

Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the Foreign Policy White Paper

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Thank you for the welcome opportunity to contribute to the strategy and evaluation processes for Australia's relationship with our region.

1. Australia's foreign policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interests.

How should we define Australia's national interests in a changing world?

Australia's Voice

Australian foreign policy has demonstrated genuine care for the well-being of our neighbouring nations. This is constructive and respectful in international relationships and preferable to recent U.S. claims of putting their own country *first*, insisting on their own trade advantage. Diplomacy, as Ambassador Joe Hockey has suggested, can do better than implying that everyone else is *second*. Civility and sensitivity enhance Australia's relations in our region, to our benefit too.

The Australian Council for International Development, ACFID urges:
"As a wealthy nation, in a relatively poor region, and as the US withdraws from international leadership, Australia must take a stronger stance in the Asia-Pacific, projecting and setting values which will shore-up [sic, shore up] Australia's future prosperity and security. We must define our own context, engaging the region in a manner consistent with our values: cooperation, democracy, egalitarianism and a fair-go. As the Minister stated in her speech, Australians help make our region a safer and more prosperous place. Let's continue that work using the values we hold."

How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy? What should we do differently? How can we do better?

Australian values which should underpin Australia's foreign policy:

- **Equity** is economic as well as social. The growing difference globally (as well as in Australia) between the 'haves' and 'have nots' will cause greater disruption, disharmony and ultimately more cost.
- **Individuals** should have choice about life-determining decisions, notably access to contraception, so that every birth can be wanted and the new individual cared for;

- **Justice** systems and universal **education** advantage all peoples in the region. Respect for a multiplicity of cultures and religions aims to diminish sectarian differences and emphasise precepts of peace.

2. Australia has diverse interests that span the globe

Which countries will matter most to Australia over the next 10 years? Why and in what ways? How should we deepen and diversify key relationships?

Regional countries in the Asia/Pacific sphere are often not on the radar of many major national aid programs. Australia can be aware and sensitive in specifically focusing on our neighbourhood:

- Our neighbourhood the “Asia Pacific is the most disaster prone region in the world. It is also home to a number of long standing conflicts that exact a human toll”. (*from UNFPA Responding to Emergencies across Asia and the Pacific.*) Pandemics are a boat ride away.
- Australia must take a long-sighted view of development and establishing stability and prosperity of regional neighbours as part of our own stability and prosperity. Like the benefits of education, this is not a ‘quick fix’. Government policy must be looking out decades, not for just one or two electoral cycles, or we will not achieve deep improvement.
- Helping our neighbours succeed will help Australia – in economical benefit, regional stability and strong relationships. Strengthening the economic stability, social stability and growing the educational status of our neighbours permits our neighbours to prosper and play a stronger role in their external relations, including with Australia. **Note: this point is also relevant to Issue 4 concerning economic opportunities for Australia.**

Which global trends, such as developments in technology, environmental degradation and the role of non-state actors, are likely to affect Australia’s security and prosperity?

- **Population pressures** world-wide are rising past 7.5 billion, with each generation larger than any before. A major impact on the world’s resources and environmental stability is the number of humans.
- **Poverty** will increase as a result of population growth in our East Asia /IndoPacific area and place greater strains on health, education and other services in our area.
- **Increase in poverty can in turn**
 - **become a breeding ground for dissatisfaction, political instability** and potentially greater willingness to embrace alternative approaches such as terrorism. But where women can choose their family’s size, population stabilises and each child receives a better share of care and education;
 - **lead to increasing numbers of refugees seeking opportunities beyond areas of poverty:** waves of migration both reflect and cause poverty.
- **Increasing environmental volatility** arising from climate change is resulting in more disasters, emergencies and humanitarian crises, all of which increase the risks for women in unwanted pregnancies (lack of access to contraception, rape)

and their consequences (threat to maternal and child health, HIVAIDS and life expectancy).

How should Australia respond?

*Note: The points made below also go to **Issue 5 concerning how Australia should confront a range of strategic, security and transnational issues**. Since poverty is a breeding ground for terrorism, addressing poverty through population control has the potential to decelerate the increasing threats from terrorism and reduce pressures associated with increasing demands for economic migration.*

Poverty and its consequences are the conditions of a significant proportion of nations until population pressures are reduced. Contraception is a major means of reducing such pressures. Australia can make significant contributions to addressing poverty by assisting with **Family Planning for the Human Family**.

Provision of reproductive health support, including contraceptive services, as a significant part of overseas aid and development is one of the most strategic interventions possible for addressing the issues of population pressure, poverty, environmental volatility and humanitarian crises.

Where women manage fertility, they gain education, enterprise and contribute in the decision-making process. Girls' aspirations grow, gender equity increases. The population can stabilise, and health and education services are not rapidly outgrown.

- **Australia values women** – as citizens, as economic contributors, as family organisers, as political leaders, as mothers and educators – and the multi-functional roles they play simultaneously throughout their lives and therefore for the enormous economic, social, cultural and leadership contributions they make.
- However, **in many of our neighbouring nations, women are not valued** as they are in Australia. Some women may have no choice but to be perpetually pregnant from an early age, resulting in **damaging physical and personal impacts**:
 - girls cannot finish their **education**, limiting their ability to educate and care for their families;
 - girls are not physically mature when having early babies jeopardising their **health** and resulting in higher rates of maternal and infant deaths;
 - repeated close pregnancies reduce the capacity of women to contribute **economically**, and as a result women are not highly regarded.

Increasing frequency of humanitarian crises whether from environmental volatility and natural disasters, wars or other sources will inevitably make it more important that women have access to and use long-term (reversible) contraceptive methods such as implants. The Minister's February announcement of an increase in reproductive health funding in crisis areas is exactly the response needed from Australia to address the particular challenges that arise during humanitarian crises.

Continuing and strengthening Australia's commitment to providing reproductive health assistance in our region on an ongoing basis as needed and not just for crises is a fundamental way to deepen our engagement and lay the groundwork for maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of other forms of overseas aid such as those relating to health, education and assistance with economic development.

6. Australia uses a range of assets and capabilities to pursue our national interests.

What assets will we need to advance our foreign policy interests in future years? How can we best use our people and our assets to advance Australia's economic, security and other interests and respond to external events?

*Note: Our comments for Issue 6 are also relevant to **Issue 3: Australia is an influential player in regional and international organisations**. In our discussion below of NGOs as an important resource we identify some of the regional and global organisations that matter most to us with respect to reproductive health and how we can both support those organisations and maximise our influence.*

The Value of NGOs, Universities and Partnerships

There is considerable advantage for the Department of Foreign Affairs in funding through non-government organisations and universities, leveraging on their expertise, on their in-country relationships and program development skills. NGOs have their own support base, and AusAID matched funding and the ANCP system have worked to advantage. Risks of funding shrinking as it descends each level of a complex bureaucratic system are minimised by the experienced negotiations between partners operating at project level.

Universities and NGOs that combine a strategic perspective with local knowledge and networks are valuable for assisting with the design and implementation of programs that will meet Australian Government objectives while respecting the sovereignty of the countries and communities in which they are working.

Women's Plans Foundation has had much encouraging experience of the advantages of working with highly effective established NGOs and universities:

- Women's Plans Foundation has found NGOs accredited to deliver family planning to be ingenious resources of medical, social, cultural and practical programs. Marie Stopes International Australia, CARE Australia, ChildFund Australia and Save the Children Australia are NGOs we have helped to fund. We have been impressed with the results and are confident of recurring benefit resulting.
- Several networks of reproductive health organisations are sharing detailed project data. Bill and Melinda Gates, through the organisation FP2020, have given considerable resources to combine and build knowledge in the overseas aid field. Global on-line meetings are made possible, and evidence-based program planning is enabled. International Planned Parenthood (IPPF), UNFPA, Population Action International, WomenDeliver, The Guttmacher Institute – these are impressively intelligent and altruistic organisations at the service of DFAT.
- Research and scholarships can be transmitted through medical and nursing schools, eg The University of Sydney and UTS.

How can Government work more effectively with non-government sectors, including business, universities and NGOs, to advance Australia's interests?

- Rather than re-inventing the wheel each year, **funding full cycles** of NGO programs produces maximum cost benefit and capacity-building completion.
- **Government matching of NGO generated funding** for family planning and contraception is a powerful way to increase capacity of this work, and to increase the power of the NGOs in raising funds from the public.
- **Ensuring that government funds are spent in the manner intended.**

- There is always the risk that NGOs and other funded agencies will be locally captured and amongst other things this can result in **scope creep** (expanding beyond what was sought by the Australian Government when it allocated funds) or diversion from intent **and even goal displacement**. Any such movements **need to be monitored and assessed**.
- While striving to avoid scope creep and goal displacement, at the same time it is important that **local organisations be able to respond in flexible ways to emerging needs and better ways of achieving results** when they become apparent. Any such changes in direction should be justified by demonstrating their continuing relevance and value added to the overall strategic direction.
- Accordingly, when the Australian government is funding agencies to deliver results on its behalf, **reasonable but not overbearing accountability** is required in order to ensure that the funds are used as intended, effectively and efficiently.
 - Information about delivery of short-term outputs and results is important but equally important is that the organisations be able to position those results within a larger strategic perspective for that community, country or region. For example, outputs and immediate outcomes (such as number of people who have been educated about contraception) may need to be set in the wider context of changes that are or are not occurring in embedding institutional and cultural practices (such as whether certain forms of contraception are culturally and legally supported). Continuing with this example: in some circumstances a hostile environment may significantly override the usefulness of education unless advocacy to ensure a more receptive context is also underway.
 - Hence, while many of the programs and projects that are funded may not go directly to bringing about such institutional and cultural changes, the choice of projects should be made in full cognizance of the extent to which their success will depend on the institutional and cultural context and whether that context is favourable.
- **Genuine partnership approaches** between the Australian Government and non-government agencies where all parties have ‘financial skin in the game’ and clear individual and joint responsibilities and accountabilities can lead to more open and constructive design and delivery of programs. This approach requires a departure from the usual ‘them and us’ mentality of funders and contract managers in relation to those they are funding and managing. It requires considerable skill and mutual understanding.

Internet and Interagency Opportunities

As DFAT has recently shown, there are new digital opportunities to enhance organisational and program communication, data collection for research and evidence-based planning. The communications world is developing at a rate previously unimaginable, and accelerating. The Gates Foundation, with the capacity of Microsoft, funds technological advances which will enable knowledgeable design and analysis around the world. WomenDeliver demonstrated in its 2016 Conference that combining and sharing resources can be powerful in energising overseas aid efficiencies. Digital media can share views of programs and achievements, attracting the attention of the Australian public so there will be increasing support of constructive foreign policy.