



**NEW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY**  
**Joint Church Agencies Network Submission**  
November 2022

# Joint Church Agencies Network Submission

## Introduction: The Church Agencies Network

We make this submission as a group of twelve Church-based overseas aid and development agencies committed to working alongside communities to overcome poverty. We do this as an expression of our churches' commitment to work towards wholeness and fullness of life for all, and particularly among communities where people live in poverty.

Our collective reach and impact are demonstrated by these figures (2019):

- \$77,405,635 in development programs reached over 3.5 million people across 48 countries
- 54% of those reached are women and girls and 34% are children
- \$5,723,870 raised for humanitarian appeals

We have long histories of relationship and partnership with local church and faith-based agencies in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. Faith is integral to community life and social institutions, for example in the Pacific over 90 per cent of the population identify as Christian. Churches and other faith-based institutions have extensive reach to almost every community and deep relationships throughout the community including with those who do not identify as religious. Theological resources can be profoundly influential in shifting social attitudes and practices. In some contexts, particularly in the Pacific, churches are the primary provider of essential services including health and education. This submission is informed by our collective experiences working through these partnerships.

## Summary of Key Recommendations:

1. Identify a clear statement of purpose for the development cooperation program that embeds principles of partnership, mutuality and a focus on human development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Prioritise local leadership and shift ownership to local actors, and develop the capabilities, program approaches and funding modalities within DFAT to drive this change.
  - 2.1 Deepen capabilities within DFAT and the wider sector to engage in meaningful consultation, engagement and listening with local actors, and ensure all strategies and initiatives reflect local priorities.
  - 2.2 Expand engagement with local faith actors informed by current successful programs.
  - 2.3 Develop and pilot funding modalities that enable local ownership.
3. Rebuild Australia's leadership in gender equality, disability and social inclusion and invest in the capabilities and programs that catalyse social norms change.
4. Increase investment in climate action and prioritise dialogue with local initiatives and investment in locally led community-based adaptation.
5. Ensure Australia's global development and humanitarian responsibilities and commitments are explicitly identified as an enduring priority.



## Recommendation 1: Identify a clear statement of purpose for the development cooperation program that is based on principles of partnership, mutuality and a focus on human development and the achievement of the SDGs; and embed this purpose within all pillars of Australia’s foreign policy.

We welcome the Government’s commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships, and to ‘work with and listen to’ local leaders.<sup>1</sup> To reflect this intent, a new International Development Policy (IDP) must embed principles of partnership and mutuality within a clear statement of purpose for the development cooperation program. That statement should focus on the specific role of development policy in investing in achieving the SDGs, human development, and poverty reduction, protecting human rights, advancing gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), addressing the impacts of climate change, and responding to humanitarian crises, including the global displacement crisis.<sup>2</sup>

While the Indo-Pacific context is characterised by strategic competition and economic instability, and development policy does make an important contribution to the Government’s foreign policy objectives to achieve a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, it does this most effectively when it is focused on human development outcomes and implemented through strong mutual partnerships. This should be clearly reflected in the purpose statement for the program.

As an equal pillar alongside foreign, trade and defence policy, Australia’s development policy – and specifically the purpose statement embedded within it - should also be identified as one of the overarching purposes for all Australian regional and global engagement. This must entail developing cross-government processes to ensure that all international Australian activities complement and assist in advancing human development and the achievement of the SDGs. Specifically, examples of this will include: analysing the development impact of all trade agreements; exploring options for expanding the current transparency-based Modern Slavery Act into a wider due diligence regime that covers the social, human rights and environmental impact of the offshore activities of Australian corporations; and working within global institutions to strengthen taxation regimes to ensure partner countries have sufficient leverage to generate domestic tax revenue.

## Recommendation 2: Prioritise local leadership and shift ownership to local actors, and develop the capabilities, program approaches and funding modalities within DFAT to drive this change.

2.1. Deepen capabilities within DFAT and the wider sector to engage in meaningful consultation, engagement and listening with local actors, and ensure all strategies and initiatives reflect local priorities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/speech-pacific-islands-forum-secretariat>

<sup>2</sup> Global displacement due to conflict and violence doubled in the past decade, topping 100 million in March 2022. Another 24 million have been displaced each year on average over the past 10 years by disasters, which have been increasingly fuelled by climate change and are increasingly permanent in nature.



The new IDP needs to commit the Australian aid program to meaningful consultation, engagement and listening to local civil society and communities across the region, including indigenous and displaced peoples,<sup>3</sup> to ensure that wherever possible the Australian development cooperation program supports existing local and regional initiatives. In all cases, Australian-supported initiatives should have the confidence and ownership of local populations as well as partner governments. This may include:

- a. Ensuring local and regional frameworks for development are used as the basis for DFAT's own strategies and initiatives. In the Pacific region this includes frameworks that have been developed by local and faith communities (notably the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Framework<sup>4</sup> which constructs an approach to development around three frames: economy, ecology, and culture and spirituality), and by regional governments (e.g., the Pacific Island Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent).
- b. Consulting directly with local faith leaders and civil society wherever possible; and ensuring that all consultations and engagement with Australian NGO partners provide sufficient time, resourcing, and expectation that local partners be consulted, and their feedback included in responses to DFAT.
- c. Building capabilities across DFAT – including at diplomatic posts – to engage in meaningful listening, consultation, and dialogue with local civil society. Cultural and faith literacy and competency should be included within these capabilities.

## 2.2. Expand engagement with local faith actors informed by current successful programs.

In many development contexts, regardless of the religious demographics, churches already exist as strong civil society organisations, with a focus on serving local people, deep roots in the community and commitment to permanent presence. They often have considerable influence in public discourse, political influence, and extensive institutional networks. This is particularly the case in the Pacific, where they are also significant service providers.

We note the Foreign Minister's words to the United Nations General Assembly: 'When Australians look out to the world, we see ourselves reflected in it. Equally, the world can see itself reflected in Australia. A nation whose people share common ground with so many of the world's peoples.'<sup>5</sup> The diversity of religious commitments within Australia means that shared faith and the people-to-people links within faith communities are an important aspect of this common ground. The recent Pacific Church Leaders Development Conference which gathered faith leaders from across the Pacific and the Pacific diaspora in Australia, together with DFAT officials, is a good example of the kind of practice that should be further developed to realise this potential.

The new IDP should reflect the significant role of faith communities in facilitating locally led development, and the potential for faith networks to utilise wider national strengths to enhance the impact of the development program. Specifically, the IDP should include:

- a. The Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Church Partnership Program are two examples of existing DFAT initiatives that are effective models for program and service delivery, strategic dialogue, and deepening people-to-people links. Both models should be identified as enduring priorities within the new IDP.
- b. The feasibility of initiating faith partnership programs in Southeast Asia should also be identified as a priority for exploration. Across this region, faith institutions have similarly extensive community reach and

<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the commitment Australia has made when signing the Global Refugee Forum Pledge on Meaningful Refugee Participation and Leadership.

<sup>4</sup> <https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Reweaving-the-Ecological-Mat-Framework-final-Web-version.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-statement-un-general-assembly-new-york>



relationships, are influential messengers across society, and first responders in times of crisis. An inter-faith partnership model in the region could be an important approach to deepen localisation, address challenges such as gender inequality, disability, and social inclusion, contribute to peacebuilding, and to reflect the strengths and diversity of the wider Australian population in development and foreign policy. It may also create a platform for dialogue at the community and national level.

- c. Opportunities to establish platforms that enable dialogue and engagement between First Nations Australians and local faith leaders should also be explored within these church/faith partnerships. Many of our agencies have existing strong relationships with First Nations communities. This is both through covenant relationships between First Nations and other Australians (such as exists between the Uniting Church and the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress) and through community program partnerships. These relationships are a foundation for meaningful dialogue and engagement – particularly with partners in the Pacific – and there is opportunity to further expand these links.

### 2.3. Develop and pilot funding modalities that enable local ownership.

Existing funding modalities are often not fit-for-purpose in facilitating ‘meaningful partnerships that are founded on mutual trust and respect’ with local actors. The current model of managing program resources and risks through contract managers and Australian partners, can lead to the centralisation of decision-making and power in locations a long way from the communities where initiatives are implemented. They can also represent poorer value for money as significant funds are absorbed within the system and diverted away from direct development purposes. The new IDP should commit to exploring, developing, and refining new approaches to delivering aid which support locally led development and seek to maximise expenditure on development outcomes. This should include:

- a. Reviewing the scale, processes, and contracts of program tenders to ensure they do not act to functionally exclude all but the largest commercial operators from presenting viable bids.
- b. Working with local and Australian partners to scope the feasibility of establishing in-country or in-region social enterprises with the capacity to hold contract management functions - enabling DFAT to address risk, compliance, and program consolidation requirements – while returning profits to support local actors and development initiatives.
- c. Supporting strong local civil society eco-systems in partner countries. This may include providing support to local partners to strengthen governance and meet grant requirements; fostering the development of local talent pools in areas like monitoring and evaluation, financial audit, and safeguarding investigation; and seed funding co-design processes that bring together cross-sector stakeholders to develop integrated multi-tiered/partner approaches to addressing complex development challenges.

## Recommendation 3: Rebuild Australia’s leadership in gender equality, disability and social inclusion and invest in the capabilities and programs that catalyse social norms change.

Gender equality is fundamental to all development outcomes, and deeply inter-connected with other challenges including climate change, economic prosperity, and peace and stability. Despite its foundational importance, progress remains insufficient and patchy in all regions globally. Women’s participation in the formal economy and in political spaces remains constricted. Women bore the heaviest health and economic burdens from Covid-19.





Across the Pacific, approximately 68 per cent of women and girls experience violence in their homes. This is a key challenge that Australian development cooperation and the new IDP must focus on in the region and globally.

People with disability and youth face distinct but also significant barriers to full inclusion. For example, it is estimated that the youth population (between 15 and 24 years old) was 1.21 billion in 2020 and is growing most rapidly in least developed countries.<sup>6</sup> This cohort faces economic exclusion through limited employment opportunities, restrictions in access to full participation in political and civic life, and vulnerability to substance abuse and radicalisation in some contexts. Across the Pacific region, a growing methamphetamine epidemic has been observed particularly in countries like Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Australia has previously played a global leadership role particularly in relation to disability inclusion and gender equality, and the step back from this in recent years must be reversed and the new IDP should set out a priority to urgently rectify this.

The re-introduction of the 80 per cent gender equality target is welcome, as is the restoration of central funding for disability. However, all issues of social inclusion – including gender equality, disability inclusion and youth empowerment are complex, with roots in history, culture, and tradition, and need a multi-faceted approach.

Our own experience is most extensive in seeking to advance gender equality. We see that directly meeting the needs of women and children affected by violence, enabling the work of women led organisations, and a discourse on women’s rights all have a part to play in addressing gender inequality. Transforming harmful behaviours of men and boys by challenging and changing attitudes and beliefs is equally important.

As church-based agencies, and in dialogue with our Pacific partners, we recognise that some Christian teaching, brought to the Pacific by missionaries in the 1800’s, played a significant role in reinforcing gender inequalities and traditional gender roles. These understandings can be used to limit the voices and opportunities of women, justify violence towards women, and limit women’s ability to leave an abusive marriage.

This also means that the church and approaches that are developed out of local cultural and biblical understandings, can make an important contribution to changing these attitudes and behaviours. Australian aid has played a crucial role in supporting one of our agencies (UnitingWorld) to develop theological resources expressing a biblical theology of gender; and enabling our broader network to utilise these resources through both the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations consortium (CAN DO), and the PNG Church Partnerships Program. The results are notable and include:

- Seven mainline denominations in PNG officially adopted gender equality as their doctrinal position and have committed to teaching this theology as part of their ministerial training. With resources through the PNG Church Partnership Program, the mainline churches established a community of practice to support their efforts to roll-out bible studies in congregations and develop a curriculum which has been adopted by theological colleges.
- The ten denominations that make up the Fiji Council of Churches made a joint public statement condemning violence against women which was played in cinemas nationally.
- Churches in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Kiribati developed and adopted Safeguarding and Protection Policies at the national level including complaints mechanisms and Codes of Conduct in line with local protection laws.
- Churches have established new relationships with key service providers (such as the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre) and are actively collaborating to refer women experiencing domestic violence.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/07/2020-World-Youth-Report-FULL-FINAL.pdf>



These successes should be built on, embedding a comprehensive and transformative approach to GEDSI within the new IDP, and expanded to social inclusion of people with disabilities and youth. Specifically, the new IDP should identify the importance of:

- a. Rebuilding capacity, global engagement, and funding within DFAT to resume a global leadership role across all areas of GEDSI.
- b. Engaging church leaders in the Pacific, and church, other faith or local cultural leaders in other global contexts, as essential stakeholders in the strategy and design of development initiatives that address gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (including youth empowerment) in local contexts where social, cultural, and religious norms are influential.
- c. Funding and facilitating integrated multi-stakeholder co-design processes at national and regional levels that bring together faith leaders with education, health, protection, employment, and recovery services to develop integrated approaches and initiatives to address gender-based violence and inequality, disability inclusion, and challenges facing young people including the prevalence of substance abuse.
- d. Ensuring programs and initiatives that seek to address violence and substance abuse, are not solely directed toward law enforcement interventions, but include focus and funding for the development of local prevention and recovery services, counselling, and diversionary programs (e.g., vocational training), and are developed and delivered together with local and faith leaders.

## Recommendation 4: Increase investment in climate action and prioritise dialogue with local initiatives and investment in locally led community-based adaptation.

In every region our agencies have programs and partnerships, we are already seeing the direct impact of climate change on local communities. It is exacerbating poverty and inequality, increasing exposure to natural hazards, and driving displacement.

Overall global funding commitments for climate adaptation remain insufficient to meet the USD 100 billion figure that the international community recognised it needs. Australia's fair share of this total has been calculated at AUD 4 billion each year<sup>7</sup> but currently committed funds are a fraction of this amount at AUD 3 billion over five years from 2020-25.

This overall shortfall is even more acute at local levels where funding for adaptation and other climate action can be unavailable or inaccessible. Local-level community and faith leaders in the Pacific have made clear representations as to the policy responses they seek from Australia and other nations including in the October 2022 Kioia Talanoa resulting in the Kioia Climate Emergency Declaration 2022<sup>8</sup> which was endorsed by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), representatives of Australian First Nations communities, Caritas Oceania, Caritas Australia and many other civil society organisations.

The declaration seeks “to ensure our communities’ access to resources for climate adaptation, mitigation, relocation, resettlement and human security amidst the climate emergency.” PCC General-Secretary Rev James Bhagwan notes that Pacific communities ‘have the Indigenous knowledge and understand their context; they are willing to do what it takes to adapt to the impacts of climate change. But they need help and they need it now...’<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-ACT-004-Climate-Finance-Report\\_Digital.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-ACT-004-Climate-Finance-Report_Digital.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.caritas.org.au/media/kxck0z0g/kioia-climate-emergency-declaration-docx.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/pacific-conference-of-churches-calls-for-less-talk-more-action-as-cop27-begins>



Given the deep importance of Christian faith across the nations in the frontline of climate change in the Pacific, addressing these challenges at a theological level is also an important element of supporting resilience and adaptation. The Reweaving the Ecological Mat Framework presents a vision and approach to development that explicitly embeds ecology as an integral strand of development. Through CAN DO, churches in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG have collaborated to develop 'Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate' resources which provide underpinnings for belief and behaviour change relating to disaster preparedness and response.

This crucial gap both in overall adaptation funding, and in funding specifically earmarked for mechanisms that are accessible for local and community-level adaptation, is a key challenge that should be addressed in the new IDP.

Specifically, the new IDP should:

- a. Commit to significantly increasing funding for climate adaptation and prioritise investing in local-level adaptation funding mechanisms and initiatives.
- b. Commit to greater flexibility and streamlined funding mechanisms, which allow partners to pivot and respond to changed weather patterns and disasters within their communities, without needing to differentiate activities and meet distinct reporting and compliance from multiple Australian Government grants.
- c. Recognise and invest in the role of faith communities in providing resources that enable local communities to make sense of and adapt to the challenges of climate and environmental change using the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Framework and the CAN DO 'Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate' work as models.
- d. Commit to mutual and respectful dialogue with local faith and civil society actors – including Australian First Nations voices - who are calling for climate action beyond the Official Development Assistance and use the wider instruments of Australian foreign policy to amplify their calls. In the Kioa Declaration this includes calls for action on mitigation policies; loss and damage funding; just, dignified, and safe movement of peoples; and ocean policies.

## Recommendation 5: Ensure Australia's global development and humanitarian responsibilities and commitments are explicitly identified as an enduring priority.

While Australia may have special and additional responsibilities in the Pacific and Southeast Asian regions, it is imperative that Australia maintain and rebuild its commitment to playing a constructive and meaningful global role in the face of growing development and humanitarian challenges.

For the first time since the creation of the Human Development Index over thirty years ago, global progress on human development has reversed for two consecutive years. The number of people facing immediate humanitarian need is at record levels driven by rising underlying humanitarian needs, as well as acute increases in the number of people displaced, and those facing food insecurity.

Global forced displacement due to conflict and violence doubled in the past 8 years, exceeding 100 million people in March 2022. That number is set to double again in less than a decade. Another 24 million are displaced each year on average by disasters, increasingly fuelled by climate change with displacement becoming more permanent due to climate change. Without greater investment in prevention and solutions, displaced populations are going to continue to place a heavy burden on host communities, host states and the humanitarian system, and the international protection system is likely to come under extreme pressure.





Australian churches have long histories of active relationship with local partners across Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, as well as the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Throughout the churches, there remains significant concern, interest, and sense of responsibility for maintaining a global reach to our development and humanitarian programs – both those delivered through CAN members and those that are part of the official development assistance program.

In response to these challenges and existing national strengths, the new IDP should:

- a. Explicitly adopt a global scope in both development and humanitarian programs and identify Australian NGOs as strategic partners in extending the program beyond regions where direct bilateral programs exist.
- b. Commit to increase humanitarian funding consistent with Australia's fair share in response to escalating need. This would currently require humanitarian funding to double to at least \$1 billion per annum.
- c. Ensure that principles of localisation are applied to global programs including in contexts where Australia does not maintain a bilateral program. This should include increased use of NGO funding mechanisms such as the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, Australian Humanitarian Partnership, and Emergency Action Alliance; and requiring that multilateral programs incorporate principles of localisation in their design.
- d. Prioritise prevention and solutions in protracted crisis and displacement contexts, but also encourage development partners to engage more substantively in protracted displacement situations. This includes exploring development financing options for displacement such as financing compacts with host states in return for refugee economic inclusion to reduce the aid burden and increase dignity and self-reliance.

