

Australian Council for International Development

Strategic Plan
2020 – 2025



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Preface

In early 2020, as ACFID concluded a nine-month strategic review of global trends affecting human development, a global pandemic struck the world. COVID-19 engulfed whole nations, threatening the health of billions of people, curtailing social life and crippling economies and people's livelihoods.

ACFID had consulted widely, considered its role and decided to prioritise the importance of achieving sustainable and inclusive development and supporting development organisations in becoming relevant for the future. The advent of COVID-19 seemed to throw this new plan up in the air, so profound was the global disruption. Yet after the initial crisis of lockdown had passed, many of the trends identified as requiring a response remained, as the pandemic had having accelerated some of them and deepened others.

Superpower rivalry between China and the US, coupled with the advent of America-first politics and its disruption to multilateral cooperation, has seen increasing competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The Pacific is an emerging battle ground for Australia in this context. Australia must shore up multilateral cooperation on a range of issues vital to the nation and to human development. Focusing on the fundamentals of human security and more cooperative relations is more important than ever, as a more multipolar and less cooperative world emerges.

Science bodies and major development actors like the World Bank and United Nations warn that without rapid efforts to tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions, the world is headed for at least a 3 degree temperature rise by the end of the century. A heating world will disrupt and reverse economic and human development and adversely impact the poorest and most marginalised people around the world.

Humanitarian crises are larger than at any time since the end of WWII, with millions displaced by conflicts in Syria and Myanmar, and the funding gap between donor commitments and need is growing rapidly. Gender-based violence and general inequality beset all societies, but in some countries are so pervasive as to be a form of low intensity conflict. Gender equality, global humanitarianism and universal human rights must be championed.

There is shrinking space for civil society in many countries. Rising authoritarianism has developmental consequences including silencing diversity of views, violating human rights, exacerbating corruption, and creating a culture of impunity, which Australia and NGOs cannot ignore.

Challenges for charity sustainability include the pace of economic development in much of Asia and withdrawal of aid donors, a flatlined government aid budget, a crowded charity fundraising environment, economic disruption, and new business models that are high cost but offer uncertain returns, all coupled with challenges to public trust in charities and increasing public expectations and government regulation of charity accountabilities. All of this means traditional business models are straining. Adding to this are the challenges of COVID-19 with the program model of NGOs inhibited by the travel restrictions and business sustainability undermined by lower fundraising returns.

Given these shifts, how can ACFID best lead, unite and support its members to make an impact on development?

New opportunities for development NGOs include engagement in new partnerships, accelerating localisation of development with partners by devolving power and resources, developing a compelling story of impact and adapting operating models to respond to the new development context.

To seize these opportunities, ACFID will prioritise a robust response to climate change, pressure on civil society in developing countries and organisational sustainability in a disrupted world. Supporting our work will be a focus on measuring our performance on enablers to achieve our goals: engaged members, strategic partnerships, a positive workplace culture, and our own organisational sustainability. Foundationally the values that members adhere to in our Code, will be ours too: Integrity, Accountability, Transparency, Respect, Equity, Effectiveness and Cooperation.

The threat of COVID-19 will hopefully pass in time, but the human development needs that ACFID and its members are called to meet remains compelling and relevant. ACFID stands ready to lead and support our members in achieving their missions and driving a vision of development for the Government that has people's human rights and sustainability at its heart.



Susan Pascoe
President



Marc Purcell
CEO

July 2020

Strategic Plan 2020-25

OUR SHARED VISION

Australia acting with compassion and fairness for a just, sustainable and equitable world.

OUR PURPOSE

We lead, unite and support international development and humanitarian organisations to realise our vision.

GOAL ONE

Sustainable and inclusive development

GOAL TWO

Organisations for the future

PRIORITY DOMAINS

CLIMATE CHANGE

1.1 Responding to climate change becomes a fundamental pillar of Australian inclusive and sustainable development and humanitarian policy and practice.

2.1 ACFID and its members act with clarity, consistency and urgency in responding effectively to climate change.

CIVIL SOCIETY

1.2 ACFID and its members consistently raise and amplify the voice of civil society actors; and respond to challenges to civic space.

2.2 ACFID supports civil society organisations in the Asia-Pacific to strengthen their ability to respond to opportunities and challenges in their context.

ADVOCACY FOR CHANGE

1.3 ACFID is an influential voice on critical and emerging issues impacting the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development and humanitarian practice.

2.3 ACFID engages with government to foster an open, accountable and fair enabling environment for international development and humanitarian practice.

AN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARD

1.4 ACFID's international development standard is upheld by members and valued by stakeholders as a mark of quality.

2.4 ACFID's international development standard establishes a benchmark for effective and contemporary development and humanitarian practice.

A HIGH-PERFORMING SECTOR

1.5 ACFID fosters collaboration and learning amongst leading development and humanitarian actors and practitioners to improve their practice.

2.5 ACFID engages members on emerging opportunities and challenges for the sector through providing learning, insights and collaboration.

ENABLERS

Engaged members
Positive people and culture
Strategic partners
Sustainable organisation

HOW WE WORK

Advocacy for change
An international development standard
A high-performing sector

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Goals & objectives
Engaged members
Positive people and culture
Strategic partners
Sustainable organisation

VALUES

Integrity, Accountability, Transparency, Respect, Effectiveness, Equity, Cooperation.

ACFID's Vision, Purpose and Values

OUR SHARED VISION

Australia acting with compassion and fairness for a just, sustainable and equitable world.

OUR PURPOSE

We lead, unite and support international development and humanitarian organisations to realise our vision.

OUR VALUES

ACFID is adopting the values from the ACFID Code of Conduct. These values will guide the way the Board and the Secretariat perform their work.

INTEGRITY

We act with honesty and are guided by ethical and moral principles in all that we do.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We take responsibility for our actions and are accountable to our stakeholders, and in particular primary stakeholders, for our performance and integrity.

TRANSPARENCY

We openly share information about our organisations and our work with all our stakeholders and the public.

RESPECT

We recognise the value and diversity of all people and are committed to treating others with due regard for their rights, dignity and integrity.

EFFECTIVENESS

We strive to deliver outcomes that bring about positive change in the lives of people living in poverty.

EQUITY

We are committed to overcoming prejudices and disadvantage and promoting fair and just access to resources and opportunities.

COOPERATION

We work with and alongside others in a spirit of mutuality, respecting diversity and difference in the pursuit of common goals.

GOAL ONE:

Sustainable and inclusive development

Champion inclusive and sustainable development policy and practice that responds to the emerging drivers of poverty and instability.

The global commitment to realising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has become urgent. The dynamics of poverty, inequality and instability have grown in complexity in an interconnected and interdependent world. Australian development policy and practice – which includes Official Development Assistance (ODA) administered by the Government and delivered by a range of international development actors, as well as ‘beyond’ ODA contributions – must support eradicating poverty, fostering inclusive and sustainable development, supporting civic space and responding to crises and instability.

Climate change is an existential threat to humanity and our development. ACFID will champion inclusive and sustainable development policy and practice as follows:

OBJECTIVES:

PRIORITY DOMAINS:

- 1.1 **Climate Change:** Responding to climate change becomes a fundamental pillar of Australian inclusive and sustainable development and humanitarian policy and practice.
- 1.2 **Civil Society:** ACFID and its members consistently raise and amplify the voice of civil society actors and respond to challenges to civic space.
- 1.3 **Advocacy for Change:** ACFID is an influential voice on critical and emerging issues impacting the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development and humanitarian practice.
- 1.4 **An International Development Standard:** ACFID’s international development standard is upheld by members and valued by stakeholders as a mark of quality.
- 1.5 **A High Performing Sector:** ACFID fosters collaboration and learning amongst leading development and humanitarian actors and practitioners to improve their practice.



Australia should get on the front foot and start a greater, more positive engagement in time of rapid change and disruption, assisting our neighbours in Asia, the Pacific and around the world. Being great partners and sharing skills and resources is good for the people of the region and its effective diplomacy. It is our best long-term chance of building a peaceful and prosperous region for future generations. We must not shy away, but project who we are – our values, our aspirations and our vision for the world.

Susan Pascoe AM, ACFID President

GOAL TWO:

Organisations for the future

Lead and support relevant and adaptive international development and humanitarian organisations for the future.

Relevant organisations are closely connected to the needs of the stakeholders they serve; they regularly and rigorously evaluate their relevance and adapt their organisations to the significant changes we are all experiencing in a rapidly changing world. As a peak body leading, uniting and supporting its members, ACFID will act to foster a development and humanitarian ecosystem that achieves meaningful change for inclusive and sustainable development. ACFID leads and supports relevant and adaptive international development and humanitarian organisations as follows:



We want to see an international development ecosystem where the best minds are applied to solve the most wicked problems, where organisations consistently have their eye on something bigger than themselves, and a Government which creates an enabling environment where diverse and effective development actors can flourish in their pursuits. ACFID can bring insights to this ecosystem and convene the capability the sector needs to be fit for the future, and befitting in serving our partners' needs.

Susan Pascoe AM, ACFID President

OBJECTIVES:

PRIORITY DOMAINS

- 2.1 **Climate Change:** ACFID and its members act with clarity, consistency and urgency in responding effectively to climate change.
- 2.2 **Civil Society:** ACFID supports civil society organisations in the Asia-Pacific to strengthen their ability to respond to opportunities and challenges in their context.
- 2.3 **Advocacy for Change:** ACFID engages with government to foster an open, accountable and fair enabling environment for international development and humanitarian practice.
- 2.4 **An International Development Standard:** ACFID's international development standard establishes a benchmark for effective and contemporary development and humanitarian practice.
- 2.5 **A High Performing Sector:** ACFID engages members on emerging opportunities and challenges for the sector through providing learning, insights and collaboration.



Blantyre Rural, Malawi: Elube, 23 years old, waits to collect her money at a cash distribution funded by Oxfam and partners. The area has been hard hit by drought in recent months. Photo: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam.



Nualak Nanoam and Jack Nanoam from the Lamanapipi community in the Whitesand area of Tanna Island, Tafea Province, Vanuatu. Photo: Tom Perry/CARE.

Enablers

ACFID has identified four enablers as key to the achievement of the strategic plan. No enabler is an end in itself; rather, each supports the achievement of the goals of the strategic plan. These enablers equip ACFID to adapt and respond to changes in its strategic landscape over the strategic plan period.

ENGAGED MEMBERS

STRATEGIC INTENT

Engaged members are key to ACFID's implementation of the strategic plan. ACFID offers leadership on issues of emerging importance to the sector and supports its members in addressing the challenges they face. ACFID communicates effectively with its members and ensures they feel engaged and derive value from membership. ACFID recognises the diverse needs of its members and welcomes new members.

POSITIVE PEOPLE & CULTURE

STRATEGIC INTENT

ACFID is an environment in which staff can grow and achieve their goals individually and as part of a team. ACFID values its staff and their wisdom. ACFID's CEO and leadership team are responsible for setting the tone for ACFID being a great place to work. All staff and teams actively contribute to ACFID's strategic direction and are responsible for making ACFID a great place to work. Staff have the competencies and capabilities needed to deliver ACFID's core functions. They also have the ambition to lead, unite and support the sector with goodwill, practical ideas and leadership. All staff are effective collaborators – inside the organisation and beyond – and live by ACFID's values.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

STRATEGIC INTENT

ACFID invests in partners, alliances and networks with staff time, financial resources and political capital that are of high value and mutually beneficial to deliver on the strategic plan. ACFID has a clear understanding of its objectives and investment in all of its strategic partnerships. ACFID manages its work with partners to learn what is working well and where

it can improve. ACFID will continue to prioritise, value and uphold its relationship with DFAT as a strategic partner. It will also engage with the private sector, philanthropic communities, universities and other international development actors to discern where and how collaboration could support the strategic plan.

SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

STRATEGIC INTENT

ACFID is a well governed with a Board that acts in the interests of the Council. ACFID is a financially healthy, sustainable and efficiently run organisation. It has the tools to deliver, communicate effectively and manage its obligations.

GOVERNANCE & RISK

ACFID's Constitution, Board and Committees are fit-for-purpose and meet the contemporary governance and risk management expectations of its members, regulators and the wider community. ACFID's Council continues to promote gender balance and diversity in its leadership.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

ACFID seeks opportunities diversify and grow its income to ensure it has the capacity to deliver the strategic plan. ACFID regularly reviews the true cost of activities and seeks to maximise efficiency in all its work.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

ACFID ensures staff have the capability to manage information and data and are supported by effective and efficient enabling processes and technology.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

ACFID's external communication has a unified approach to members and stakeholders that ensures it is professional, timely and relevant.

Our core functions – how we work

ACFID is uniquely positioned to contribute to change in the development and humanitarian sector in Australia. This unique positioning is drawn from ACFID's mutually reinforcing roles as an influential peak body representing views and taking ideas to Government and a standard bearer for effective development and humanitarian practice. ACFID plays a unifying role across Australian development and humanitarian organisations.

ADVOCACY FOR CHANGE

ACFID's advocacy connects, champions and represents a dynamic network of international development and civil society actors united by its vision of Australia acting with compassion and fairness for a just, sustainable and equitable world. It actively grapples with international development challenges and opportunities emerging from the changing nature of poverty, new development influencers and the dynamic, politicised international development, human security, foreign policy and regional security landscape, including shifts in geostrategic and geo-economic relations in the region.

ACFID Secretariat establishes advocacy priorities on an annual basis through consultation with its members and the broader ACFID network. The ACFID Advocacy Agenda sets out these priorities, guiding ACFID's engagement with government for the coming year. The Advocacy Agenda is published on ACFID's website.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

ACFID advocates to government for a compassionate and high impact development cooperation portfolio for Australia. This means ACFID advocates for international development policy and practice that is responsive to its context, based on partner country needs, takes account of what works, and is founded on internationally agreed norms for sustainable development, human rights, and open and inclusive societies. These include the Sustainable Development Goals, OECD Development Assistance Committee criteria and norms, the Humanitarian Principles, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and associated human rights conventions. ACFID defines Australian development policy and practice to include Official Development Assistance administered by the Government and delivered by a range of international development actors, as well as 'beyond' ODA contributions to eradicating poverty, fostering inclusive and sustainable development, and responding to crises and instability.

The focus of ACFID's advocacy efforts is on international development policy and practice. From time to time, ACFID may also undertake advocacy in relation to domestic matters where this is central to advancing ACFID's advocacy for a compassionate and high impact international development cooperation portfolio for Australia, consistent with the mission of ACFID and the priorities of the Advocacy Agenda.

ACFID holds itself and its members accountable for these principles and values through ACFID's international development standard (ACFID Code of Conduct) and its alignment to the Global Standard for Civil Society Organisation Accountability.

WHAT WE DO

To advance the Advocacy Agenda, ACFID generates constructive, accountable, transparent and independent dialogue between government and the international development sector. ACFID also informs and engages the public in this work. ACFID focuses on issues where it can have the greatest advocacy impact. This includes issues that are:

- Most critical or catalytic to the overall direction, quality, accountability and transparency of the Australian Government's development cooperation portfolio
- Most important to sustainable and inclusive development needs, particularly in the Asia-Pacific, and humanitarian imperatives globally
- Critical to the enabling environment for civil society independence in Australia
- Propositional – harnessing insights and examples of effective policy and practice approaches from the ACFID network and elevating them into the advocacy arena.

ACFID measures the impact of its advocacy efforts and is committed to ongoing learning, improvement and innovation in government engagement, policy development and advocacy initiatives.





AN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARD

ACFID's international development standard (the ACFID Code of Conduct) aims to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of ACFID's members. Importantly, the standard is independently governed on behalf of the ACFID Board and ACFID Council by the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee (CCC). The CCC has autonomy in decision-making in relation to determining the Code signatory status of ACFID members, compliance assessments and complaints handling. In conjunction with other aspects of ACFID's work, the effective management of this standard contributes to the realisation of human rights and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.

ACFID's international development standard is deliberately aspirational. It articulates ACFID members' collective understanding of good organisational and development practice for organisations involved in international development and humanitarian action. It goes beyond what the Government could seek to achieve through regulation and demands a standard of practice from signatories that requires continuous investment and effort, self-assessed and verified regulation, and a commitment to best practice. This voluntary commitment to a principled, demanding standard distinguishes ACFID members from other development actors.

WHAT WE DO

That ACFID members meet these standards is an important end in itself for individual agencies and for the credibility and legitimacy of the sector as a whole. Further, a large contingent of members proving, improving and demonstrating their effectiveness and impact is again an important end in and of itself as well as a precondition for ACFID members' influential voice as leaders in the development sector. Leveraging their collective influence and impact as principled leaders in good development practice, ACFID members contribute to changes both in the regulatory environment and in the role of NGOs which will – over time – be reflected in changes in results, approaches and business models and associated practice standards.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

ACFID's international development standard must both support and drive its members' relevance. In the period of this strategic plan, ACFID will invest in a comprehensive 'refresh' of the ACFID Code of Conduct branding to ensure that it is a fitting signal of the work that ACFID members do, and a verifiable mark of quality to donors, regulators, and stakeholders everywhere. This 'refresh' will consider the manner in which ACFID refers to this standard and its position in the market, and make recommendations for the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee and the ACFID Council to consider.

To continue to drive the sector's leadership and influence, and to expand ACFID members' reputation as leaders in good practice, ACFID must invest in exploring options for expanding the reach and influence of the Code. Specifically, this investment should seek to understand the appetite for Code signatory status from organisations operating differently to the 'traditional' Code signatory, and whether and how this could be accommodated. Market feasibility testing will consider these and other strategies for both relaxing the Code to be 'open' to new possibilities, and/or actively marketing the Code to these non-traditional actors. This should not and will not open a path to ACFID Council membership to those who would otherwise be ineligible, only an avenue to Code signatory status.

A HIGH-PERFORMING SECTOR

ACFID is committed to building sector capability so that Australia has a high performing development and humanitarian sector that delivers for the stakeholders it serves. ACFID is uniquely positioned in a number of key areas to support the sector, in particular as a data repository, a convenor of thought and practice leadership, a collaborator and broker of research, and a voice to government policy-makers and regulators.

WHAT WE DO

ACFID collects data through an annual statistical survey, and through the Code compliance assessment process. These data yield insights over time that provide useful analysis of the health of the NGO sector. The 2018 State of the Sector report drew from these and other data and demonstrates the richness of analysis which is possible from the data ACFID collects.

Sense-making of the political and policy environment, market conditions and the development context continues to be an important role for a peak body. ACFID has a longstanding learning program of work, primarily focused in areas of development and organisational practice. Alongside this, it plays an important convening role in drawing together different actors from across the development landscape. In particular, ACFID has a role in engaging members in these emerging issues to better enable them to respond to these trends. Collaboration has also been a hallmark of ACFID's way of working with research institutions and other partnerships to engage across sectors on contemporary issues of relevance to the sector.

Finally, ACFID not only engages with government to influence policy, it also engages to seek to shape the enabling environment for its members including government regulation and market opportunities.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

Over the life of this strategic plan, ACFID will be investing in:

- Building ACFID's data collection, management and analysis capability to give members the information they need to make decisions on the issues that affect the sector
- Understanding the pain points that squeeze ACFID members' already stretched resources, and sourcing collaborative solutions from within and outside the membership
- Bringing ACFID members together in new and different ways through purpose-driven event series that blend formal and informal opportunities to make meaningful connections and tackle complex issues in the ACFID network.

Measuring performance

ACFID is committed to regularly assessing its performance against this strategic plan. It will use a range of quantitative and qualitative tools to undertake this assessment. ACFID will utilise this process to learn and adapt its approaches to achieve the strategic goals of this plan.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Delivery of the annual business plan
- Assessment of progress against objectives
- Regular opportunities for lessons learned and adaptations

ENGAGED MEMBERS

- Growing member satisfaction with the value and strategic direction of ACFID
- ACFID's membership remains representative of the international development sector

POSITIVE PEOPLE AND CULTURE

- Growing staff engagement
- Healthy people & culture practices
- Appropriate changes made as a result of assessment of culture priorities by staff and management

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

- Appropriate changes made as a result of assessment of strategic partnerships to ensure they are clear, mutually beneficial and managed effectively.

SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

GOVERNANCE AND RISK

Appropriate changes made as a result of assessments of:

- Member perception of Board performance
- Board performance self-assessment
- Regulatory compliance
- Self-assessment against ACFID's Code of Conduct

FINANCIAL HEALTH

- Appropriate changes made to the financial health of the organisation through diversification and growth of income and control of costs
- Appropriate changes made to information management and technology as a result of assessment of emerging requirements

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

- Appropriate changes made as a result of staff and member satisfaction with ACFID's systems, process and technology

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- Appropriate changes made as a result of staff and member satisfaction with ACFID's delivery of external communications

Act for Peace provides support through local partners for Syrian refugees in Jordan like Lilia, who lives in a tent with her husband and three sons. In September 2019 there were over 650,000 Syrian refugees living in Jordan. Photo: Karen McGrath/Act for Peace.





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Cover photo: Suai, Timor-Leste:
Chefe do Suco of Matai, João
Gusuão, stands on the newly
constructed highway that has
divided his community in two. He
is working with Oxfam and local
partners to negotiate a solution
for his community. Photo by
Kate Bensen/OxfamAUS.


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