



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Election Policy Platform 2016



About ACFID

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak body for Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in international development and humanitarian action. Our vision is of a world where all people are free from extreme poverty, injustice and inequality and where the earth's finite resources are managed sustainably. Our purpose is to lead and unite our members in action for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Founded in 1965, ACFID currently has 127 members and 15 affiliates operating in more than 100 developing countries. The total revenue raised by ACFID's membership from all sources amounts to \$1.525 billion (2013-14), \$838 million of which is raised from over 1.5 million Australians (2013-14). ACFID's members range between large Australian multi-sectoral organisations that are linked to international federations of NGOs, to agencies with specialised thematic expertise, and smaller community based groups, with a mix of secular and faith based organisations.

ACFID members must comply with the ACFID Code of Conduct, a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aims to improve international development outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency and accountability of signatory organisations. Covering over 50 principles and 150 obligations, the Code sets good standards for program effectiveness, fundraising, governance and financial reporting. Compliance includes annual reporting and checks. The Code has an independent complaints handling process.

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Cover image: CARE staff distribute Australian aid supplies following the 2015 Nepal earthquakes.
Credit: Lucy Beck/CARE

Australia is a prosperous nation well placed to do our part for a fairer world. Our aid program has a crucial role in building peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, Africa and around the world. It helps increase the health, education and wellbeing of people living in poverty. By investing in human development, our aid program builds the preconditions for inclusive economic growth, lifting people out of poverty and improving Australia's relations with our neighbours.

Over the last fifteen years, extreme poverty has been halved. Ninety percent of children in developing regions now attend primary school, and 19,000 fewer children under five die each day. Australia's aid program has played a critical role in these achievements.

In September 2015, along with all 193 countries of the United Nations, Australia agreed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs set an ambitious plan for the world to end poverty by the year 2030, committing countries to reach the vulnerable and marginalised, and leave no one behind.

Achieving the SDGs will require a shift by Governments to better address the relationships between economic growth, environmental sustainability and human development. The SDGs apply to all nations but place extra responsibility on developed countries like Australia to assist those nations which have a harder road to travel.

Any Government elected on 2 July will need to have a credible plan to demonstrate how Australia will achieve the SDGs at home and contribute to their realisation around the world.

Restoring Australia's depleted aid budget and rebuilding our aid program are the first important steps any new Government will have to take.

Ending poverty is an issue that transcends political divides and ACFID is calling on all parties to restore cross-party support for Australian aid, ensure their election policies reflect the values of a compassionate Australia, and share a generous, bold vision for Australia's place in the world.



Marc Purcell

CEO of the Australian Council for International Development

1. Develop a white paper on international development

Reducing poverty and inequality in our region and around the world must continue to be the priority of Australia's international development efforts. Aid has a crucial role in building peace and stability, facilitating trade, supporting our diplomatic relationships, and ensuring Australia's biosecurity. In this way, alleviating poverty around the world is firmly in our national interest, as well as being a moral imperative. With our aid program now managed out of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, it is more important than ever to ensure that we are actively considering the role our international development program plays in our long-term, strategic engagement with our region and the world.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Develop a 'white paper' on international development** that considers the context of global poverty and donor trends in coming decades and prepares Australia to utilise its international development program as a tool to increase prosperity in the long term. This white paper should be developed through a consultative process and address the role of different actors, particularly recipient states, and others such as NGOs and the private sector.

2. Rebuild the Australian aid budget

In recent years, significant and repeated cuts have been made to Australia's aid program. In FY2016-17, we will give just 0.23% of GNI to aid – the lowest level we have ever given as a nation. These devastating cuts have damaged Australia's successful poverty alleviation efforts and our reputation, particularly in our own region.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Reverse the cut of \$224 million** announced in the FY2016-17 Federal Budget
- **Index the aid budget to ensure growth in real terms**
- **Rebuild the aid budget to \$5.5 billion** (0.3% of GNI) in the next term of Parliament
- **Set Australia on a trajectory** to meet its international obligation of aid as 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2030.¹

3. Embed the Sustainable Development Goals into Australia's development efforts

In September 2015, Australia signed up to the SDGs along with all 193 countries of the United Nations. The SDGs set an ambitious plan for the world to end poverty by the year 2030. They commit to reach the vulnerable and marginalised, and leave no one behind. Significantly, the goals apply to all nations – not just developing countries – so Australia will need a plan to implement the goals domestically and through all aspects of our foreign policy, including aid.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Embed the SDGs as the overarching purpose of Australia's aid program**, with the SDGs integrated into relevant thematic and geographic policies, programs and performance benchmarks.² There should be a policy coherence approach to implementing the SDGs, considering the impact of Australia's policies on areas such as the environment, migration, taxation and trade on developing countries.

¹ This is in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda – agreed to by Australia in July 2015 – which reaffirms the commitment for developed nations to give 0.7% of GNI in aid.

² Further detail on how the SDGs can be integrated into Australia's aid program is contained in ACFID's report, *From Policy to Action: Australian Aid and the Sustainable Development Goals*.

- **Develop a whole of government plan for domestic implementation of the SDGs.** This should be driven by the Prime Minister, and a division should be established within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet so as to have clear oversight of implementation, monitoring and reporting across government.
- **Host a national summit every three years** to monitor implementation of the Goals domestically and through Australia's aid program, bringing together stakeholders from across civil society, the private sector, government and academia.

4. Prioritise action on climate change

Climate change has the potential to undo decades of development gains, and it is likely to have disproportionate impact on developing countries – particularly those in the Pacific. Through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in December 2015, Australia joined over 190 countries in committing to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees. This important agreement includes pledges by countries to cut carbon emissions, make provisions for 'loss and damage' associated with climate change impacts in developing countries, and extends the current goal of US\$100 billion per year in climate finance for developing countries through to 2025.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Develop and implement a detailed climate change strategy for the aid program** that ensures dedicated climate change programming, and provides guidance to country programs and thematic areas on how to address the impacts of climate change.
- **Scale up Australia's climate finance** based on our fair share internationally, to at least AU\$558 million per year in public finance, administered through the Green Climate Fund and through other multilateral and bilateral arrangements.³ This needs to be new funding not at the expense of existing poverty alleviation programs.
- **Implement the Paris Agreement through Australia's domestic policy**, particularly by meeting and exceeding emissions reduction targets in line with the 1.5 degree warming limit, increasing investment in renewable energy and ending subsidies for fossil fuels.

5. Ensure effective humanitarian assistance

We are witnessing a rise in the scale, frequency and impact of humanitarian crises on vulnerable people around the world. With an increase in slow-onset and protracted crises, there is an urgent need for flexible, multi-year funding that allows Australia's responses to be tailored to each disaster. The impacts of El Niño, particularly in the Pacific, are estimated to be severe with many Pacific nations already experiencing concerning levels of water and food shortages. Food security in the Horn of Africa is deteriorating at an alarming rate and conditions in Ethiopia are significantly worse than they were during the 2011 Horn of Africa crisis. The Syrian humanitarian crisis shows no sign of abatement as it enters its fifth year.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to need** – irrespective of where that need arises.
- **Increase significantly the humanitarian emergencies fund to \$240 million** to ensure that Australia can continue to be an effective donor in times of crises.
- **Develop fit for purpose mechanisms for protracted humanitarian crises** and slow onset crises that enable quality and timely responses.
- **Continue to partner with Australian NGOs** with humanitarian capacity and increase the allocation of humanitarian funding delivered directly through NGOs to at least 19% in line with the OECD average.⁴

³ Oxfam Australia, 2016, *Bringing Paris Home: How Australia measures up against the new global climate agreement*

⁴ Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015

6. Engage with NGOs and civil society

Australian NGOs play a vital role in the delivery of the Australian aid program, building capacity within local organisations and systems and providing essential services to underserved communities. The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) delivers nearly 20% of the Government's results for only 2.7% of its overall aid.⁵ Investing further in this effective program is good value for money. Furthermore, an informed and engaged civil society that enables people to fully participate in the economy and civic life is a development outcome in its own right, and will be critical to ensuring the SDGs are achieved for all people. Government interventions can support civil society, ignore it or constrain it – Australia's development efforts should actively support civil society.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Engage with Australian NGOs and facilitate their role within the aid program** with regards to policy dialogue, information sharing, consultation, and aid delivery (including new grant windows at a country and thematic level).
- **Increase support for the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and the Australian Volunteers Program** in recognition of the substantial results they deliver and the opportunity to leverage public support, public understanding of aid and people to people links.
- **Increase support to local civil society organisations** in developing countries, and facilitate an enabling environment for civil society through working with country governments, donors and other actors.
- **Ensure the regulatory environment supports the work of NGOs and civil society in Australia** as a vital part of a healthy democracy, and recognises the diverse roles and functions of civil society organisations and NGOs including service provision, advocacy and contributions to policy debate.

7. Increase the effectiveness, accountability and transparency of the aid program

Lack of transparency and predictability of aid are key impediments to the effectiveness of aid investments. Additionally, a strong evidence base is critical to ensure development interventions are having the greatest impact. Particularly in light of the SDGs' application across all of Australia's international policy, it is critical that all areas of DFAT understand and can effectively implement the SDGs across Australia's trade agreements, aid program, and diplomatic efforts.

ACFID is calling for all parties to commit to:

- **Ensure DFAT attracts and retains a dedicated body of development professionals and technical experts to lead aid delivery.**
- **Increase support for research, evidence and evaluation** through the aid program, delivered through a comprehensive strategy.
- **Build on the 'green book' and 'orange book'** for Australia's aid program by adding forward expenditure and greater program details.
- **Prioritise public communication, engagement and education** on the priorities and outcomes of the aid program, to build public understanding and awareness.

⁵ Office of Development Effectiveness, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, *Evaluation of the Australian NGO Program*

A vision for Australia's role in the world



10 questions on international development

The broader narrative for aid

- 1 What do you and your party see as the primary purpose of the Australian aid program?
- 2 What do you and your party see Australia's role to be in contributing to peace and stability in Asia and the Pacific?

Aid Volume and management

- 3 ACFID believes that Australia should rebuild the aid budget to reach \$5.5 billion in the life of the new Parliament (by 2018-19). What will you and your party do to reinvest in the Australian aid program?
- 4 What steps would you and your party take to ensure an effective, transparent and predictable aid program?

International Commitments

- 5 What would you and your party do to ensure Australia fulfils its commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, signed in 2015? How will you ensure Australia's aid program is working towards the commitment to 'leave no one behind'?
- 6 What would you and your party do to ensure Australia fulfils its commitments to ensure the world achieves its 2C target and pursues 1.5C (as per the Paris international climate change agreement), and effectively supports developing countries that will be hardest hit by the impacts of climate change?

Humanitarian Response

- 7 How should Australia respond to humanitarian emergencies in developing countries around the world?
- 8 How will you and your party commit to ensuring that Australia can continue to be an effective partner to countries experiencing humanitarian crises?

Fostering the role of civil society

- 9 What would you and your party do to foster a positive environment for civil society organisations to operate in Australia and internationally – as key actors alongside government and the private sector for poverty alleviation and sustainable development?

- 10 **Is there anything else about international development or your vision for Australia's role in the world that you would like to tell us?**



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