



**Sexual Health &  
Family Planning  
Australia**

*Leading the way in sexual and reproductive health*

2 February 2011

## **Submission to the AusAID Independent Review on Aid Effectiveness**

Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia is an AusAID accredited peak body of eight State and Territory Family Planning organizations. Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia is the only Australian NGO that specializes in international advocacy and projects for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This submission draws on Sexual Health and Family Planning's experience as a relatively small NGO undertaking AusAID funded projects.

### **Performance and Lessons Learned**

AusAID recently hosted a meeting of NGOs in Melbourne to discuss AusAID's Child Protection Policies. Following this an online forum was held to allow collective discussion on implementation issues. This was a very welcome activity and most useful. Similar approaches could be held to facilitate joint learning and skill development between Australian NGOs, and between Australian NGOs and AusAID, such as for the area of managing fraud in-country.

The review of the AusAID Accreditation System was an important activity and the recommendations emerging from this review are welcome.

### **Efficiency and effectiveness**

#### Relationship with Australian NGOs

AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness has invested significantly in exploring how AusAID should engage with civil society organizations, including NGOs, in developing countries. This exploration has been fruitful and provided new directions for AusAID in engaging with civil society in developing countries.

Following this exploration, now is an opportune time for AusAID to review its relationship with Australian NGOs working in international development. AusAID could invest more in its relationships with Australian NGOs. Australian NGOs are a key development partner for the Australian aid program. There are good opportunities for expanding shared learning and coordination activities, building an Australian international development community that promotes learning and continuous quality improvement. The end result will be improved efficiency and effectiveness in our efforts to ameliorate suffering and poverty across the world.

One example that highlights the need for greater coordination of relationships between Australian NGOs and AusAID relates to the lack of shared learning between Cooperation Agreement partners. A paper on lessons learned during the first phase of the Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement (SINPA) produced useful and pertinent information on Cooperation Agreements. Yet this document was never shared with Cooperation Agreement partners in the PNG-Australia Sexual Health Improvement Programme (PASHIP). This deprives them of important information that could have enhanced their progress towards program objectives.

Similarly, greater coordination and collaboration about Australian NGO activities within the aid programme would enable progress towards programme objectives. For example, often staff at post in developing countries are not aware of various AusAID-funded Australian NGO projects and programmes in the country. This undermines efforts for greater coordination and collaboration, towards shared objectives.

In relation to the AusAID NGO Accreditation System, despite the review and subsequent changes in 2009, the accreditation system continues to present particular challenges for small and/or specialized Australian NGOs. It would be useful to revisit this section of the accreditation system. Small NGOs have an important niche role to play in international development efforts: they have specific technical expertise or work with community groups in developing countries that others overlook. Their contribution needs to be supported and encouraged in ways that are different to larger NGOs. Some of the accreditation system requirements can be irrelevant to small and niche NGOs' work, yet they have to implement these requirements regardless. This creates inefficient burdens and wastes resources on compliance simply for the sake of it. We recognise that there must be a degree of consistency and a basic level of quality built into the accreditation system. However, further discussion and exploration of the best way to do this within small/niche Australian NGOs will contribute to continuous quality improvement, and expand the effectiveness and efficiency of aid expenditure.

Systems and policies for AusAID staff to guide engagement with Australian NGOs could also be developed, supporting consistency across staff turnover and across the Aid Program.

#### Building a Relationship Focus within the Aid Program

AusAID could improve its efficiency and effectiveness by investing in professional development for staff in the area of relationship management. Experiences with the aid program can vary, depending on the ability of the staff member concerned to manage relationships with various stakeholders. This has significant impacts on project objectives, such as expenditure, ensuring activities are coordinated and that problems are resolved quickly rather than left to hinder progress towards project objectives and goals.

Aid and development activities are founded on relationships and require a significant skill-set for staff in the areas of relationship management, conflict resolution, negotiation, and self-reflection and insight. AusAID staff are highly skilled professionals, particularly in specific areas of aid and development. It is unreasonable to expect all staff recruited to AusAID to be experienced in all areas of managing challenging relationships, often across cultures. Therefore, AusAID could expand staff skills in this area through ongoing professional development. The result would be that resources invested in aid activities are utilised as efficiently as possible.



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