



Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

6 February 2014

RE: Inquiry into Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission for the Committee's Inquiry into Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program, and commend the Government for holding an inquiry into this important area.

CBM is an international development agency, committed improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in low income regions of the world. CBM Australia has an Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

This submission provides an overview of our concerns and suggestions regarding disability inclusive development as a focus of the Australian aid program within the context of the integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We have addressed three key Terms of Reference with a particular focus on the impact of the aid cuts and restructure, on the Australian Government's role in disability inclusive development.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide a briefing to the Committee at a public hearing, or other forum.

Yours sincerely,

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Senate Inquiry submission: Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program

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SCOPE

CBM Australia commends the Senate for undertaking an inquiry into the Government's recent reforms of Australia's foreign aid program and welcomes the opportunity to make this submission.

This submission addresses the first three Terms of Reference of the Senate Inquiry. The recommendations made in each section are interrelated and set out according to the Terms of Reference.

This submission highlights the risks and challenges to the Australian aid program maintaining and deepening its focus on disability in the context of programmatic and budgetary reforms.

SUMMARY

- As a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it is important that Australia appropriately contributes to global poverty alleviation.
- NGOs have an important role to play in Australia's foreign aid program as effective 'on-the-ground' implementers of aid.
- CBM Australia welcomes the focus on reducing poverty as the focus of the Australian aid program.
- Australia has an important role to play as a world leader in disability inclusive development to:
 - provide regional leadership on the implementation of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)
 - lead on disability in the post-2015 agenda
- As the integration process continues, it is essential that strong technical support for disability inclusion is embedded within the new DFAT structure.

INTRODUCTION

Australia is building a reputation as a global leader in disability inclusive development. Australia has worked to improve the quality of life of many people with disability living in developing countries by ensuring disability is a focus of the foreign aid program.

Disability is strongly linked to poverty. Over one billion people in the world live with disability and over 20 per cent of the world's poorest people in developing countries live with disability.¹ International development efforts have historically excluded people with disability (for example the Millennium Development Goals). Growing recognition of this exclusion and the links between poverty and disability has led to an increased understanding that global poverty alleviation efforts will not be successful unless programs and processes reach people with disability.

Disability inclusive development is integral to development because:

- It makes economic sense, and ensures that all people benefit from economic development;
- It fulfils Australia's international legal obligations as a Party to UNCRPD to ensure that all development assistance includes and benefits persons with disabilities;
- It allows Australia to consolidate its international reputation in area of disability inclusive development;
- It is fundamental to ensuring effective poverty alleviation by reaching the poorest of the poor.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

A. Australia's ability to deliver aid against stated policy objectives and international commitments

Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

As a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it is important that Australia appropriately contributes to global poverty alleviation. The OECD noted that Australia has an important role to play in delivering ODA at a similar rate to other donor countries.²

CBM Australia supports the sector-wide call for the Australian Government to maintain its commitment of increasing ODA to 0.5 per cent GNI. The Australian Government's *Policy for Foreign Affairs* states: "consistent with robust benchmarks, remain committed to increasing the foreign aid

¹ World Health Organisation: World Report on Disability 2011 p. 28 available at: www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html

² OECD DAC, 2013, see Preliminary ODA 2012 and trends since 2002-Interactive charts, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/oda2012-interactive.htm>

programme towards 0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI)”³. Furthermore in the *Final Update on Federal Coalition Election Policy Commitments*, issued on 5 September 2013, the Federal Coalition stated that growth in aid would be indexed to CPI.⁴

CBM Australia is disappointed by the recent cuts to international development funding. It is a setback to Australia meeting its international obligations. The reliability and predictability of funding across multi-year budgets contributes to more effective and efficient programming. Prior to the election, the Government stated it was committed to further supporting the work of Australian NGOs: “*The Government will re-prioritise foreign aid allocations towards non-government organisations that deliver on-the-ground support for those most in need*”⁵. Sufficient and predictable funds allow NGOs to meet their commitment to partner organisations in the field and achieve development outcomes. The role of NGOs is discussed in the final section.

As the Australian Government undertakes reforms to ensure Australia’s aid program is efficient, effective and accountable, CBM Australia supports the aid sector wide call for a renewed commitment to reach 0.5% GNI and the outline of a detailed timeframe.

Reforms to the Aid sector

The Australian Government’s process of reforming the Australian aid program to ensure it is effective, sustainable and accountable has led to a reprioritisation of foreign aid. Addressing the UN in September 2013, Foreign Minister the Hon Ms Julie Bishop stated that the Australian Government would “*put economic diplomacy at the centre of [our] foreign policy*”. CBM Australia supports the Australian Government efforts to build a more efficient and effective aid program, but has concerns that a stronger focus on economic development alone may not improve the lives of the poorest of the poor. Economic development does not necessarily lead to a reduction of poverty on an equal basis for all. There is growing research that unless targeted support is included, people with disability may not always benefit from economic development and that “*the disparity between people with disability and the general population appears to increase with overall economic development...*”⁶. It is essential that the Australian aid program recognises that people with disability must be intentionally included in international development programs. An effective aid program is one that reaches the poorest of the poor and builds sustainable human development and stronger more equal and resilient communities.

The Australian Government’s more recent statement that a key focus of the aid program is “reducing poverty in the Indo-Pacific region”⁷ is welcomed by CBM Australia. Ensuring Australia’s international development efforts are fully inclusive of people with disability promotes a stronger,

³ Federal Coalition, September 2013, *The Coalitions policy for Foreign Affairs* available at: www.liberal.org.au/our-policies

⁴ The Hon Joe Hockey & The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP, *Final Update on Federal Coalition Election Policy Commitments*, 5 September 2013 available at: <http://www.liberal.org.au/latest-news/2013/09/05/final-update-federal-coalition-election-policy-commitments>

⁵ The Hon Joe Hockey & The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP, 5 September 2013 available at: <http://www.liberal.org.au/latest-news/2013/09/05/final-update-federal-coalition-election-policy-commitments>

⁶ Mitra, S. et al. *Disability and Poverty in Developing Countries: A Multidimensional Study*, World Development (2012), p.11, available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.024>

⁷ Media Release: Five billion dollar aid budget to focus on the region
http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2014/jb_mr_140118.html

more effective foreign aid program. Australia's foreign aid program has a growing track record of including people with disability.

The role of the NGO sector in foreign aid

NGOs have an important role to play in Australia's foreign aid program as effective 'on-the-ground' implementers of aid, with strong connections and support from the Australian public. Predictable and sustainable funding is a key contributor to effectiveness.

CBM Australia has also been concerned by the recent cuts to the ANCP funding. ANCP funded programs have a real impact to the lives of children and adults living with disability. A brief overview of achievements of CBM Australia's ANCP funded programs in 2012 illustrates this impact:

- **111,970** people with disability have accessed health and rehabilitation activities (including treatment, surgeries and home based rehabilitation)
- **3,040,480** people were screened for eye, ear and physical impairments and referred for appropriate services where needed
- **5,981** children with disabilities were able to access schools made more accessible for children with disabilities
- **36,046** people with disabilities were able to gain employment as a result of skills training or capacity building
- **28,950** people with disabilities are better able to represent their interests and are better informed about their rights.

Example of ANCP funded project in Philippines

Through ANCP funding CBM Australia supports NORFIL Foundation, a non-government organisation focused on the needs of children and young people with disabilities and their families throughout the Philippines. Since 2002 NORFIL has carried out a Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) project to address the societal barriers preventing the inclusion of children with disabilities as equal members in their community. Over time, NORFIL has worked closely with local government by assisting and equipping them to implement services and support for people with disabilities. This has achieved strong local ownership of the program and a shift NORFIL Foundation are now working to strengthen the capacity of local government units and a parents' association by:

- Lobbying for the establishment of a Committee for Disability Affairs to oversee the implementation of programs and services for people with disabilities at the local government unit level;
- Strengthening the parents' association, AKAPIN Batangan, and the relationship between the association and local government units; and
- Training additional government volunteers to extend the provision of rehabilitation services.

This is just one example of how Australian funded programs are making a significant impact to the lives of children with disabilities and their families and how NGOs make a valuable contribution to the Australian aid program.

Australia's role as a world leader in disability inclusive development

Since ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) in 2008, Australia has put measures in place to integrate disability inclusion across international development policy and practice. Article 32 of the UNCRPD requires that States Parties ensure all international development efforts both include and benefit persons with disabilities. This is an ongoing international legal obligation that Australia has as a party to UNCRPD.

'Enhancing the lives of people with disability' has been one of the key objectives of Australia's foreign aid program. Australia's focus has been underpinned by an overarching strategy: *Development for All: Towards a disability inclusive Australian aid program 2009 – 2014 (the strategy)*. The strategy has received international recognition, and positioned Australia as a world leader in disability inclusive development. Many donors are seeking to learn from Australia's experience.

CBM Australia welcomes the Australian Government's renewed commitment to disability inclusive development, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs' address to the UN General Assembly in

September 2013⁸ and the announcement of a second disability strategy from 2015 by the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Senator Brett Mason, on 3 December 2013⁹.

It is essential that the Australian Government's renewed commitment to leading the field in disability inclusive development is supported by a predictable, long-term funding commitment. CBM Australia is concerned at the recent announcement of \$4 million reduction in funding allocated for disability and gender (\$29 million in 2012/13 to \$25 million 2013/14).

To remain a key leader in disability inclusive development and to continue to have an impact on the lives of people with disability in developing countries, it is essential that the next DFAT disability strategy is well-resourced, including the following:

- **A multi-year budget commitment to the five year-span of the new strategy:** to meet the Government's priorities of an efficient and accountable aid program that makes real impact, it is essential that the new disability strategy is resourced by a strong and reliable budget commitment;
- **Inclusion of persons with disability in the design of the new strategy:** the 2012 Independent Mid-Term Review of the *Development for All* strategy praised the consultations carried out with persons with disability throughout Asia and the Pacific in its design.¹⁰ This resulted in a strategy which reflected the needs and priorities of people with disabilities.
- **Retain senior technical expertise to translate policy into practice:** a strong policy commitment requires high level technical staff at DFAT to ensure it is well- implemented.
- **Improved systems to track and monitor budgetary allocations towards disability inclusion across all sectors:** to best measure the impact and reach of the aid program's disability inclusive practices, a stronger focus on tracking the outcomes and impacts of budget allocated for mainstreaming disability within all sectors is essential.

It is also pivotal that strong policy dialogue and implementation rests on credible advisors.¹¹ An Ambassador for Disability Inclusive Development would provide a focal point for promoting effective strategies to mainstream disability as a cross-cutting issue across Australia's aid program and partnerships. The Ambassador would also promote leadership and accountability for disability-inclusive development both within and external to DFAT.

CBM Australia is concerned that reduced funding to the aid sector may impact the development and implementation of the new disability strategy. Strengthening the focus on disability inclusion will continue to build on Australia's global leadership in disability inclusive development, but also have a positive impact on the lives of people with disability in the poorest settings.

⁸ Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP stated: "*Through our aid programs, Australia has an important role in improving the lives of people with disability in other countries*". Full transcript available at: http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2013/jb_sp_130923.html

⁹ Available at: http://ministers.dfat.gov.au/mason/releases/2013/bm_mr_131203.html

¹⁰ Available at: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/aidissues/did/Documents/dfa-mtr-annexes.pdf>

¹¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2014). Lessons from Australian Aid: 2013 report on independent evaluation and quality assurance. (Office of Development Effectiveness)

B. Australia's ability to maintain its international development priorities, including sectoral, regional, bilateral and multilateral international relationships

Regional leadership on implementation of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)

Australia has an important role to play in supporting countries in the Pacific and East Asia to implement the CRPD. An increasing number of countries in the Pacific and East Asia region are signing and ratifying the CRPD. The ratification of the CRPD is a crucial first step for raising countries awareness and commitment to meet the needs of persons with disability. For many countries, particularly small island nations, implementing the CRPD once they have ratified it is extremely challenging.

Many countries need continuing training and technical assistance to comply with the requirements of implementation and reporting. Australia has an important role to play throughout the region in supporting Governments to implement the CRPD. Opportunities include supporting:

- Governments who have recently ratified the CRPD such as Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Tuvalu, to strengthen policies, reporting processes and human resources to enable them to implement the CRPD and Optional Protocol.
- Civil society organisations such as Disabled Peoples Organisations to use and report on the CRPD, and support the Government with regard to its implementation.
- Supporting Governments to establish or review independent human rights institutions that include a mandate to promote and uphold the rights of people with disabilities as set out in the CRPD.¹²

Key role to lead disability in the post-2015 agenda

The strong links between poverty and disability mean that in order to overcome poverty effectively and with equity, all major development frameworks including the post-2015 agenda must explicitly address disability inclusion.

The importance of doing so has been recognised in the United Nations Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the United Nations Secretary General Report, *'The Way Forward: a disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond'*.¹³

Despite this recognition, there is still much work to do to ensure that disability is adequately included in the post-2015 agenda. As world leaders in disability inclusive development, Australia should spearhead dialogue on this issue and champion the inclusion of disability throughout the

¹² As recommended by the Pacific Disability Forum's Biannual Conference Outcome Statement 2010, p 5.

¹³ Available at: www.un.org/disabilities/documents/gadocs/a_68_95.doc

post-2015 framework. This was another key recommendation of the Mid-Term Review of the *Development for All* strategy, and presents a critical opportunity for Australia to influence the global development agenda.

C. The integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the freeze in international development assistance funding

Technical support for disability inclusive development

The recent integration of the former AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is an ongoing process with significant impact on stakeholders in the aid sector, particularly non-government organisations.

As the integration process continues, it is essential that strong technical support for disability inclusion is embedded within the new DFAT structure. Technical support on disability inclusive development is required for:

- **Policy development and implementation:** (as discussed earlier).
- **Disability-specific programs:** a commitment to disability inclusive development also requires investment in targeted disability-specific programs, e.g Community Based Rehabilitation¹⁴ to meet the needs of people with disabilities and improve access to education, health services and livelihood opportunities. The integration into DFAT must retain and strengthen technical support to ensure best practice, sustainable and effective disability programs are delivered.
- **Disability inclusion embedded across all development programs:** to ensure all programs include and reach people with disabilities, program staff, including those in-country, requires ongoing capacity building, mentoring and technical input. The role of senior technical support from the Disability Policy Section of DFAT is critical to ensure policy commitments flow down into the delivery of the new disability strategy.

¹⁴ Community Based Rehabilitation covers health, education, livelihoods, Social and cultural involvement, and empowerment. See further: <http://www.who.int/disabilities/cbr/en/>