



Review of the DFAT-NGO Humanitarian Partnership Agreement 2011-2015 ACFID Response

Since 2011 the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement has deepened the way that Australian NGOs work with Government and each other. ACFID strongly concurs with the review's finding that there is much to build on from the lessons learnt throughout the life of the HPA and we look forward to engaging with DFAT on the redesign process.

NGOs play an integral role in responding to humanitarian crises and the review acknowledges their 'deep expertise and on-the-ground capacity to deliver effective emergency relief assistance through their international and local networks.' The HPA mechanism has supported effective humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction programs and disaster risk management capacity building, with the review noting that activities under HPA funding have met, and often exceeded expected targets, in sometimes highly difficult operating environments.

The review report presents a concise and comprehensive analysis of the issues of the HPA, informing the remaining 12 months of the mechanism and forming a basis for the design of a successor mechanism. We acknowledge the commitment of DFAT and the consultants to actively engage with the sector, both HPA and non HPA partners, and look forward to continuing this consultative manner through the design process.

Finally, ACFID would like to acknowledge the individuals who have held the role of HPA director. The review has noted a lack of clarity between the roles of the HPA and that of ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG),¹ however successive HPA directors, through their collaborative and collegiate approaches, have ensured that the partnership has worked effectively alongside and collaboratively with the HRG. This is a significant tribute to the individuals who have held the role and has helped to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the Australian Humanitarian sector.

ACFID's response is in two parts – overarching comments on thematic areas raised within the HPA Review, and responses to the fourteen recommendations of the review.

Thematic Response

Slow Onset and Protracted Crises

While the review report suggests the HPA mechanism is best suited to rapid-onset disasters, it has been used effectively for multiple slow onset and protracted crises throughout its operation, demonstrating the adaptability of the mechanism and the flexibility of all partners. One key concern of ACFID members has been the lack of clear criteria for activation of the mechanism for slow onset and protracted crises, and as such, time delays have occurred between the emergence of early warnings and HPA activations.

To this end, ACFID recommends DFAT develop a funding approach that allows the Australian Government to respond effectively to slow onset and protracted crises – whether within a new HPA mechanism, or as a separate funding window – supporting the Australian accredited NGOs that are best placed to respond. Noting that discussions are underway,

¹ Membership includes the 6 HPA Agencies (CARE Australia, Caritas Australia, Oxfam Australia, Save the Children Australia, Plan International and World Vision Australia), and Act for Peace, ActionAid Australia, ADRA Australia, Australian Lutheran World Service, Australian Red Cross, ChildFund Australia, Habitat for Humanity, Islamic Relief Australia and RedR Australia.

ACFID would welcome the creation of a forum whereby ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group and DFAT meet on a regular basis to identify early warning signs in order to ensure timely response to slow onset disasters.

Funding

HPA Partners affirm the review's finding that funding volume through the mechanism has been low compared to the cost and effort invested by partners. The low level of funding through the HPA, relative to Australia's overall contributions (incl. the Australian public and other donors²) to humanitarian response, has hindered the ability of the mechanism to go to scale.

A scoping report commissioned by HPA partners in 2012³ of humanitarian financing in Australia found that the HPA had a 'relatively high administrative burden' for both AusAID and NGOs, and that from the perspective the HPA NGO partners, the administrative burden was 'disproportionate to the size of the mechanism and ... either the administrative burden needs to be reduced or the size of the grants increased in order to make the mechanism more cost effective.' ACFID supports the finding that efficiency could be improved by increasing the volume of funding through the mechanism, noting that a funding increase would need to be accompanied by further administrative and secretariat resourcing.

In approaching the design phase, ACFID supports recommendation 9 that DFAT estimate a minimum level of annual funding, to ensure that a new mechanism is fit for purpose for the expected level of funding.

DRR/DRM Capacity Building

DRR programs are critical for both development and humanitarian programs and ACFID urges DFAT to strengthen the support given to Australian NGO partners for DRR initiatives. Most ACFID HRG members implement DRR programs that work to mitigate risks, build local capacity and ensure sustainability across their international development programs, broader than what is currently run through HPA funding.

ACFID affirms the comment that DRR/DRM Capacity Building funding throughout the HPA mechanism has given life to the partnership during periods of few responses, noting that this funding has allowed HPA partners to develop new and innovative programs that have strengthened responses and created stronger partnerships and linkages. As such, ACFID recommends the continuation of funding to support humanitarian capacity building and preparedness activities as part of a new mechanism.

Partnership Approach

The review report notes that HPA partners have developed a collaborative relationship over the course of the partnership and that the design process should seek to build upon it. HPA Partners have noted, echoing findings from the Mid Term Review, that over the course of the partnership, dialogue has not always been strategic or founded on the principles of partnership, with DFAT often adopting the traditional role of client/service provider and HPA Partners adopting their role of seeking funds from a donor. As the HPA is redesigned, we strongly encourage DFAT to build a new mechanism based on principles of partnership.

² As at 12 June 2015, ACFID members raised from the public a combined \$17 million for Tropical Cyclone Pam and \$40.8 million for the Nepal Earthquake.

³ Humanitarian Advisory Group, *Humanitarian Financing in Australia: Scoping Report on Comparative Mechanisms*, 21 February 2013.

Strategic Dialogue

ACFID affirms the reviews finding on the need to clearly define both the purpose of strategic dialogue, and the roles and responsibilities between partners to a future mechanism. ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group have been involved in, or convened, many of the achievements listed under Outcome 3, demonstrating both the lack of clarity on responsibilities between the HRG and HPA and the ongoing willingness of Australian Humanitarian NGOs to collaborate on issues of mutual concern. ACFID recommends strategic dialogue on humanitarian responses and Government policy remains with the Humanitarian Reference Group who, taken together have a large geographic footprint, thematic expertise and partnerships with DFAT across a range of programs (including country/regional funding consortia such as AMENCA, and ANCP).

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

ACFID welcomes the comments and identified lessons on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, noting that this has been a reoccurring area for discussion amongst partners throughout the life of the HPA. ACFID also affirms the lesson on establishing a clear MEL framework with partnership outcomes, including with sufficient budget allocation, as part of a future mechanism. This framework should involve some standardisation of minimum standards for disability inclusion and gender mainstreaming across project design, implementation and community feedback mechanisms. This however, should be balanced to ensure a MEL framework is not over-complicated and demonstrates the impact of the Government's investment.

ACFID strongly recommends that the purpose of learning within a future mechanism is clearly articulated, and mutual learning outcomes are defined from the outset of the partnership – with ACFID's HRG playing a role in this process. If the purpose of learning is focused specifically on the mechanism (as per current activation lessons learned exercises undertaken by HPA partners) learning should remain with partners, as it is difficult to be genuinely inclusive of non-partners. If learning is focused on improving responses and sharing best practice, this should be inclusive of a broader range of humanitarian partners to improve the overall response of Australian responders in times of crises.

Under ACFID's new strategic plan, ACFID will continue to substantially invest in and strengthen the learning agenda of members. ACFID looks forward to continued dialogue with DFAT on areas of complementarity between a learning agenda across the wider ACFID membership and a new HPA mechanism.

Gender Equality

Given the Australian Government's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in the Australian Aid programme, ACFID would like to see a stronger focus on gender within the design of a new mechanism. This could include a greater focus on gender sensitive responses, gender-balanced rapid needs assessment teams and increased capacity to conduct Gender Action planning.

Protection

DFAT's protection policy supports both protection mainstreaming and standalone protection activities. While noting that the HPA has supported a focus on protection mainstreaming, it is disappointing that because of the limited funding, the HPA has rarely supported standalone protection activities. ACFID would like to see a new mechanism strengthen work on protection, particularly of women and children, and a stronger prioritisation of disability inclusion.

Review Recommendation Response

Recommendation	ACFID Response
1. Build on the achievements of the HPA, and all the lessons that have been learned as identified in section 4 of this report.	Agreed. The HPA mechanism has been an effective mechanism to enable Australian NGOs to respond to humanitarian crises.
2. Analyse other comparable donor mechanisms and other comparable DFAT partnerships to identify best practice in partnering for effective humanitarian action.	Agreed. This will be critical to ensuring DFAT remains a best practice donor into the future. Many ACFID members are involved in other donor mechanisms and would be happy to provide relevant lessons and insights to the design team.
3. Reviews the recommendations from the Office of Development Effectiveness' evaluation of the ANCP program for their relevance to a future mechanism.	Agree in principle. While there are strong similarities with ANCP, the design phase would need to fully unpack where there are similarities and synergies in contrast to the clear differences and operating environments for the programmes being funded.
4. Consider adaptations to the peer review in order to review the divisive aspects while maintaining the positive elements of NGO collaboration.	Agree. HPA partners have had a number of discussions already on how to strengthen and build collaboration while diminishing the potential divisive aspects of the mechanism.
5. Assesses funding models that include both a narrow and broad NGO supplier base (or a combination of both), giving prominence to considerations around capacity to respond to different crises, established local capability, access to specialisation and value for money.	Agree. DFAT has previously indicated that they can fund non-HPA organisations if they choose, however this has rarely occurred in practice. Through the design process, DFAT should consider what an optimal Australian response would be, and build a fit for purpose mechanism to meet that response.
6. DFAT use the design process to articulate its expectations around the purpose (or purposes) of a future mechanism	Agree. All Australian humanitarian stakeholders need to be clear on the purpose of a new mechanism.
7. DFAT use the design process to define the role it expects to play, as both a partner and as a donor, acknowledging that a future mechanism must remain effective in the context of DFAT staff turnover	Agree. A lack of articulation of the expected role of AusAID/DFAT as partner vis-a-vis donor was an issue through the life of the HPA. DFAT should use the design process to consider what changes need to be made to progress the partnership from a transactional relationship to a strategic relationship, built upon principles of partnership.
8. DFAT use the design process to consider funding arrangements that continue to be flexible and adaptive but are also more predictable and long-term	Agree. This has been a key recommendation of ACFID policy briefs and dialogue with DFAT throughout the life of the HPA. DFAT should also consider clear criteria as to when the HPA mechanism will be activated, particularly if responses to slow onset and protracted

	crises remain a part of the mechanism.
9. Estimate a minimum level of annual funding to be channelled through a future mechanism to enable the design of an appropriately resourced governance and management structure.	Agree. Developing an idea of the estimated annual level of funding will ensure that the mechanism has the appropriate resourcing and fit for purpose governance models. The design phase should also consider where there could be greater benefits through sector-wide collaboration initiatives through ACFID.
10. In the event that the HPA is activated for a <u>major rapid onset emergency</u> , HPA funding will be evenly split between all partners with established local capacity to respond. The Response Committee would still operate, and have a stronger focus on coordination of quality responses, and collaboration around monitoring and learning.	Agree, in principle. This recommendation requires further discussion between HPA partners and DFAT. Key areas for further consideration include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scale of a rapid onset disaster and the funding being provided (i.e. if more than \$3million). • The sectors that DFAT may want to support in any given response. • Clarity on what happens when a partner does not have either geographical presence or obvious capacity to respond.
11. In the event that the HPA is activated for a response to a <u>protracted crises</u> , the Response Committee's peer review process will be supported by an independent technical assessment of NGO proposals.	Agree in principle. This recommendation requires further discussion between HPA partners and DFAT. Key areas for further consideration include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who would bear the financial cost of technical assessments? • How is the panel constructed – could we draw from sector specialists within HPA/non-HPA members?
12. Partners will review and debate the benefits and costs of the consortium approach that has been used in the Vanuatu and Nepal responses at an HPA/HRG quarterly meeting.	Agree. Discussion to be held at August HPA meeting, with invitations extended to HRG members to participate.
13. Partners will design future HPA learning events to encourage sector-wide learning, be inclusive of HRG members, have a thematic/sectoral focus, and draw in outside agencies (such as academic institutes and/or private sector organisations) as relevant	Noted. As noted above, ACFID is supportive of this recommendation on the basis of a clearly defined purpose for such sector-wide learning events, to ensure targeted and meaningful engagement.
14. Partners will review current procedures around capacity mapping of HPA (and non-HPA) NGOs, with the aim of removing any duplication of effort, and improving the accuracy and utility of the information provided to all parties.	Noted. This will be discussed at the August HRG dialogue with DFAT, as the HRG has been considering capacity mapping. ACFID is unclear however on the proposed purpose of this recommendation, and who would have ownership of the initiative.