

Executive Director's report to ACFID Council 2009

Marc Purcell

1. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, ACFID, in its 43 year, is a respected and at times influential membership organization, which faces some significant challenges and has many opportunities.
2. We have a long history, good reputation, and a slowly climbing membership, but there are new NGOS, mum and dads aid efforts, Gen X campaign initiatives, do we include them?

- But what are the activities we need to renew, and messages we need to communicate, to attract new members, and to retain existing ones, and make us a sustainable prosperous membership organization beyond 2020?
3. We have enormous potential resource base in human skills and experience that come together through the networks of ACFID from EXCOM down to working groups which is a great resource for the future, but how best to develop new and effective cultures of working together?
4. We have political credibility with the new ALP Government – but what ideas and proposals do we have to leverage this to the best effect?
5. We have a new principle based partnership agreement with AusAID, but how do we make this agreement live within AusAID, and be meaningful for you our members so we are expanding and deepening our relations with AusAID?
6. There has been a shift in the professional background of the sector over the last 10 years, with a new generation of workers in development, humanitarian work and policy and activism, equipped with MA Dev, AYAD experience, and IT savvy, coupled with more senior non sector managerial skills being imported. How do we best address the professional development of this younger generation, and the wider non-sector arrivals?
7. We have good linkages to a range of external bodies interested in development, such as universities, how do we multiply the effect of these relations so as have greater impact, on development policy, for members, on the lives of people in development countries?
8. We have a Code of Conduct that sets standard for the sector around accountability and transparency, but significant challenges are present:
 - an increased likelihood of regulatory reform affecting our sector,
 - a development effectiveness debate that asks us to look at accountability downwards to our beneficiaries, rather than just to donors, and

- an increased likelihood of contagion in terms of reputational risk. This is spawned by our very success; the increased publicity brings greater scrutiny. In this sense the aid sector's reputation is only as strong in the public eye as our weakest link. Therefore the need to continuously improve the code.

9. Will people support such change in face of these challenges?

10. Together these questions add up to two fundamental question:

11. What is ACFID? What is it's future?

12. Answering the first question will help respond the second question.

13. ACFID is often perceived as the office and staff on the other side of the lake, and while that is part of ACFID, and those 15 staff work very hard and care greatly about members, and is seen in some of the services that the secretariat provides, - the training, the member bulletins the analysis that is done prior and post budget, this is part of what is ACFID, but it surely not be the some total of ACFID.

14. Some see ACFID as the Executive Committee, whom you will soon elect new members.

So ACFID is and must be a democratic body, and all member agencies are eligible to stand and help contribute and shape the organization by providing leadership.

Under our constitution too, all members are entitled to see copies of the minutes of meetings, and members should not be shy about seeking out their representatives and asking them to raise issues. But this too, is not the some total of ACFID

15. Some see as the sector body for setting standards and good practice, through the Code of Conduct and important discussions on development practice which help lift the practice of the sector; but this too is not the sum total of ACFID...

16. ACFID is seen by some as a conduit for information exchange with Government

- some say we have worked well to cultivate relations in recent years, and others say we are too close to Government.
- Whatever your point of view, without policy, positions and viewpoints arising from the members themselves, our voice to Government will be weak and an unclear.
- In order to have an equal dialogue with Government, we need to have members actively debating ideas, forming views and developing these into positions and policy, which we can then advocate.

- We need members working together with the ACFID staff and Excom to undertake the dialogue with Government.
- But this begs the questions where will such positions and views be formulated?

17. ACFID has constitutional right of members to work together in committees and working groups – there are there committees ranging from Development practice, Advocacy and Public Policy and Humanitarian, and over 20 working groups ranging from regional groups like the Africa working group, operation focused groups like the Finance working group, and thematic like the Human Rights Task Group.

18. Participation in ACFID networks occurs for a variety of reasons, including combining forces to make a stronger statement, legitimacy, learning, potential access to funds, and the pooling of resources.

19. Democratic management is a necessity in ACFID. Success depends on equity in the relations and exercise of power within the ACFID networks. The members are autonomous organizations and vary in size and ideology. In ACFID's network, when its members participate in taking a decision, that is the best guarantee that the decision will be implemented

20. The ACFID family promotes and is nourished by the enthusiasm and energy characteristic of a voluntary participation in its membership. We maintain dynamism to the extent the network is able to balance the diverse contributions of members with joint, sustained collaboration.

21. For this, the leadership must stimulate and strengthen democratic internal processes,

Ensure the active participation of all members and effective work in alliances. A network must enhance interaction between its members. It facilitates rather than directs innovative proposals for action.

22. And finally there is this great gathering, Council, which combines the collective energy, experience and wisdom of 73 organisations. Is this ACFID? Yes, it is a vital part of ACFID too

23. We all know this to be true as NGOS, we have strength when we work to combine and have a united voice – witness the success of MPH – a creation of the ACFID APPC

ACFID is the collective voice of Australian Aid and Development NGOs, and NGOs will have greater impact when working collectively.

We are a membership body, but we are also a peak body, and we are your Peak – we can lead and speak on international development but you must participate and help drive us on the issues, the scope of our work and the

24. Can we remain a cosy club of 73 NGOS?

No, we cannot be so. There are new NGOS, mum and dads aid efforts, Gen X campaign initiatives, We may look at them as amateurs, but and they are being launched and run with the same idealism and energy that many of us commenced with 20, 30 or 50 years. We must reach out to them and bring them in as we have experience, knowledge and standards that will benefit them.

So we must become a broader church

25. We need to be a clearer voice of the sector. And how can we do this.

26. Well I need ask you, not just to ask what is ACFID doing about matter a, or issue x, but we invite you – the members – to ask how you can contribute to ACFID for you are ACFID, you have the wisdom, the skills, and authority to shape and drive this organization into the coming decade. I invite you to step forward and do so. This will ensure the future prosperity of this great Australian Council for International Development.