

Union Aid Abroad APHEDA

The global justice organisation of the Australian union movement



SUBMISSION : NEW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The review of Australia's development policy comes at a time when the critical years to address the climate crisis collide with the impact of a once-in-a-hundred year pandemic, when democratic values are being challenged through the increased presence of China in countries nearest to Australia, and when the global economy faces major shocks in the immediate years ahead.

These challenges present Australia with an imperative and an opportunity to lead in development programming, informed by a federal Labor government with a deep understanding of the role of government, of structural policy reform capable of addressing inequalities and of the strategic role of civil society organisations.

In making this submission, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA highlights one area of deficit in development policy of Australian governments to date; that of the role of trade union development in low income countries as a core strategy of both democracy-building *and* poverty alleviation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Introduce a new thematic area of trade union development into the Australian international development program in line with other OECD nations of Europe, the US and Japan.
2. Build the capacity of DFAT in this new area, drawing on the expertise of European donor countries and the international trade union movement.
3. Embed the ILOs Decent Work agenda into the development program.
4. Increase allocations of ODA to support national social protection systems in low income countries.
5. Support the realisation of the right to a safe and healthy working environment for all workers, now a Fundamental right under ILO Conventions with new ODA funding.

The questions posed in the Review's Terms of Reference are addressed below.

1. *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?*

The aid strategy must respond to a rapidly changing global and regional context, with a triple crisis of climate, economy and geopolitical shifts. These crises lead to:

- increasing armed conflict and insecurity;
- increasing climate-induced disasters;
- exacerbated inequalities between nations, within nations, and between women and men;
- loss of Decent Work – jobs with safety, equality, security, living wages, and the right to organise and collectively bargain;
- threats to health, food, energy and water security;
- intensified political repression and loss of democracy;
- greater refugee and labour migration flows;
- shrinking space for democracy and human/workers' rights.

The pandemic has heightened many of these challenges, deepening inequalities and providing cover for the retraction of government regulation traversing human, labour and environmental rights. Wealth accumulation at the top end increased during the pandemic, and the impact of neo-liberalism particularly privatisation of essential public services continues to direct the policies and reform agendas of the international finance institutions (IFIs).

Australia, through its development program has an opportunity to impact these challenges through ODA and non-ODA commitments particularly in these areas:

- promotion of democratic values to counter rising authoritarianism in the Asia-Pacific region;
- promotion of systemic change to address poverty and social protection through the building of sustainable trade unions and workers organisations in global South countries;
- negotiation of labour rights in bilateral and multi-lateral trade agreements with global South countries, including for exploited migrant labour workforces;
- significantly increasing ODA commitment to climate finance and upscaling these commitments over the coming 5 years;
- building on the First Nations foreign policy commitment to underscore the climate impact on indigenous communities/native people globally and launch with these communities, a deeper decolonisation approach with like-minded countries;
- ensure that essential public services such as education, health and energy are not privatised as part commitments for funding made by Australia to the IFIs.

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

Australia, both within DFAT and across the breadth of development organisations and actors, will need to develop new or strengthened capabilities in the areas of:

- A deeper understanding of the whole of civil society relationships including trade unions and other social movement actors;
- Knowledge in workers' rights and trade union development, a recognised form of development globally and donor through donor governments in Europe, the US and Japan;¹
- Willingness by government to challenge privatisation agendas in the international development policy realms, with DFAT capability and
- Understanding of the impacts of colonisation and clear policy commitment and direction to address this in development implementation across all areas;
- Understanding risk and due diligence in the new world order, in a way that still enables the fostering of civil society relationships in high risk locations, and does not lead to a curtailment of civil society engagement and development programming.

¹ <https://www.ituc-csi.org/trade-union-s-international>

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

Australia's democratic values and its 170-year-old trade union movement are two of its most valuable national strengths, currently under-utilised by the development program.

Civil society partnerships and the promotion of democratic values

A key task is to centre the aid program on accountable Australian NGOs and civil society organisations, to work in genuine partnerships with democratic civil society organisations in low-income countries and communities facing injustice. Building the strengths of workplace and community organisations, and enabling movements for social and climate justice, is central to an effective international development program.

Australia's democratic traditions are played out through the engagement of Australian development NGOs working collaboratively with international civil society, the impact of which cannot be underestimated. For example, the accountability that the Australian aid program places on Australia aid NGOs which is transferred to our 'downstream' partner organisations internationally, is a concrete example of democratic values in action. Further Australia's diaspora communities in their engagement with international development work and volunteer fundraising, foster democratic traditions through links with local community and civil society organisations, often in momentous struggles for democracy and greater human rights (for example, to health, education, decent work) in their countries of origin.

'Double investment' by investing in trade union building

Helping to build the trade unions and organisations of workers, farmers and women, plays a double role in development. Firstly, unions struggle against poverty and lift the living standards of the working majority in the population, through fights for living wages, health, social protection, price controls and other forms of structural reform.

Second, democratic space has been under attack by populist, autocratic and repressive regimes across the world, particularly in the last decade. In history and in the present, in many countries, the driving force in struggles to win or defend democracy has been the workers' and the women's movements. The largest democratic organisations internationally, and indeed in most countries, is the trade union movement.

Many OECD countries similar to Australia, make a specific allocation in their international aid program for partnerships to build workers organisations and trade unions. The OECD Development Assistance Committee is monitoring SDG 8 on Decent Work, and Just Transition, and has structured inputs from the global trade union movement and recognises trade unions within its recommendation on enabling civil society.²

4. *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?*

The aid program must urgently address the climate crisis, not simply with mitigating climate-exacerbated disasters and health emergencies, but with sustainable socio-economic development through:

- strategies for Just Transition ensuring working people have Decent Work in a decarbonised economy,
- ensuring public or cooperative control of renewable energy production and distribution
- ensuring water and food sovereignty, and.
- reversing destruction of ecology and biodiversity

² <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/Instrument%20s/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021>

The aid program should be internationally accountable within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. For Union Aid Abroad- APHEDA and the Australian trade union movement, goal 8 about Decent Work is central, with its 12 targets³. Further, the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Decent Work Agenda should be embedded as a fundamental part of a new Australian Government aid strategy.⁴

Social protection is now widely recognised as a foundation for development: IFIs such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund recognise that social inequality is a threat to social prosperity.⁵ Social protection, for instance through improved wages and conditions, state regulation, public services and transfer payments, hinges on the presence of active trade unions within the wider social sector. This is already fully recognised internationally within many donor countries' development programs.

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

The Australian aid program since the 1980s has made strong contributions, though Australian NGOs, to helping build the capacities of movements, unions and communities to win human rights and fight injustice and poverty in the Pacific, Asia and southern Africa. A key focus of the new aid program can be resourcing, on the basis of solidarity, the people-to-people linkages between Australian civil society and democratic organisations and movements in focal countries, to build capacities in workers' rights, workers' health, women's rights, farmers' rights and climate justice.

An example of this successful approach from Australia's past efforts is that of the Australian Middle East NGO Cooperation Agreement (AMENCA) which operated in the Palestinian Territories from 2006-2021 across three phases. Working in partnership between a group of Australian NGOs and Palestinian civil society NGOs, this program had successful outcomes in building business confidence in agriculture and food manufacturing, securing new markets within and outside of Palestine and ultimately reducing poverty amongst Palestinians who participated in the AMENCA phases. A dedicated and long term partnership program between Australian and local NGOs is the model for building systemic and structural reform through informed and supported civil society, who are able to act as advocates for policy reform, as well as implementers of programs for people in poverty.

6. 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?

The new government needs to restore capacities and intellectual capital to the Department for the aid program, and restore mechanisms of accountability, evaluation, transparency and broad consultations. The previous government's approach towards the abolition of ODA and advisory committees for aid, and particular sectoral areas such as gender, health, environment and agriculture, curtailed valuable interaction with Australian civil society. The Committee for Development Cooperation (CDC) was able to mobilise, in a very cost effective way, the intellectual and social capital of Australian civil society NGOs, for effective peer review processes, in accreditation, ANCP, bilateral programs and thematic areas. This should be restored. In some instances, consultancies have a conflict of interest in intervening between DFAT and Australian NGOs.

Much of the aid program has been contracted in a non-transparent way to a small number of high profit consultancy companies, so a value-for-money review is needed, as was proposed by the Rudd government. In recent years transparency and accountability for the larger contracts has disappeared. Due diligence and risk management should be proportionate to the scale of programs and projects. It seems that small NGOs have a greater burden in accountability for due diligence than the larger contractors.

DFAT funding can deploy the skills of suitable non-profit NGOs in areas of partnership, innovation, experiment, and in enabling risk management in ways that are less appropriate for DFAT itself.

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

⁴ There are four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda: employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue

⁵ WB: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/overview>

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

We welcome that with the new government, the purpose of the Australian international aid program is shifting from a failed neoliberal agenda of advancing Australian national and business interests to the goal of addressing poverty, inequality, injustice and the climate crisis. It is important that the government will refocus on feminist and First Nations frameworks for foreign policy. Also welcome is the increasing aid budget, including an enhancement of ANCP funds.

The aid policy should be based on international humanitarian law and human rights, and international conventions on civil and political, social, workers', women's, indigenous, child and people with disabilities rights.

Union Aid Abroad supports efforts by government for the decolonising of aid, and we have a strong history of localisation and partnering with local organisations around areas of shared values, organisations mainly of workers, farmers and women. But we believe Australian foreign policy and aid program should also reflect a commitment to enabling anti-colonial and self-determination movements, in line with UN resolutions.

The focus must be on Pacific island nations and income poor countries in South East Asia, but Australia is also an Indian Ocean nation, with political, security, economic and social interests in South and West Asia, and Southern Africa. The aid program should respond to the interests of Australian civil society and diaspora communities of which South Asia features strongly according to the most recent Census.

Appropriately, the government is increasing support for multilateral and UN agencies. This is part of Australia committing to international obligations and must be maintained and strengthened.

Appendix: who we are, Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA

In 1984 the ACTU established Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA), inspired by the example of the Norwegian People's Aid, founded by the labour movement of that country. Our board is made up of ACTU appointments and those elected by the membership. We have been fully accredited with DFAT since accreditation began in the 1990's. We are a member of ACFID, and a signatory to the Code of Conduct. We are affiliated to the international Solidar network of secular and labour movement based development organisations, and a member of the international Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN), collaborating with national union federations, the global union federations, and the trade union donor/solidarity organisations of the OECD countries to support worker's rights and trade union building in global South countries.

We currently have offices in Dili, Vientiane, Hanoi and Cambodia, led by locals with strong standing with their national union movements, civil societies and governments. We work collaboratively with trade unions and community-based organisations internationally, primarily in the Indo-Pacific region.

Our strategy mandates work on four key focus areas:

- Workers' rights, workers' health, Decent Work and trade union building
- Women's equality and women's movement building
- Climate justice and Just Transition
- Labour migration and refugees

We have almost four decades' experience in projects in worker's rights, health, women's rights, agriculture, technical and vocational education, democratic media, refugees and migrant workers, environment and Just Transition, in:

- Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, New Caledonia/Kanaky
- Vietnam, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thai-Myanmar border, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor Leste
- Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka
- South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Eritrea, Western Sahara, Malawi, Mozambique