

Dear Madam/Sir,

As a PhD candidate studying the making of Australian policies in the Pacific islands I have conducted some research into the operation of the Australian aid programme. I would like to share some of the insights I have gleaned as a brief submission to the review.

First and foremost, it is apparent that the major thrust of Australian aid policy is torn between a number of competing objectives of which development (however defined) is but one. Australian strategic, foreign policy and trade interests, while an inevitable part of the Australian political landscape, exercise an influence that can completely obscure development objectives.

I therefore propose that a formal institutional separation be made between AusAID and DFAT by making AusAID its own department with its own minister, preferably sitting in the Cabinet. Moreover, AusAID itself needs to improve transparency and accountability by instituting a formal separation of powers between its implementation and monitoring arms.

Secondly, AusAID's lack of institutional strength is not only relative to other government agencies but also internal. Rather than displaying continuity and building on its knowledge, it too often lurches from one 'fad' to the next, each time apparently convinced that it has finally unlocked the key to development. As anyone who had paid attention to the field would know, development is highly elusive, and in practice multiple strategies are always pursued in parallel. An explicit acknowledgement of this fact and an honest discussion of the political nature of development would allow a more mature policy development process and help to dispel some of the cynicism that surrounds aid delivery.

While establishing AusAID as a separate department will go some of the way to achieving these goals, it is likely to be insufficient. AusAID also needs to undergo institutional building to strengthen its learning capacity and reflect the complex nature of development without the constant need to portray itself as having the answer.

In addition to these reflections on the institutional structure within which Australian aid is delivered, I would endorse the more immediate critiques of the aid programme made by AID/Watch. These are: that the current focus Technical Aid (an example of 'faddism') be wound back; that aid providers be required to demonstrate how their work fits with recipient priorities; and that policies related to trade, investment, finance, migration and climate change be reconciled with those of poverty alleviation, gender equity and sustainable development.

Regards,

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