

# Overall Submission to the International Development Policy Review by the Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University

31/01/2020

## INTRODUCTION

This review draws upon previous submissions to: the [Joint standing committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Inquiry into Australia's aid effectiveness](#); to the [Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee of the Australian Senate on the Sustainable Development Goals](#), and to the [Foreign Policy White paper](#).

## IN THESE SUBMISSIONS WE ARGUED:

- For a review of how key domestic policies enhance or detract from Australia's ability to act in the national interest in international arenas;
- Australia is in a unique position to act as an 'honest broker' between emerging and existing powers. It is in both Australia's national interest and in the interests of the region as whole, that it builds not just economic linkages, but also the political and social relationships necessary to play this role;
- It is important to build more sustained networks and linkages of learning and mutual exchange between people working on common problems in Australia and in other countries in our region. This will assist in demonstrating, and communicating, a different mode of international collaboration: one built on respect, mutual exchange and common humanity, rather than one overly characterised by charity, pity and short-term aid.
- Realising the Sustainable Development Goals means acknowledging that universal challenges are shared problems and that international cooperation is about learning together how to address them;
- That DFAT's current organisational policies and practices are often inconsistent with emerging research on effective development practice, and this needs to be addressed.

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At the heart of these arguments is the proposition, built on long standing evidence, that building and maintaining healthy, *respectful* relationships underpins not just effective development practice, but public diplomacy and international cooperation as well. In a world of growing political and social *polarisation* this emphasis on finding fresh ways of maturely negotiating our differences as well as transcending them, is becoming ever more critical.

#### WHAT MIGHT THIS TAKE?

There is no shortage of risk and trend analyses about the key issues of the day, which might inform a new International development policy. Inequality; climate change and food insecurity; nationalism, conflict and population movement; as well as Artificial Intelligence and the future of work, generally all figure on these lists no matter if it is [Oxfam](#) or the [World Economic Forum](#) producing them.

However, despite this apparent consensus, we need to look 'below the water line' at some of these issues to explore the underlying drivers of these trends, and importantly how they might be addressed.

## 1. CULTIVATING 'A GREATER US'

Australia is well placed to model new forms of local and international collaboration and relationships. We are also well placed to demonstrate that the two are not just mutually exclusive but can be combined in beneficial ways. The Pacific region's [response to the Australian bushfires](#) is a powerful example of the fact 'there is more that binds us with our neighbours than sets us apart'. This would create a very different public narrative of the value of international development and cooperation.

1. There is a growing consensus that there are important links between collective psychology, identity and politics - see the Collective Psychology project (<https://www.collectivepsychology.org/>). This project is asking whether enough of us can see ourselves as part of a larger 'Us' instead of part of competing camps arguing that 'when fear and anxiety become central to politics, tribalism is the result'.

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## 2. VALUING LOCALLY-LED AND LOCALLY-OWNED PROCESSES OF CHANGE AND REFORM

There is a lot of evidence which shows that [locally-owned and led processes](#) - the notion of [localisation](#) in the humanitarian area - has more effective, sustainable development outcomes and impacts. [Dan Honig](#) and [Susanna Campbell](#), among others, have produced strong evidence that top down control, micro-management, overly bureaucratic accountability and measurement systems impede local ownership, adaptation and innovation, particularly in volatile contexts. What seems to be more effective is (often informal) accountability - or effective relationships - to local communities and people, and navigation by judgement i.e. giving front line staff, practitioners, local people the space to discover and learn from trying to solve their own problems. This does not mean doing away with formal accountability and reporting processes, but it does mean making sure that a) they do not produce perverse incentives to under-perform and b) that they are complemented by effective feedback loops from citizens, local partners and practitioners.

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This requires agencies to be developing genuinely shared processes of design, monitoring and performance assessment with partner governments and civil society organisations. This is being attempted in the DFAT Governance and Law & Justice programs in the Solomon Islands. This will in turn necessitate valuing the diverse knowledge, experiences and worldviews which exist in the region, and the value of bringing multiple but different perspectives to bear on the common problems and issues we face.

At the same time it means ensuring local organisations are adequately funded and supported. For example, there is clear evidence that the strength of women's organisations and movements is associated with positive policies to reduce violence against women, and other markers towards greater gender equality[2]. Despite this, recent data shows only \$31 million (the 2018 OECD aid budget was \$153 billion) was allocated to local women's organisations in developing countries by donors[3].

### 3. BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS WHICH ENABLE 1 AND 2

There is unsurprisingly a general lament about the quality of leadership and lack of political will in the world today. This includes the leadership of companies, banks, NGOs and universities as well as political leadership.

At the same time there is emerging research in the field of international development that the business practices, organisational architecture, reward systems and incentives in these institutions are increasingly out of sync with the agile, innovative, creative partnerships and collaboration which is required.

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Recent DFAT funded research, that our Institute has been involved in, explores these questions of leadership and development[4]. This suggests we need to move beyond notions of heroic individual leadership, to think much more about not only collective leadership and the role of coalitions, but also the role of societal or what some call [systems leadership](#). For example, the kind of leadership that confronts the ideas, norms and values which hold current practices in place, and proposes – and indeed models – new sets of ideas, relationships habits and practices. This understanding and inspiration for different forms of leadership comes from an exploration of existing and successful practice at multiple levels and in multiple domains and sectors, and from experiences right across the globe, including from DFAT supported programs such as the [Vanuatu Skills Partnership](#), and [Coalitions for Change](#) in the Philippines, as well as DFID supported programs such as the [Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn](#) (PERL) programme in Nigeria, and its predecessor the [State Accountability and Voice Initiative](#) (SAVI).

2. Weldon, S. Laurel, and Mala Htun (2013). "Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women." *Gender & Development* 21.2: 231-247.

3. See <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/principles-practice-strengthening-accountability-gender-equality-international>

4. Hudson, McLoughlin, Roche, and Marquette (2019) Inside the black box of political will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program

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This means cultivating leaders and leadership which can: work at individual, organisational and systems levels simultaneously; model and create micro-relationships between staff which enable motivation, autonomy and trust to drive systems change; model new forms of collaboration and networking to disrupt the status quo and propose alternative futures; and reimagine values, ethics and business practices in ways which support all of this.

SO WHERE WOULD ONE EVEN START?

**A.** Identify and learn from organisations, programs or initiatives already attempting to work in ways which promote and successfully support locally led processes. This might include the programs cited above, but also the [Australia Pacific Training Coalition](#), which is seeking to transition more to this way of working. This kind of ‘positive outlier’ analysis has three major advantages: i. it identifies initiatives which are already working and provides practical immediately applicable lessons for how to work in this way, ii. it avoids the risk of attempting untried approaches, and iii it helps identify institutional obstacles to working in this way and how to overcome them in real time.

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**B.** From these experiences and existing research undertake a review of DFAT’s core business processes. Assess the degree to which they might be better aligned to enabling and supporting locally-led development. Finally incentivise the development and maintenance of effective long-term relationships and partnerships. An example of a current attempt to do things differently in this regard is the current co-design process for the new gender and disability program in Indonesia. It builds on previous initiatives such as [MAMPU](#) and [Peduli](#), and is engaging local women’s and disability organisations in the design, choice of contractor and how the program will be managed.

**C.** Making significantly more funds available to local civil society organisations and women’s organisations in particular. Learn from examples such as the Netherland’s [Leading from the South Fund](#), and other initiatives supporting women’s funds such as Canada’s [Equality fund](#), which seek to get funding more directly to local actors.

**D.** Ensure that the investment in DFAT’s staff capabilities includes supporting the emergence of individual, collective and systems leadership capacities. These skills are appropriate for the kinds of complex issues the organisation seeks to address, and in building effective relationships. The development of these capacities needs to be effectively integrated into the programs run by the [Diplomatic Academy](#), and other internal training programs held by government agencies involved in international development activities.

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**E.** Revise the performance framework for Australia's international development work. It must include a greater emphasis on seeking to understand how effective Australia's relationships are in the region. The revised framework can also assist in building greater accountability between citizens and governments in the region. It should also include measures of the use of evidence and effectiveness of learning systems central to the framework (see more specific suggestions in a separate submission on the performance framework).

**F.** Ensure DFAT and all the programs they fund make their learning resources, reporting, and evaluations available to local practitioners, governments, civil society etc. This will require a) the proper maintenance of documentation by contractors and DFAT which is a pre-requisite for future programs not reinventing the wheel, and b) accessible databases and public websites which make this information available and which allow citizens and governments to access the knowledge and learning accumulated by these programs. The Institute has piloted a process by which this might be done as part of its support to the PNG-Australia Governance Partnership, which indicates that this can be done at relatively low cost.

**G.** Invest resources in helping the Australian public have a greater understanding of the value and importance of building effective, mature and respectful relationships with our neighbours. This could be done through international NGOs who have a history of undertaking this sort of communication and education work, as well as by DFAT and associated media outlets.

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