

AusAID Briefing

ASEAN Regional Forum

Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, 16-17 April, Brisbane

Thank you for inviting me to speak about AusAID's humanitarian and disaster relief work in our region.

I wanted to start my briefing by giving you an outline of Australia's aid program, which has been undergoing a rapid process of expansion and change over the last few years. I wanted to talk about our approach to humanitarian response to natural disasters, in particular our new Humanitarian Action Policy. And finally, I wanted to outline the disaster management work that AusAID is doing in the region.

Australia's Aid Program

AusAID is the Australian Government agency responsible for managing Australia's overseas aid program. We are based in Canberra and have representatives in 37 countries. About two-thirds of our assistance focusses on Asia and the Pacific – that is, much of the ARF region. For this financial year, our official development assistance is more than \$4.8 billion, which equates to 0.35 per cent of Australia's gross national income. In dollar terms, Australia's aid program has more than doubled over the past five years.

Australia has a strong commitment to its aid program. The Australian Government has committed to increasing the aid program until it reaches 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015. Based on current economic projections that is likely to see the budget for the aid program almost double again from its current level, to around \$8 billion.

This increase will make Australia one of the fastest growing donors in the OECD.

In order to ensure that this rapid expansion is managed and delivered effectively, the Government commissioned in November 2010 a comprehensive independent review of the aid program, the first in 15 years. The review was released in July 2011 and made 39 recommendations to strengthen the program.

Since that time we have been working to implement the review's recommendations. We are building our aid program around five core strategic goals:

- Saving lives
- Promoting opportunities for all
- Sustainable economic development
- Effective governance
- Humanitarian and disaster response

It is the first and fifth goals, ‘saving lives’ and ‘humanitarian and disaster response’, that I wanted to focus on today.

Saving Lives/ Humanitarian and Disaster Response

Australia’s humanitarian aid in 2010-11 was approximately \$425 million, or 11 per cent of our total aid budget. The size of this investment is a recognition of the importance of humanitarian action to save lives and support long-term development. And we will continue to increase our humanitarian aid as our budget increases.

On 16 December last year, Australia launched a new Humanitarian Action Policy to guide our approach. You should each have received a brochure that outlines the new policy.

The policy provides detail both on how Australia supports, and how Australia works with the international community to support, improved humanitarian action.

We see this as humanitarian action which:

- meets the needs of and is accountable to affected populations;
- supports partner governments and local capacities, including with disaster preparedness;
- protects the safety, dignity and rights of affected populations;
- ensures our support is timely and coordinated; and
- integrates recovery as part of humanitarian action to support longer-term development.

Australia’s priority is to provide funding in a way that meets both the immediate life-saving needs of crisis affected people and facilitates the transition from relief to development.

I would like to give a brief example which demonstrates how Australia has supported this transition from relief to development.

In Indonesia, over 1,100 lives were lost and more than 300,000 buildings were damaged following the 2009 earthquake in West Sumatra.

Australia already had an active education program in the area which had included the construction and rehabilitation of schools.

This development program was extended after the earthquake – together with US AID – to rebuild 39 schools that had been damaged.

The schools were reconstructed to better withstand the impact of future earthquakes – integrating disaster risk reduction principles and meeting Indonesia’s earthquake resistance standards.

At the same time, we worked with the Government of Indonesia and the local West Sumatran Government on a public ‘Build Back Better’ campaign which used advertising and social media to promote safer building techniques in the earthquake affected area.

This brief example shows how we were able to re-prioritise an existing education program to meet immediate education needs during a crisis, and then transition back to development. Australia’s response and recovery program helped children get back to education quickly after the disaster – and into facilities that were safer.

The elements of Australia’s aid program that are supporting this approach are:

- close and longstanding relationships with partner governments, multilateral agencies and non-government organisations;
- close linkages between development and response teams - development program staff are always involved in response and recovery planning and implementation; and
- strong policy commitment to integrate early recovery into humanitarian action – which has been reinforced in the new Humanitarian Action Policy.

We also know that more needs to be done to monitor and assess the impact of early recovery on affected populations. This increases our accountability to those affected by crisis and makes sure that Australia’s humanitarian funds are genuinely assisting those who need it. For example, we need to:

- assess the effectiveness of humanitarian action in supporting early recovery - to ensure that people recover more quickly, and with greater resilience, from a crisis;
- know if we are supporting local capacity and reducing reliance on international humanitarian assistance; and
- incorporate this knowledge into our programming.

Measuring the impact will also assist donors to demonstrate the value in providing much needed further funding for recovery – and increase public support.

We recognise this is a current gap, and together we need to work to improve this.

Moving forward in implementing the new Humanitarian Action Policy, we plan to do more to integrate early recovery into humanitarian programs, and support effective transition back to development.

A five year implementation plan will be developed in 2012, outlining our annual priorities.

As humanitarian partners, we need to be innovative and flexible in financing recovery. We look forward to working with our partners in implementing the policy.

Disaster Relief in the ARF region

Australia's humanitarian aid in the ARF region in 2010-11 was approximately \$122 million. The majority of our humanitarian aid in the region is delivered through our multilateral partners. Our capacity building work is mainly delivered bilaterally – we work with partner governments to identify and implement their priorities.

An innovative example of our bilateral work is the Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction.

The Facility is a \$67 million bilateral program with Indonesia over 5 years to 2013. It represents Australia's largest bilateral program aimed at reducing the risk of natural disasters before they take place, and it supports Indonesia's goal to strengthen national and local capacity in disaster management and to promote a more disaster resilient region.

The Facility operates under a co-directorship model, with one Director from AusAID and one from Indonesia's national disaster management agency BNPB. This partnership highlights the close working relationship between Australia and Indonesia to reduce the risk of natural disasters in Indonesia through better preparedness and response.

And it is delivering positive results. For example, the Facility has extended the 'Build Back Better' campaign, that I mentioned earlier, beyond school reconstruction to include other institutions such as health clinics. In doing this, it has linked with other AusAID partners in the field, such as local faith based organisations.

Australia recognises Indonesia's strong regional leadership in disaster management. Through the work of the Facility, we continue our partnership with Indonesia to advance this work. The Facility program concludes in 2013 and Australia is working closely with the Government of Indonesia to continue our partnership in disaster management through a new program

Australia is also supporting our regional partners to implement their disaster management priorities.

Australia has a strong relationship with the ASEAN Secretariat based on ongoing policy dialogue and programming support. We work with the ASEAN Secretariat to help implement the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management & Emergency Response (AADMER) and we have provided more than \$2 million, including for:

- key activities identified by the ASEAN Committee for Disaster Management, including Emergency Rapid Assessment Team training and regional earthquake risk assessments;
- support for further staff within ASEAN Secretariat to progress AADMER activities with Member States; and
- establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), including for the recruitment of nine corporate and three specialist positions by ASEAN Secretariat for the AHA Centre.

Australia's engagement also includes participation in the ASEAN Technical Working Group on Disaster Management. The Technical Working Group was initiated by Australia and is chaired by the Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction.

The Technical Working Group brings together Dialogue Partners and the ASEAN Secretariat to discuss priorities under the AADMER and to share information on activity implementation.

In the East Asia Summit, we are supporting implementation of the new initiative - '*A Practical Approach to Enhance Regional Cooperation on Disaster Rapid Response*' - that was endorsed by leaders in November 2011. This includes support to establish a Secretariat to implement the new initiative.

And we will continue to look for opportunities to support the work of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Given the various regional mechanisms that are in operation, a challenge is to ensure that there is good coordination, collaboration and information sharing, so that the region advances its approach to disaster management cohesively.

Summary

In summary, I wanted to reinforce the importance that AusAID places on humanitarian response to natural disasters, and I encourage you to consider AusAID's new Humanitarian Action Policy. While much of our work focusses on bilateral relationships, we see the critical role that regional coordination plays in improving disaster relief. The ASEAN Regional Forum provides a robust mechanism to take this forward. I would encourage you to consider how to ensure the alignment of ARF's work and the work of other regional mechanisms.

Thank you