

Answers to questions on notice from Baptist World Aid and the Border Consortium

Question 1.

The first question related to a prior discussion that members of CAN DO had held with DFAT regarding a potential proposal that addressed some of what is being discussed in this current inquiry; this is the Hansard record of the question Senator Fawcett asked:

Senator FAWCETT: Have you put that to DFAT? Have CANDO put that to DFAT as a proposal?

Mr Bartlett: I believe it has been discussed with DFAT. I'm not sure of the extent to which it has been framed as a formal proposal at this time.

Senator FAWCETT: If discussed, what was the reason DFAT gave as to why they couldn't entertain the proposal?

Mr Bartlett: I'm unaware of those reasons. I believe the response to that discussion was simply a reference back to—

Senator FAWCETT: Could you take that on notice to the people who put that proposal together and had those discussions with DFAT, and come back to the committee as to why that was not accepted?

Answer

Those that were working towards are a proposal from CAN DO included James Thomson with Act for Peace, Duncan McArthur who appeared with myself at the hearing from the Border Consortium, and Melissa Lipsett, the CEO of Baptist World Aid.

The last correspondence received from DFAT was from the Director of Protracted Crisis, Tim Vistarini, writing to James Thomson with Act for Peace on the 10th of March this year, with whom James and others had met with in person a short time earlier.

Director Vistarini indicated they did not share the same view regarding the credibility of research and the situation on the ground in Myanmar as CAN DO had presented, but did indicate funding will increase with an emphasis on rural areas in the new financial year, and that DFAT would be in touch once they have better information.

in spite of James' attempt to follow up this correspondence, to date (Nov 21st, 2023) these members from CAN DO have not heard from either Director Tim Vistarini, or anyone else at DFAT with regard to this conversation. As a result, this conversation never did become a formal proposal.

Question 2, and 2a

The Hansard record of the second, and follow on question I took on notice are as follows, with the answers provided courtesy of those with direct area of expertise as indicated.

Senator FAWCETT: Could you take this final question on notice, given the time. In your submission you talk about the US\$181 million spent, where a significant number of the beneficiaries were in Yangon et cetera. If DFAT were to increase the amount of funding going through a group like CAN DO and local networks, can you give us an indication of what kind of dollar value you think you could effectively deliver, and to what areas, and how you would frame your own due diligence, if you like, to give assurance that it would be effective and that the taxpayer would be happy with how that money had been spent?

Mr Bartlett: I would definitely take that on notice because it's not a number that I would care to try and calculate.

Senator FAWCETT: That's fine, but could you take it on notice to give us an indication of what the art of the possible is to close that gap so we get more than 16 per cent—or whatever it was—of the people in greatest need actually getting the support.

The following answers to both these questions has been provided by our Director of International Programs at Baptist World Aid (Transform World Aid) - Ms Fiona Smith, and quoted directly without edit.

Here are my preliminary calculations, but keeping in mind this is still very hypothetical and would need to go through a more thorough process of needs assessment and co-design involving local implementing partners. Based on the earlier capacity statement prepared by CAN DO partners, as well as some learning from collaborating with CAN DO on other Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) activations, I would like to suggest the following.

CAN DO Capacity Statement based on current response capabilities

Based on a survey of Australian Church Agency Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) in late 2022, the maximum response capabilities of this network totals approximately \$7.5M AUD. A minimum level of combined funding of at least \$4M AUD would be necessary to address the scale of needs, while still achieving significant geographic coverage/spread.

CAN DO Agencies are well positioned to work with local partners across almost all states in Myanmar (Kayin, Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Chin, Mon) and regions/divisions (Mandalay, Taunggyi, Bhamo, Kalay, Hakha, Pekhon, Loikaw, Taungngu, Hpa An & Mawlamyaing, Bago, Upper Bogalay, Yangon, Sagging, Magway). Their capacity extends across a wide range of sectors including food assistance, livelihoods, protection, WASH, shelter, psycho-social support, GBV & trafficking prevention, nutrition, healthcare and medical relief. Through these interventions, CAN DO and their local partners could reach more than 500,000 people.

Meeting due diligence requirements

I would like to suggest that as all CAN agencies are ANCP accredited agencies by DFAT, that this already provides a high level of demonstrated compliance with DFAT standards and policies. In addition, several of these organisations have already been managing ANCP-funded programs in Myanmar which demonstrates they are already capable of maintaining due diligence according to the Australian govt's expectations.

Given the importance of managing risk and adopting strong financial oversight, I would like to suggest that at minimum 10% of budget should be allowed for administration costs (to match current ANCP guidelines). However, the actual cost of maintaining compliance and additional risk mitigation measures due to the complex operating environment would be closer to 15%.

I would also like to advocate for additional funding be made available to push down to local partners to assist with their internal core/admin costs given the additional requirements for them to meet the Australian govt's expectations e.g regarding safeguarding training and background checks, financial transparency, risk assessment and mitigation etc. This follows ANCP practice also, and contributes towards the strengthening of local organisations- which is essential to support localisation efforts.

Duncan McArthur with The Border Consortium also has provided an answer to the "dollar value" question that Senator Fawcett asked; his answer is also without edit as follows.

In 2023, TBC is on track to disburse approximately USD7 million to reinforce the resilience of just under 300,000 IDPs in rural areas of southeastern Myanmar. This multi-sectoral response has been delivered through a network of 30 civil society organisations and ethnic service providers. Funds are raised from four bilateral donors and three multilateral donors with DFAT contributing roughly USD 1 million. TBC is confident the absorptive capacities of our local networks are sufficient to double the scale of assistance offered for civilians afflicted by atrocities in 2024. So if DFAT could allocate an additional USD 7 million, then TBC's partners could assist an additional 300,000 IDPs in 2024.