

Aid effectiveness review submission

As a current member of AusAID's Capacity Development Panel and former Organisational Development Adviser for AusAID (2001-04) I wish to make two points regarding the effectiveness of Australia's aid. They relate to growing local capacity, and measuring effectiveness.

Growing local capacity to build capacity

Aid programs have become better at more explicitly focusing on developing the capacity of individuals, groups and organisations, rather than simply providing technically focused assistance. However, a further step needs to be taken, that is to build the capacity of local people to become advisers, consultants, facilitators and coaches in their own country and beyond. Some programs such as the Sub-National Strategy and the Advisory Support Facility, both in PNG, have specifically sought to use local consultants and advisers, but there is an opportunity for the Aid program to more proactively develop local talent, and in creative ways that do not simply 'poach' the best people from government.

The benefits of strengthening the local consulting / advisory market are:

- It truly helps people in developing countries to help themselves
- It can help strengthen the private sector, a sector which has traditionally been ignored by development agencies even though a strong private sector is arguably the best opportunity for employment and development – as evidenced by China
- It weakens the criticism of the use of advisers. Much of the commentary in 2010 appeared to be focused on the cost of advisers, and international advisers are generally more expensive than local and regional ones.

Measuring the effectiveness of aid

There appears to be an obsession with trying to measure the effectiveness of the aid program. I would be interested to know just what percentage of the total budget is spent on monitoring and evaluation. And what has been the impact of all the effort – in other words, who is measuring the effectiveness of the M&E?

Maybe it is time to get back to basics. First, let's start with what we know – for example, that development is going to take a long time, and think about what this means in terms of measuring changes. Secondly, learn from others. For example, how about commissioning a study to identify which Australian government departments are really good at measuring the effectiveness of their programs, and equally, are good at telling the public about their successes? The result of such a study could provide guidance for how AusAID could improve its approach. Alternatively, it could show that no government department is particularly good at demonstrating its effectiveness, which in turn leads to the question of why the aid program appears to be scrutinised and criticised more than others.

I am happy to expand on either of these points.

*Jan Morgan
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