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### **Submission for the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness**

In 2003/4 AusAid funded the construction of the Womal Dispensary on the western side of Gaua Island in Vanuatu.

With a population of around 500, this remote area lacks roads or air services; telephone contact is via radio telephone with no prospect of a mobile service; it can be months between visits from trading boats and the weather conditions often preclude the dispensary runabout from making the 20 mile open ocean passage to the airport on the north eastern side of the island.

Poor supervision during the construction phase of the Dispensary resulted in serious inadequacies in the building. These include the absence of plumbing (no water in the building and no septic toilet) even though it was planned and the materials supplied, open eaves, no covering or paint on the concrete floor, the absence of insect screening on doors and windows, no means of lighting the building and no steps at the back door which is 1 metre above the ground.

In 2005 we visited the area on our yacht and noted the deficiencies. In 2007, when we again visited there had been no improvement except that a cruiser from Australia had donated three Coleman lights which could be charged by the bank of solar panels we had retrieved from the yard and erected on a frame in 2005 in the hope that someone else would come along with lights.

On our visit in 2007 we were distressed to see that the building still lacked water and sewage so sailed the round trip of 180 nm to Luganville where we purchased building materials so that the local people could construct a water supply from 50 metres away to the building, install a sink inside and laundry tub and shower alongside the building and put a garden hose from the tap outside through a window to the sink.

While there is now a water supply of sorts, it is far from the standard you or I would be happy to say was provided by the Australian government or its taxpayers.

We visited West Gaua in September, 2009 to find the building continues to crumble. The open eaves are a source of deterioration, while the whole building is in dire need of paint, insect screening to doors and windows and replacement of rusted Louvre frames and some glass. There is still no septic toilet and the makeshift plumbing installed in 2007 struggles to meet modern health standards. Lighting is grossly inadequate.

The Vanuatu government has failed to replace consumables, bedding, linen and other instruments as they have worn out, although there is now a refrigerator for vaccine storage. While the Vanuatu Government may have a reasonable excuse for not maintaining standards (it has no money) the same could never be said for the Australian Government. Australia has great wealth and the means to ensure its aid program is well managed and resourced.

The staff house is of local materials and far below the standard to which a professional employee working in an extremely remote location is entitled. The current nurse arrived in 2005 but has been an irregular presence because his wife has, until recently, refused to live in the extremely poor conditions. We believe the provision of better accommodation for Dispensary staff - and the school staff – would assist in attracting and keeping committed staff at the Dispensary and school.

An efficiently managed aid program would have ensured that systems and process were in place to supervise the proper construction of the infrastructure in the first place and would have an ongoing means of supporting the maintenance program to rectify any deficiencies in construction of the Dispensary ie by providing a bathroom, laundry and hand washing facilities and, at the same time, building decent staff

accommodation. Aside from the humanitarian need, the Government would avoid any embarrassment that could occur should it be publicised how poorly managed has been the Australian aid program on the western side of Gaua Island.

The failure to provide adequate infrastructure in remote areas of Vanuatu is possibly a direct result of Australian Consular staff not getting out to those areas enough and their reliance on information from city based Vanuatu government officials. The fact that infrastructure provision in remote areas is extremely difficult should not be a disincentive to providing top quality buildings and services for the most disadvantaged people in the country.

The Australian Government aid program needs to make provision for natural disasters in its programs of support. The people on the western side of Gaua were evacuated to the northeastern side of the island in late 2009 because of the eruption of the volcano and have probably only recently been allowed to return. What little infrastructure was in place is probably now not functional and will need replacing. It would be very reassuring indeed if AusAid has provided funds to rebuild infrastructure here and elsewhere in Vanuatu.

Yours sincerely  
Geoff and Cherylle Stone  
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