



DFAT Aid Program Review | Oaktree Submission

Who Is Oaktree?

Oaktree is Australia's largest youth-led development organisation. We champion young people as key agents of social change. This submission is based on seventeen years of experience in international and domestic youth-targeted programming. Since 2003, we have worked with local partners in the Indo-Pacific to deliver education opportunities and capacity-building programs to empower young people in our region.

Executive Summary

With over **50% of the global population under the age of thirty**, the world today has the largest ever generation of young people.¹ This youth population is currently concentrated in the Global South — 9 out of 10 young people live in underdeveloped countries. Despite the overwhelming presence of young people in development contexts, their experiences are ignored in international development practice to the detriment of global stability and prosperity. In Australia's case, our aid and development program fails to address the population size and potential of young people in the Indo-Pacific region.

Oaktree believes that the Australian government should:

1. re-evaluate its international development policy in light of regional challenges, such as the youth bulge and the imminent threat of climate change and;
2. acknowledge that the inclusion of youth perspectives and youth-targeted programs in aid policy fundamentally enhances regional security, resilience and economic growth.

Recommendations

Oaktree's **primary recommendations** are as follows:

1. Adopt a youth strategy in DFAT's new international development policy
2. Collect age-related disaggregated data in the monitoring and evaluation stage of aid programming
3. Invest in youth employability and capacity-building programs in the Indo-Pacific
4. Partner with young people in climate change mitigation efforts

¹ Asia Pacific UNDP, *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report 2016* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2016), 81, https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/human_development/asia-pacific-hdr-2016.html



R1: Adopt a youth strategy in DFAT's new international development policy

Young people are a vital component to an effective and inclusive aid program.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 1.7 billion people under the age of twenty-five.² In the Pacific alone, over half of the region's total population of 10 million is under the age of twenty-five.³ The rapid growth of this youth population is placing strain on key resources, national infrastructures and basic services.

Our closest neighbours are coping with the joint effects of an unprecedented youth boom and poor economic performance: high youth unemployment rates and heightened political tensions.

The average rate of youth unemployment in the Pacific is 23% — considerably higher than the global average of 12.7%. And according to research on civil unrest, a 1% increase in a youth bulge increases the risk of political violence by 4%.⁴

It would be remiss of DFAT's new international development policy to ignore the challenges and opportunities presented by a regional youth boom.

It is in Australia's best interests to adopt a youth strategy that adequately responds to current socio-cultural dynamics and ultimately prevents further regional instability and economic stagnation. Only by acknowledging, involving and targeting the key demographic at the centre of these risks can we craft the best solutions to our regional challenges.

Beyond these considerations, a participatory youth strategy that empowers young people to meaningfully engage in development processes has further benefits. Namely, youth participation in the development of aid policy leads to more **sustainable long-term outcomes**.⁵ When young people are involved in policy creation, they develop a sense of ownership over the work and a vested interest in its effective long-term implementation.⁶

Young people have a unique perspective to offer policy-makers. Their familiarity with technology and their willingness to challenge established conventions means they often make novel

² Ibid.

³ Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), *The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific* (Suva, Fiji: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2015), 5, <https://tinyurl.com/ssbjrq3>

⁴ Urdal, H. "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 3 (50) (2006): 607-629.

⁵ London, Jonathan K., Zimmerman, Kristen and Nancy Erbstein. "Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development," *New Directions for Evaluation*, no.98 (June 2003): 33-45, doi:10.1002/ev.8310.1002/ev.83

⁶ Oaktree, *Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development* (Melbourne: Oaktree, 2016), 18, https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/oaktree/pages/69/attachments/original/1479263142/Practice_Note_-_Youth_Participation_in_Development.pdf?1479263142



contributions to policy discussions. Studies have also shown that youth participation leads to greater ownership over and, subsequently, greater legitimacy of youth-targeted programs.⁷

Additionally, young people know how to craft appropriate solutions to the problems that affect them. They are best-placed to identify their own needs and priorities, which means that they can assess the effectiveness of youth-focused aid projects and policies. This ensures that aid programming remains relevant and beneficial to its intended targets.

The United States and the United Kingdom have already recognised the advantages of youth mainstreaming in a development context. Since 2012, the US government has incorporated a youth lens in its aid program via the USAID Youth Policy. The UK's Department of International Development (DFID) has also acknowledged the capacity of young people to act as agents of positive change, adopting a youth strategy in its aid program in 2015. Taken together, USAID and DFID engage young people through:

- Consultations;
- Youth-led research;
- The integration of youth into key aspects of development programming such as design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, and;
- Building the capacity of young people to participate in political and development processes.

Oaktree urges DFAT to meet the global standards of development best practice and create a youth strategy that: 1) takes into account the unique needs and potential of young people, and; 2) promotes youth participation in the design and implementation of aid programming.

R2: Collect age-related disaggregated data in the monitoring and evaluation stage of aid programming

The Australian aid program currently does not measure the impact of its initiatives on young people nor the degree of involvement they have in its implementation. The existing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework does not collect information regarding the number of young people participating in programs nor the outcomes for the youth involved. Therefore, it is impossible to gauge the true effectiveness of Australian aid programming in relation to young people.

As the drafting of an effective and realistic youth strategy depends on an accurate assessment of the demographic in question, the new international development policy, as well as the new aid performance framework, should collect age-related disaggregated data in the M&E stage of

⁷ London et al., "Youth-Led Research And Evaluation: Tools For Youth, Organizational, And Community Development," (2003).



programming. This will allow for greater understanding of the distinct needs of young people and subsequently, they will be better equipped to support a specific focus on youth in the Indo-Pacific region.

To mainstream youth in the M&E framework, Oaktree recommends that DFAT draws inspiration from the way its current monitoring measures and aid performance reports track the impact of aid programming on women and girls. The explicit focus on gender equality as an aid performance benchmark ensures that Australian aid programming remains strategic and informed – youth mainstreaming should follow in the same footsteps.

R3: Invest in youth employability and capacity building programs in the Indo-Pacific

Young people are an under-utilised resource when it comes to maintaining regional security and prosperity.

Given the high rates of youth unemployment and potential for civil unrest in the Indo-Pacific region, it is crucial that Australia's new international development policy adopts strategic measures to alleviate rising economic and political tensions.⁸

In terms of civil unrest, recent cases of instability are understood to have involved, if not were largely driven by, youth disaffection with their quality of life, urban migration and ethnic tensions. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- Student protests against racism in West Papua in late 2019;
- Student protests in PNG in 2016;
- Protests against the monarchy in Tonga in 2003 and 2005, and;
- Civil conflict in New Caledonia, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in the early 2000s.

Oaktree recommends that the Australian government invests in youth employability and capacity-building programs to equip young people with the skills, networks and confidence required to successfully enter the workforce. The need for this type of investment is crucial, as about 40% of employers state that young people attempting to enter the workforce lack basic and relevant skills.⁹ One way this measure could be implemented is through creating a link between the Australian Pacific Technical College and the Pacific Labour Scheme.

⁸ Firth, Stewart, *Instability in the Pacific Islands: A Status Report* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 4 June 2018), https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/instability-pacific-islands-status-report#section_35076

⁹ Lim, Cheryl and Grant, Andrew, *Unleashing Youth in Asia: Solving for the "Triple-E" challenge of youth: Education, Employment and Engagement* (Singapore: McKinsey Center for Government, 2014), 8, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20Sector/Our%20Insights/Unleashing%20youth%20in%20Asia/Unleashing%20youth%20in%20Asia.ashx>



Investing in capacity-building and leadership programs for young people is also an investment in our regional future.¹⁰ There is an urgent need to equip young people with the appropriate leadership skills to take action in political and public affairs due to the anticipated transitions in leadership in the next 20 years.

When emerging young leaders are empowered to understand their rights and meaningfully participate in civic processes, we can stimulate intergenerational behavioural change, potentially redefining the way an entire generation thinks about political change, corruption and good governance.

These employability and capacity-building investments will also have economic implications. For example, building leadership and productive capacity is a key aim of Australia's Aid for Trade program. Investing in upskilling youth in the Pacific would contribute to the program's strategic goals and empower young people to increase their income-generating capacity. This, in turn, will likely lead to an overall decrease in their long-term aid reliance and increased trading opportunities throughout the region.

R4: Partner with young people in climate change mitigation efforts

Young people have a vested interest in resolving transnational issues such as climate change, where younger generations will be disproportionately affected by its devastating consequences. Young people are also more inclined to accept the science regarding climate change. This makes them an appropriate and motivated partner in the fight to mitigate the impending climate crisis.¹¹

Oaktree urges the Australian government to recognise the unique skill set young people can bring to the table – namely, their familiarity with social media and technology.¹² As a cohort, they experience connectivity like no other group. They access and disseminate information faster and further than ever before, creating new opportunities for how young people can increase participation at the community level, and strengthen accountability at a local, national and international level.

By working with a demographic that strongly believes in the need for greater mitigation efforts, the Australian government can demonstrate its commitment to safeguarding our ecological and environmental future.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2014.,

<https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/australian-aid-development-policy.pdf>

¹¹ A major youth-led organisation fighting climate change in the region is 350 Pacific (350pacific.org)

¹² Puybaraud, Marie, "Digital Natives: A Tech-Savvy Generation Enters the Workforce," (2012)