

Monday, 31 January 2011

To Whom it may Concern
Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness Secretariat
GPO Box 887
Canberra
ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

I do not wish to be named as I am somewhat critical of some of our efforts and am not a professional in this field but merely an untrained observer with little knowledge of what Aid programs are currently being supported or what their aims are. However, there are some points I would like to raise. There are three general issues with the main one being about teaching people how to fish, rather than just plodding along giving a hand out here and there and creating ongoing obligations and dependency.

1. I felt that in some cases our foreign Aid was just a given – a long standing habit, taken for granted. I am thinking here particularly of Vanuatu which I visited in 2008. While some programs seemed very good, such as the program which trained local people to screen for cervical cancer, well-meaning and highly educated professionals were being deployed to carry out basic maintenance on schools etc. It seems to me that this type of work should be carried out by local people with the professionals being used to train them in fixing taps, painting the building etc. thus putting more responsibility in the hands of local people. In that respect I was very impressed by the work being done by South Korea in Mongolia, where they not only ran a very effective mobile dental service throughout the country, but also trained Mongolians in Dentistry and Forestry in South Korea. I see we are doing something similar with training of doctors and obstetricians in Vanuatu which is very much a step in the right direction,
2. The second thing which struck me, not only in Vanuatu but also in places like Nepal, is the terrible unevenness of aid programs, not just Ausaid but that of various NGOs as well. Places with high visibility and some kind of relationship with a foreign organisation do very well, while others, even very close by, are totally neglected. In Vanuatu, Epau is the poster child of Foreign Aid. In Nepal it is the villages around Chitwan National Park and Lumbini where there are many tourists. I would like to see more programs which *empower local people to achieve more themselves* and lift all boats. I don't know how to encourage people to push for universal education and health care, rather than having isolated communities and individuals as beneficiaries and it may not be appropriate for a foreign government to encourage this kind of political activism, but I am thinking here of the ways in which the service clubs like Lions and Rotary and other community organisations in Australia provided playgrounds and local amenities or the way in which school mothers here had cake stalls to raise money for things like a school bus. It wasn't

always just handouts. How did this come about? And how do we encourage it elsewhere?

3. Lack of Visibility. If one of the aims of our foreign aid is to raise Australia's profile abroad, then we should take note of what the Japanese and the Chinese have been doing in Vanuatu, where they have built large, highly visible infrastructure projects which presumably *benefit the many rather the few* – new bridges, roads and ports. Everyone points to the Japanese Bridge in Vanuatu and both the Japanese and the Chinese have gained important trade concessions, fishing rights etc. because of them. While I like the idea of small scale humanitarian projects, we appear to be seen as benign and rather gullible, whereas tangible symbols of power would seem more effective in making our presence and concern known. I see from the website that Australia is also doing something about improving Port Facilities and infrastructure, but again this mostly involves Efate. In Mongolia last year I stood outside the closed office of the Australian Mongolian Aid Office and asked shopkeepers nearby and Mongolians what it did. No one had any idea. *Perhaps it is a case of not only do good works, but to be seen and heard doing good works as well.* I think we also need to report our programs much more widely at home too, something which was very evident in South Korea where the press and TV regularly carried such information and the public was thus much more informed and supportive.

I hope this will be seen as constructive criticism and would be very pleased to see the outcome of the review,

Yours sincerely,

[name withheld]