

## UNSW Submission: International Development Policy Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to inform Australia's new International Development Policy.

UNSW Sydney is committed to tackling significant global development challenges and contributing to Australia's efforts to improve the lives of individuals, their families and communities. At the forefront of our efforts to effect this positive change is the UNSW Institute for Global Development (IGD). The IGD is committed to achieving change by harnessing academic excellence, fostering transformative partnerships and translating evidence into impact.

In response to the consultation questions, we provide the following advice:

***What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?***

### *Harnessing our people-to-people links*

The changing demography of Australia, including increased migrant populations from developing countries, provides opportunities for diaspora engagement in Australia's development assistance. Australia's migration inflows are heavily connected to the higher education sector, and there is a vast array of contextual as well as technical knowledge among diaspora communities in both the university and private sectors, which should be utilised.

Australia has invested significantly in the higher education of many individuals across the Indo-Pacific through the Australia Awards. More targeted approaches to utilising these individuals and networks to inform Australia's development assistance builds upon the initial investment, strengthens ties, and assists in more contextually based approaches.

### *Applying approaches and solutions used in Australia*

Viable solutions to developmental challenges and opportunities in Australia can be leveraged for the region's benefit. Western Sydney, for example, provides a classic example where models and technologies developed to address healthcare, urbanisation, renewable energy, and climate change can be transferred through twinning approaches in the region.

### *Geopolitical opportunities and challenges*

The greater South Asian region with India at its core provides both a challenge and opportunity for development partnerships in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, building on the extant alignment of democratic values, security interests, and subject matter experts from this near region of Australia.

Furthermore, the intensification of the strategic rivalry in the Indo Pacific and the concomitant increase in development investment by Quad and AUKUS allies elevates the place of PNG and the South Pacific in global strategic and development policy. As

global development mechanisms are increasingly focused on Australia's geography and sphere of influence, Australia is required to assume a larger leadership role in shaping regional development discourse and outcomes.

The above points provide additional encouragement to better integrate regional development activities with traditional foreign and security affairs. If undertaken from a perspective of mutual respect, Australia can step into a role of leadership with integrity to serve the Pacific family and beyond.

#### *Addressing climate change through low-emission technology*

As the Terms of Reference note, Australia is on the frontline of climate change. Assisting communities to address both the immediate and longer-term impacts of climate change for instance will be key for Australia's engagement in the Pacific. This includes both actions to limit climate change, as well as climate change adaptation activities to mitigate the impacts of climate induced events.

In particular, Australia can assist its Pacific neighbours through the sharing of expertise and technology related to low carbon emission technology. Australia is a world leader in low emission technology, for example the ubiquitous solar PERC cell manufactured widely around the world is based on technology developed at UNSW. At UNSW we have much interest from governments in the Indo-Pacific wishing to learn about low-emission technology from Australia. There is scope to do more, in partnership with the Australian Government, to meet this demand.

#### *Applying the lessons learned from COVID-19*

Arguably the biggest challenge of the past two years has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Given Australia has fared relatively well globally in its response to COVID, based in large part to the key role of scientists, researchers and global health experts, it is important that the Government continues to apply and share the lessons learnt from our pandemic management and response. This includes supporting our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific to ensure that they have health systems robust enough to manage ongoing health issues and future pandemics.

### ***What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?***

#### *Greater use of technology and data*

The complexity of developmental dilemmas in the 21st Century will require data-driven analytical capability using artificial intelligence, remote sensing/GIS, big data, and area expertise on issues at the intersection of development with security, governance, and climate.

#### *Longer term partnerships*

In this context of complexity and disruption, Australia needs to develop closer, direct relationships with partners and counterparts on the ground. This requires DFAT to develop and sustain in-house capacity to appraise development contexts and work flexibly with local partners on the ground. This means reducing reliance on third party contractors who work on shorter time frames, with different incentives.

The Australian Government would benefit from forging more strategic knowledge partnerships for development with Australian universities and industry. Unlike contractors who work on short-term contractual cycles, and in many cases DFAT Canberra-based and posted staff who regularly change roles, academics and researchers have a deep knowledge of context and issues in the Indo-Pacific developed from long-term focussed, country or region-specific research.

Building trust and confidence both in Australia's competencies and our partners is vital. Longer term, meaningful relationships between government, academia, and industries across the region should be a priority.

***How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?***

*Better utilising the expertise within Australian universities*

Universities can play an important role in supporting the Australian Government's development agenda by providing access to cutting-edge research and technological innovation for addressing developmental vulnerabilities. As noted above, sharing Australia's expertise on low emission technology is just one example of this.

Universities can also provide academic expertise, adding essential contextual nuance and sensitivity to private-sector delivered development. As noted above there is potential for universities to partner with the private sector (that is business, rather than development contractors) to improve the effectiveness of the development cooperation program.

Universities are by their nature collaborative institutions. Through joint research and collaboration with researchers from across the Indo-Pacific, universities are forging partnerships, building capacity and increasing knowledge and understanding about the region and issues relevant to it. The Australia Government should do more to foster collaborative research between Australia and our neighbours across the Indo-Pacific.

In addition, there are opportunities for universities to be better utilised and supported, beyond research and teaching. Building on the wealth of research, technological and training capacity, universities are well placed, for example, to build policy and administrative capacity for the civil services across the region, as well as design and implement technically complex projects to counter climate change and mitigate its impacts.

There is potential for the Australian Government to form multi-faceted partnerships with universities directly, and with universities and the private sector, to ensure positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Through direct dialogue with universities, there is also scope for the Government to better understand how it can utilise the strengths of this world class sector, and to help university faculties, academics and students better understand what role they can play in supporting the Australian Government's development cooperation program.

DFAT is reassessing how it approaches problems and finds solutions given that most of the current challenges faced are intersectional (for example, the impact of climate change on public health and gender equity; the impact of digitalisation on democracy

and governance; gender equity in education and government). DFAT could utilise its convening powers to pool expertise from across many differing institutions and sectors to both frame multi-dimensional dilemmas and seek solutions. To best support this approach we would recommend DFAT draws on a wide range of experts and takes fresh, innovative approaches to problem-solving and program development.

***How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?***

*Working more closely with local partners*

Partnerships should be developed through new pathways of engagement and funding that privilege/prefer community-determined framing and resolution of development issues.

Resetting the approach to a more community driven model would be a tangible signal to the Indo-Pacific that Australia can be a trusted leader able to balance national interest with fairness for others. Assisting communities to address both the immediate and longer-term impacts of climate change for instance will be key for Australia's engagement in the Pacific.

*Engaging with the private sector*

The private and NGO sectors (local business, rather than for-profit contractors) are often the forgotten stakeholders in development programs. However, through technological innovation and bridging the last mile to local communities around the world, the private sector brings the opportunity to supplement the assistance from 'traditional' aid programs, and to bring about further development progress.

As the private sector moves away from a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to other kinds of metrics (Environmental., Social, Governance, (ESG) sustainability), there are huge opportunities to leverage their work. While we are not advocating for an uncritical embrace of the potential of business as positive development agents, the private sector should not be wholesale rejected with suspicion or cynicism.

While private sector-university partnerships exist, there is need to better incentivise partnerships between universities and industry to multiply impact in the service of public interest in and around Australia.

***What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy?  
What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?***

*More flexible and innovative programs and practice*

As a middle power, Australia has the potential to be more nimble, agile, and innovative in its development program to propel Australia's leadership in global development practice. Without undermining the importance of multilateral institutions and partnerships, Australia should look to leverage its position to pursue innovative programming directly with regional allies and decrease reliance on basket funding mechanisms.

Australia has the capacity to be responsive to our partners in times of need. This requires options and flexibility in how to provide assistance and as the development landscape continues to evolve, less traditional aid and development mechanisms should continue to be tested. Australia is well placed to manage risks associated with working outside the traditional aid architecture when appropriate.

***How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?***

*More diverse monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) partners*

It is essential to augment or replace dependence on ODA-implementing contractors/partners for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes. Long-term alliances of Australian university and public-interest groups and their regional peers can serve Australian government as alternative partners for MEL processes.

While DFAT has access to very experienced MEL expertise, it tends to rely on a very small pool of individuals and companies. Alliances with Australian and regional universities would provide independent, fresh insights and diverse ways of learning.

***How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?***

Given current and emergent geopolitical trends, it is imperative that regional security and governance considerations are recognised and accounted for across ODA's operations. This will require dedicated resourcing and processes bringing ODA and non-ODA priorities together in real time, so that there is a single set of priorities to work to.

Dedicated resourcing and processes should recognise the importance of the broader landscape for assistance and the interconnected nature of ODA and non-ODA. This would better reflect complex issues and relationships globally and across the region.

**Conclusion**

UNSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's new International Development Policy.

If UNSW is in a position to further contribute to Australia's international development policy and activities, or if you would like to discuss any issue raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact IGD's Director, Dr George Varughese, on [g.varughese@unsw.edu.au](mailto:g.varughese@unsw.edu.au).