessible information to the public via a regularly updated website.