

29th January 2010

To the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness
Canberra

Dear madam and sirs,

I am a rural scientist, with 45 years in the NT, and a substantial involvement with aboriginal issues and people, a big interest in Papua, and perhaps most of my involvement has been with East Timor issues.

I worked in East Timor with an aid group from early October 1999 to the start of February 2000, when the it and the UN decided that the only agricultural scientist with hands on experience in the region for 25 years was not wanted. However I had seen a fair bit during those months and worked my butt off.

Since then I have visited on average several times a year, and been on a Sister City c'tee, and involved with 2 friendship groups. I've also written quite a lot about agriculture, and the environment, and a bit about human rights and politics. I independently tried to design and get fuel efficient stoves going etc and tried hard to get ETG and people to understand the need to 'rehabilitate the environment' to protect the soil and water supplies, and even to stop roads from washing away. No clear results seen yet!!

I will be brief.

Aid should be assessed on results achieved, not on cash allocated or doled out.

Often Aid programs do not look at results achieved. Also a lot of money is often spent on consultants who might come from anywhere, usually though probably from Australia and US. Their fees are sacred, they are paid at the start, not at the finish for a job well done. Follow up is often not part of the bargain. Results should be made public.

By contrast I have seen the operation of the DAP scheme operated by the Australian Embassy in Dili, and even helped staff access progress of projects on the ground, via transport and local knowledge. This scheme requires submissions from community groups, and if accepted, the outlay is usually about \$5,000, a max maybe \$10,000, I'm not sure if it can go higher.

I have seen villages in central southern East Timor achieve splendid results, and get a huge boost to morale and enthusiasm. This type of program must have a set of core values that might be used for many other and bigger aid projects.

I have also been involved with meetings with arrogant consultants, who, because they are being paid vast amounts, and presumably have the ear or attention of governments, feel they can 'lay down the law' to volunteer helpers who might even have better and greater knowledge.

There are even arrogant governments who don't know how best to handle government or Aid, and resort to blaming the Aid industry. It probably makes them feel better, but they should be involved in identifying and designing aid projects, thus having some 'ownership'. That is important - and that is where the DAP scheme is so good!

Trouble is, many who are keen to help don't perhaps have the administrative skills, or better put, the bureaucratic skills, to deal with government structures. Aid is a difficult subject, many with technical skills do not have the experience or the all round people skills to do the job well. Enthusiasm is no substitute for ground-up people skills and knowledge. This applies to consultants too. I am sure that most projects fail unless the groundwork is done to find out what the people want, or to educate them as to what they (should) want in advance!!

Timor local production of milk comes from Buffalo or Goats, yet someone introduced dairy cows adapted to cool climates. A lot of misinformation has been promulgated to try to justify this. At present the NT administration has some Murrah milk-Buffaloes which can treble milk production straight off. Some surplus bulls are said to be available at bargain basement prices, and a sure-bet Aid project would be to send some to East Timor to mate with buffalos that are used for milk production, once herds and owners are located and are keen.. Some Saanan Goats were sent to East Timor, the survivors are mostly at the Natarbora Agricultural College, yet the College does not seem to have the skills or energy to use these to mate widely with local goats and build up the herd and milk production. Giving animals without intensive followup and programs is usually a disaster!! Same applies to Boer (meat) goats at Maliana agricultural college. The 3 Ag Colleges are not working well. Perhaps some experienced agric college administrators or lecturers could be offered to East Timor government!! I would offer but I am too old, and have other projects to get on top of!!

I won't go on - I think most in Darwin recognise that my outspokenness on these sort of issues cost me my NTG job in 1992, at least it gave me more time to support East Timor, and probably my NGO job in ETimor in early 2000. I don't feel expert, or that I know how to influence governments or to change many directions of the Australian Aid Industry in the way suggested, I hope you do - good luck.

Rob Wesley-Smith BRurSc