

Submission to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness

1. Between 2008 and 2010 I worked as an adviser to the Public Sector Capacity Development Program in Timor-Leste. The following observations are based on that experience and further informed by nearly 30 years as a senior government official in the public services of Tasmania and Queensland.
2. The main failings I saw in the delivery of aid support in Timor were:
 - (a) lack of any statement of the real objectives of the aid program;
 - (b) lack of an overall country plan or strategy for the early period I was there;
 - (c) a failure to demand reciprocity from the Government of Timor-Leste for the money that was being spent—in other words, aid was given but there was no requirement for the recipients of that aid to demonstrate improvement resulting from it;
 - (d) enthusiasm but lack of real relevant experience on the part of AusAID staff on the ground;
 - (e) lack of clarity about the proper point of demarcation between AusAID and managing contractors;
 - (f) very high levels of competition amongst donors for ‘a slice of the action’.
3. These issues are dealt with in the following paragraphs subject to these caveats:
 - (a) the viewpoint of an adviser in these environments is less than perfect;
 - (b) my comments are based on observation rather than any structured research
 - (c) a good deal of my understanding has come from endless discussions with a range of people during the time I was in Timor-Leste and must be regarded as anecdotal.

Real objectives of the aid program

4. It was never clear to me that the aid program had any clearly articulated objectives. What I saw as the persistent failure of AusAID to call the Timorese to account for their failure to deliver their side of the capacity development equation can be explained only if the aid program is seen as an instrument of foreign policy lubricating a relationship with the recipient government. Any beneficial results from aid are a bonus.
5. Maybe this is as it should be; and there are obvious risks in a clear public articulation of such an approach. The real downside, though, is that it makes any real measurement of aid effectiveness almost impossible.

Lack of a country plan

6. By the end of the time I was in Timor-Leste, AusAID had developed a country strategy, but during the first year I was there none existed. It made it almost impossible for advisers to contextualise the work they were being asked to undertake or to be clear about their overarching objectives.
7. I note a country strategy was developed during 2009.
8. One would hope that a country strategy would lead to various programs and components of programs working together. My view is they did not. The effort on the ground always seemed more individually focussed. That approach seemed to be supported.

Lack of reciprocity

9. The main theme of aid delivery when I was recruited was 'capacity building', an apparently noble proposition about which much could be written. But not here.
10. However, to be effective, capacity building requires a willingness on the part of the recipient to have their capacity built. Too often it seemed to me that, for the Timorese, persuading a donor to provide an adviser was more about having someone on hand to undertake complex tasks quickly (that is, an in-line role) and, sometimes, prestige. Whether skills were transferred was incidental.
11. A key component of capacity building is a willing counterpart. I was an adviser to the Civil Service Commission in Timor-Leste over nearly 3 years and only saw counterparts provided towards the end of that period.
12. Aid effectiveness would be appreciably improved if clear, measurable objectives were set for aid recipients, they were required to deliver on them, and there were consequences for failure. In this example, failure to demonstrate that there had

been effective skills transfer and capacity improvement because there was no real counterpart should result in some consequence, possibly withdrawal of the adviser.

Experience of AusAID Staff

13. AusAID staff, while bright, hard working, enthusiastic and competent commensurate with their experience, often seemed to me to lack the real personal experience to make them totally credible with ministers and senior bureaucrats of recipient governments, particularly when they were offering advice about matters outside their own experience—such as, the political-bureaucratic interface and the really important aspects of public sector governance.
14. I suspect this problem was exacerbated in Timor-Leste because status is an issue. More importantly, though, the Timorese were not interested in a Westminster-style, common law based system and AusAID staff (and many advisers) were not comfortable trying to deliver what the Timorese wanted.

Demarcation between AusAID and Managing contractors

15. Perhaps it is unfair, but it always seemed to me that the simple demarcation between AusAID and the managing contractor ought to have been around policy. In other words, AusAID should have been negotiating and monitoring the delivery of the policy outcomes with the managing contractor left to deal with administration, adviser placement and performance, etc.
16. This did not seem to occur in Timor-Leste with the managing contractor being left to try to determine and manage many of the policy issues and outcomes.
17. This issue was manifest in a peculiar understanding of the role of advisers. There were some in AusAID who seemed to regard them as being employees of the Government of Timor-Leste rather than of a managing contractor fully paid for by AusAID. There were no consequences when advisers gave advice contrary to the interests or views of the Australian Government. This was extremely frustrating when those views undermined longer term work being done by other advisers.

Donor Competition

18. It is worth noting that a difficulty for AusAID in applying sanctions for recipients not meeting their side of the bargain is that other donors will immediately step in to provide support. Competition to be a donor is intense which diminishes the chance of achieving good outcomes for the recipient.

19. It is certainly not helped when—as happened on one occasion—AusAID proposed to fund a multilateral project to employ an adviser whose employment AusAID had terminated.

Conclusion

20. In summary, the ability of AusAID's programs to deliver quality results was reduced by its apparent unwillingness to establish a proper relationship in which the recipient (the Government of Timor-Leste) had to meet certain requirements or risk a loss of support.

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