



**Australian Council For
International Development**

**Pre-budget Submission to the
Australian Government
for the
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The ACFID Code of Conduct represents the active commitment of Australia's non-profit, overseas aid agencies to integrity and accountability in all their actions. It enhances the professional standards among agencies and thereby maintains public confidence in the way that community contributions to overseas aid are raised and used.

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Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, 191 heads of government, including from Australia, pledged to meet the following Millennium Development Goals. Since taking office last year, the Labor government has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving these goals, including the major commitment by developed countries. The goals are:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- Halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
 - Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**
- Ensure that children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**
- Ensure girls have the same access to schooling as boys
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**
- Cut infant and child deaths by two-thirds
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health**
- Reduce by three-quarters the proportion of women dying in childbirth
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
 - Begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**
- Reverse the loss of environmental resources
 - Halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water
 - Achieve a significant improvement in the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development**
- Address trade, debt, aid, public health and technology issues to promote economic growth and poverty reduction

Summary

The first Labor aid budget in May 2008 improved the quality and reach of Australia's aid program. By placing the internationally-agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) close to the centre of the program's design and evaluation process for the first time, it rectified a significant weakness in Australia's aid program. ACFID welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement in April 2008 that his government would join other OECD donors as a member of the MDG Call to Action¹. Initiatives in the May 2008 federal budget on education, health, climate change, disability and Pacific partnerships reinforced this welcome change.

Yet, even Labor's plan to increase an aid spending level to 0.5% of gross national income (GNI) by 2015 will leave Australia in the bottom third of OECD donor countries in that year. Australia should join the majority of OECD donors in setting out a timetable to reach aid spending of 0.7% of GNI by 2015. The best way to demonstrate the government's renewed global engagement in this field is to share the burden in a way that reflects Australia's exceptional economic performance over the last decade. This would also be reflective of the role of Australian citizens as the second most generous citizenry among OECD countries in private donations for global poverty.

Adopting this timetable would enable Australia to not only offer regional leadership, but also to be a more substantial contributor to global development, including on climate change mitigation and adaptation programs in our region. ACFID recommends a major increase in funding for these programs, particularly in the area of renewable energy.

The international food crisis, more frequent natural disasters and related factors causing extreme poverty have a disproportionate effect on vulnerable populations in most developing countries because they have little capacity to adequately prepare or respond for such change. Therefore, ACFID recommends the government commit new investment to:

- address the causal factors underlying the international food crisis, especially through increased agricultural research and related services for partner countries in South East Asia and the Pacific;
- minimise the withdrawal of children, especially girls, from school and the reduced use of essential health care due to financial impacts on poor families of the food crisis;
- eradicate malaria in the Pacific; and
- leverage Australia's world-class expertise to expand disaster risk management capacity in Pacific Island and selected South East Asian countries.

¹ Joint UK-Australia Statement on Global Development. 7 April 2008

Consistent with the ALP's 2007 Party platform, which articulates a clear commitment to involving marginalised people in policy development and program design,² ACFID urges the government to enable participation and inclusion by target communities in the design and implementation of all relevant parts of the aid program. This is the guiding principle in domestic social programs where the voice of marginalised Australian communities is actively incorporated in planning. Australia's aid program should similarly be based on engagement of these groups in early stage planning and program design. This is the only way to gain sustainable support from target communities.

By adopting this approach, communities help to diagnose their problems, prioritise possible interventions and become active in implementation. This would reinforce Australia's broader governance message about support for a vibrant democratic voice in countries where this is not well established for marginalised groups. It would directly enhance the voice of women in decision-making at the local and regional level.

With its expanding capacity, the government also now has the opportunity to draw on world class Australian expertise to provide policy leadership among OECD donors on child rights issues. This would be consistent with Labor's strong focus on children in domestic policy. ACFID recommends a new strategy be developed for the aid program to achieve impact.

The confidence and trust of the Australian community are central to sustaining a growing aid program. Given the previous lack of transparency about the aid program's performance and the plan to expand the program significantly, there is now a higher premium than ever before on transparency and the promotion of awareness about the program.

ACFID congratulated the government on issuing the first Annual Review of Development Effectiveness earlier this year. This is a vital tool to nurture public confidence over time. It demonstrates both a commitment to transparency in an expanding program and a readiness to adapt programs where evaluations show that this is needed.

² Australian Labor Party (2007). *National Platform and Constitution*.
http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/2007_national_platform.pdf

ACFID's Role

ACFID represents 70 Australian non-profit overseas aid and development agencies. It administers an industry Code of Conduct that is recognised as the leading Code of its kind internationally. Private donations to ACFID member agencies in 2006 were \$725 million, with an average annual growth in donations over the period 2002-2006 of 16%. Government funding represented 11% of non-profit aid sector revenue in 2006-07.

ACFID members operate in over 100 countries, often working with their counterpart agencies in developing countries over several decades. Over 1.7 million Australians support ACFID member agencies, with over 900,000 families giving on a regular basis. Around 30,000 Australians volunteer their time to support one or more of our member agencies and many agencies have ongoing partnerships with private companies.

ACFID maintains close working partnerships with peak civil society organisations in the Pacific Islands, Asia, North America and Europe. It participates in regular policy dialogue with six federal agencies and contributes to parliamentary enquiries and a range of conferences and seminars. It is an active member of the Australian Collaboration, the National Non-profit Roundtable, the Make Poverty History Campaign and the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(in order of presentation in this submission)

1. Adopt a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of Australia's aid program.
2. Establish a specific child focus strategy as part of the proposed rights-based framework.
3. Increase funding for immediate and long-term measures to address food security issues and to cease domestic subsidies for biofuel production.
4. Increase funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation programs in Pacific Island countries.
5. Eradicate malaria in the Pacific and expand programs for maternal and child health.
6. Expand access for children to primary education and improve gender targeting within the program.
7. Expand the disaster risk management program for targeted regional countries and contribute to the regional leadership of ideas on this topic.

1. RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation:

Adopt a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of Australia's aid program.

A key way to improve Australia's aid program is to move beyond simple measures to address the symptoms of poverty. By adopting a rights-based approach to the design of sub-programs, Australia would become more effective at addressing the root causes of poverty. We would, thereby, join with other progressive donor governments in addressing equality of opportunity and social justice within development.

This approach is based on involving communities, not just partner governments, in shaping the change processes that we promote. It treats poor and marginalised people as participants in the work rather than as objects of donor programs. It is consistent with the ALP's strong commitment to promote human rights as a core foreign policy objective internationally.³ ACFID endorses the Platform's statement that:

“the basic human rights to food, shelter, health care, economic security and education are preconditions for human survival, dignity and the enjoyment of civil and political rights. Equally, respect for civil and political rights is critical to advancing economic and other rights. Each group of rights underpins the other”. (Clause 80, Chapter 14)

It is timely for this fundamental ALP commitment to be embedded in the aid program. This would enable the Australian aid program to more directly address the causes of poverty and social injustice. It would also ensure that poor and marginalised communities become participants in shaping bilateral and regional aid program priorities and processes. This, in turn, would enable more people to claim their rights to essential education, health and other services.

The OECD, the World Bank and other bilateral donors have already promoted this approach, often by linking program objectives to the MDGs. It provides a solid framework to integrate the standards and principles adopted by multilateral and other bilateral donors into the program design, implementation and evaluation of Australia's aid program.

While AusAID has presented human rights as one of its key thematic areas, and includes a rights-based approach in its *Building Better Governance*, the current focus is limited to a narrow band of activity within its governance sub-program. By drawing on the lessons learned in this area from the World Bank, United Nations' agencies and other bilateral donors (notably the United Kingdom), Australia's aid program could make significant advances within 1-2 years.

³ Australian Labor Party (2007). *National Platform and Constitution*.
http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/2007_national_platform.pdf

In addition to improving the long-term effectiveness of Australian aid, this approach would bring Australia increased harmonisation with other aid donors. It can be expected to generate better understanding in Australian agencies and partner governments of their responsibilities as duty bearers and an increased focus on involving aid beneficiaries in decision-making processes as rights' holders. Inevitably, this approach will improve Australia's impact on achieving the MDGs and on empowering marginalised communities to have a voice in their domestic political processes.

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) implemented and assessed the impact of its own rights-based approach in 2004. It used a Participatory Rights Assessment Methodology (PRAM) for this purpose. The evaluation concluded that, while efforts in civil society alone can bring many benefits, it is far more cost-effective to work with government and civil society together. Similarly, by applying these lessons in the design of Australia's aid program, the objectives for the public sector and civil society are more likely to be achieved.

ACFID recommends that the Minister for Foreign Affairs sponsor a forum to examine how best to apply this approach to Australia's aid program and put in place a process to present policy options within 12 months. The forum would ideally involve representatives of relevant multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, the Asia Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions and regional civil society leaders. It would focus attention on ways to apply rights-based norms and standards to the design, implementation and evaluation of aid programs and advise on relevant measures linked to the MDG indicators.

2. CHILD RIGHTS

Recommendation:

Establish a specific child focus strategy as part of the proposed rights-based framework.

Donors around the world are moving towards a greater emphasis on policy coherence. Using a child rights-based approach across AusAID's development assistance programs would allow for the incorporation of numerous cross-cutting issues (such as gender and disability) through one coherent framework and will contribute to the realisation of the MDGs.

A child and youth analysis for policy and program design through child rights-based programming would entail predicting the impact of all policies and programs on children and youth, even if they are not the explicit focus of the particular activity. Child rights-based programming would consider children in the context of their families and communities as well as their broader social, cultural, political contexts.

Children and youths make up half the world's population. The proportion of children in developing countries is far greater than in developed countries. In fact lowest developed countries represent one-tenth of the world's population,

but one-fifth the annual number of births⁴, making reducing child poverty crucial. However, there has been a lack of focus on children's issues and their key role in the sustainability of development within the Australian aid program to date. We have an opportunity to correct this in practical ways through a child rights-based approach.

AusAID has already recognised the specific vulnerabilities of children through the child protection policy, showing significant leadership in the donor community in terms of children's rights. The explicit commitment of the current Labor government to equity, rights and the MDGs also provides an ideal background to lead the DAC in establishing international standards from the child rights approach to overseas development assistance. A child rights-based approach would serve as an important demonstration of our commitment to the UNCRC and is an opportunity for Australia to lead the way in the practical implementation of its principles in the development assistance framework.

Children are a focus of the MDGs and, therefore, Australia's move to support reaching these goals necessitates an increase in our response to children. Many of the MDGs are explicitly focused on children and those that are not play a significant role in improving the environment in which children are living. When approaching the MDGs using the child rights-based approach, we not only ensure children's vulnerabilities are incorporated, we also ensure our interventions are sustainable in the long-term.

A child rights-based approach to the Australian aid program would mean considering children in all we do. It is not limited to a focus on child-targeted projects, but instead recognises that children, and children's wellbeing, are fundamentally connected to the community as a whole. Therefore, community interventions of any sort must predict the impact on children's rights as well as seeking their opinions and participation in matters that concern them.

A child rights-based approach would also demand greater emphasis and budget allocation on programmes directly connected to children's health and survival, development, participation and protection. The recognition that communities with strong infrastructure and governance that encourages civil participation and upholds human rights will enable children to access their rights and improve their own communities in turn.

If AusAID employs a child rights-based approach to programming and increases budget allocations to child-focused programs, as well as involving children in other programs, the expected outcomes could include:

1. A greater impact on the MDGs:
 - Reduced infant and child mortality in areas AusAID is working in
 - Increasing numbers of children involved in early childhood development activities (including early education and health care)

⁴ UNICEF (2001). *Poverty and Children: Lessons from the '90s for Least Developed Countries*. http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/pub_poverty_children_ldcs_en.pdf

- 2 Increased engagement of youth in decision-making and economic development:
 - Youth participation in development activities and further opportunities for their positive involvement in communities
 - Greater opportunities for youth to engage in productive economic activities
3. Established excellence in child rights-based programming and development
 - Recognition by other donors of AusAID's leadership in the area of child rights-based programming
 - Improved implementation of child-focused policies within partner countries

3. FOOD SECURITY

Recommendation:

Increase funding for immediate and long-term measures to address food security issues and to cease domestic subsidies for biofuel production.

Over 850 million people currently live with food insecurity and, of these, 60% live in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.⁵ Since early 2007, food prices have been spiralling and it is estimated an additional 100 million people will become food insecure.⁶ Riots and civil instability in Haiti and in some African countries are a precursor of likely civil unrest and instability elsewhere. Even before the current crisis, it was clear that the MDG for halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015 was unlikely to be met.⁷

Australia has been generous in its humanitarian responses to emergency situations for many years. The Labor government's response to a series of natural disasters in 2008 has been notable and its recent \$30 million commitment to the World Food Programme (WFP) appeal for additional funding was commendable. Additional Australian funding for food aid should support rather than unintentionally undermine local food and agriculture markets. After the recent conference on world food security in Rome, the WFP plans to rely on sourcing most goods and services from developing nations rather than recycling surpluses from developed countries.

⁵ UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (2008). *Crop prospects and food situation. No1*. www.fao.org/Giews/english/cpfs/index.htm

⁴ De Schutter, O. (2008). *Analysis of the world food crisis by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food*. Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. www.ohchr.org/English/issues/food/index.htm

⁵ United Nations (2007). *Millennium development goals report 2007*. www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg2007.pdf

⁶ UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (2008). *Women and sustainable food security*. <http://www.fao.org/SD/FSdirect/FBdirect/FSP001.htm>

ACFID urges the government to ensure that any additional funding directly strengthens the key role performed as food producers and providers. Women produce between 60% and 80% of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production. While women play a key role in small-scale agriculture, the farm labour force and day-to-day family subsistence, they have more difficulties than men in gaining access to land, credit and productivity-enhancing inputs and services.⁸ Australia's assistance should be designed to contribute to long-term food security by addressing such barriers for women.

At the food summit in Rome, leaders agreed that substantial new support for agriculture in developing countries was needed from donors. As part of this global effort to reinvest in agricultural development, Australia has exceptional assets on which to draw. They include pure and applied research, support with the application of basic technology and funding for food support programs. Australia has the capacity to help selected developing countries boost their agricultural productivity over the coming decade.

ACFID commends the government for developing a long-term action plan for food security. This has the potential to apply Australian expertise in semi-arid agriculture research, production and adaptation. The work of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is especially important in this regard. However, the trend of declining real funding level for agricultural research in the aid program over the last 15 years needs to be reversed.

Australia could influence policy areas such as agricultural extension systems. Given the critical need for improving research and applied in technology and productivity, ACFID recommends enhanced ACIAR funding. This should include support for collaborative research in policy work between Australia and partner countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia. ACIAR is well placed to assist partners in developing responses to climate change and mitigation drawing from local knowledge and practices.

A strong focus on assisting Pacific Island countries to pre-empt a food crisis is recommended. This would include an initiative to obtain current information on agriculture, fisheries and quarantine regimes impacting on access to food supplies, as well as an assessment of arrangements to respond to a food crisis if it emerges.

In relation to biofuels, there is mounting evidence that the aggregate impact of global biofuel production has exacerbated food price increases. A confidential World Bank report has estimated that biofuels have forced global food prices up by 75%.⁹ Biofuel production not only consumes crops that could be used for food, but it also competes with food production and water.

⁹ [Chakraborty, A. Secret Report: Biofuel causes food crisis. 2008. www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jul/03/biofuels.renewableenergy.](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jul/03/biofuels.renewableenergy)

A report by the Global Subsidies Initiative, a programme of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, warns that biofuel subsidisation distorts the domestic food production market¹⁰. It also questions the long-term viability of the Australian biofuels industry in the face of international developments. Therefore, ACFID urges the Australian government to cease subsidies for biofuel production and urges the United States and the European Union to cease their own subsidies, especially in those commodities which directly impact on prices for food staples in developing countries.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE

Recommendation:

Increase funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation programs in Pacific Island countries.

Climate change is already impacting the world's most vulnerable populations and slowing progress towards the MDGs. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change forecasts a disproportionately large impact on developing countries due to their higher dependence on agriculture and because they have little capacity to respond and adapt to changes.¹¹

The 2008/09 federal budget and subsequent policy announcements demonstrate the government's intention to contribute substantially to mitigating the impact of climate change, especially in vulnerable Pacific Island countries. ACFID welcomes the commitment to provide \$150 million over three years to meet climate adaptation needs, primarily in Australia's neighbouring island countries, and the additional \$2 million specifically to support community adaptation activities in Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga and Solomon Islands. Given the significant regional need for climate change mitigation and adaptation programs and Australia's capacity to assist in this work, ACFID recommends that priority be given to expanding this program over the next four years.

ACFID also recommends that gender be integrated into the design of programs so that the differential impacts on men and women are addressed. As the majority of the world's poor, women living in poverty, are at particular risk. Social roles and constraints exacerbate the physical risks they face, as demonstrated by the Asian tsunami of 2004. Women are also key actors in ensuring their communities' ability to cope with and adapt to climate change.

¹⁰ Quirke, D., Steenblik, R. and Warner, B. Biofuels at what cost? *Government support for ethanol and biodiesel in Australia*. 2008.
http://www.globalsubsidies.org/files/assets/biofuels_subsidies_australia.pdf

¹¹ Working Group II Contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007). *Fourth Assessment Report Climate Change 2007: Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*.
<http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/ar4-wg2.htm>

Chances of avoiding unmanageable climate impacts will be poor unless the global trend of greenhouse emission growth is reversed by 2015. ACFID congratulates the Australian government for working with countries in the Asia and Pacific region through the government's \$200 million International Forest Carbon Initiative and the \$20 million commitment for the Australia-China Joint Coordination Group on Clean Coal Technology. Progressive increases in funding for such initiatives are necessary to be fully effective in reducing deforestation and fostering collaboration to improve energy efficiency and boost renewable energy technologies.

Australia is moving in a positive direction by agreeing to support the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Adaptation Fund arising from the climate change talks in Bali. However, concerns are raised about supporting the establishment of new funds to be administered by the World Bank because it may create conflicting duplicate mechanisms to the UNFCCC's Adaptation Fund.¹² Furthermore, concerns have been raised about the World Bank having a poor record in promoting alternative energy and the World Bank governance structures would mean that decision-making would be donor dominated with minimal consultation with developing countries.

5. HEALTH

Recommendation:

Eradicate malaria in the Pacific and expand programs for maternal and child health.

Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are the worst affected malarial countries in the world outside Africa. The economic costs of malaria in the Pacific run into the billions of dollars in lost productivity, increased health care and significant burdens on family members each year. The young and elderly are particularly susceptible.

Increasing the four-pronged approach successfully used to date by the Global Fund, supported by AusAID, in places such as Vanuatu would involve:

1. Provision of insecticide impregnated bed nets;
2. Spraying insecticide on the interiors of houses in the mornings;
3. Rapid diagnostic tests; and
4. Improving access to new medicines, eg Artemesinin and derivatives.

Funding additional research on best practice for malaria eradication in the Pacific and spreading this approach across the worst affected areas over five years would significantly increase economic, health and education outcomes. Implementing this strategy with a culturally appropriate public education message could see the eradication of malaria in the Pacific within five years.

¹² Müller Band and Winkler, H. *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? The Governance of the World Bank Climate Investment Fund*. 2008. www.erc.uct.ac.za/Research/publications/08Muller-Winkler_One_step_forward.pdf

By shifting towards a substantial anti-malaria program in the Pacific, Australia has the opportunity to finally eradicate malaria in Pacific Island countries. Such an investment would also lead to benefits for aid program actions in East Timor, Philippines, Laos/Cambodia and parts of Africa. Mechanisms for such a campaign should involve close cooperation, including additional resourcing to the Global Fund.

ACFID commends the Labor government on its 2008/09 budget initiatives on health, particularly in relation to clean water and sanitation, avoidable blindness and disability and HIV/AIDS. Even with this welcome change, Australia remains well below its proportionate share of gross national income in health spending by OECD donors.¹³ ACFID recommends a steady increase in Australia's contribution to the best performing agencies already targeted by the government in the last budget. They include the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Global Fund, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO).

Maternal and child health

More than half a million women die each year due to pregnancy-related causes and many more suffer debilitating long-term effects such as fistula.¹⁴ Improving the health and nutrition of mothers-to-be and providing quality reproductive health services are pivotal to addressing many underlying causes of child mortality.¹⁵ ACFID urges increased funding for regional countries which are a long way from achieving MDGs 4 and 5, drawing on WHO priorities in the *Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health*.¹⁶

There are strong links between food insecurity, poor nutrition and mortality in relation to HIV-related illnesses. Poor nutrition undermines an individual's response to anti-retroviral therapy and exacerbates the socio-economic impacts of the virus. The adverse impact on household food security associated with the loss of productivity amongst HIV-positive women (given their key role in food production and family support) highlights this linkage.¹⁷

ACFID also recommends expanded funding to address violence against women. This is central to efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS infection rates. Research conducted in a diverse range of countries including Guatemala, Haiti, India,

¹³ World Vision Australia. (2007). *How is the Neighbours Health? The Millennium Development health goals and our region.* <http://www.worldvision.com.au/learn/policyandreports/files/HowistheNeighboursHealth.pdf>

¹² UNICEF. (2008). *The State of the World's Children 2008.* http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/The_State_of_the_Worlds_Children_2008.pdf

¹³ World Bank. (2008). *Global Monitoring Report 2008.* http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2008/Resources/4737994-1207342962709/8944_Web_PDF.pdf

¹⁴ World Health Organization. (2008). *HIV, Food Security and Nutrition Policy Brief.* <http://www.who.int/pmnch/about/en/>

¹⁵ UNAIDS. (2008). *HIV, Food Security and Nutrition Policy Brief.* data.unaids.org/pub/Manual/2008/jc1515a_policybrief_nutrition_en.pdf

Jamaica and Papua New Guinea found that some women and girls have acquired HIV/AIDS through coerced sexual activity.¹⁸

Health information systems

ACFID recommends a modest program to assist selected regional countries to establish effective health information systems. This could be done in cooperation with Demographic and Health Survey and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey initiatives. This could lead to significant improvements in health system efficiency, effectiveness and equity. At present, a number of countries in our region, particularly in the Pacific, have very weak health information systems and are unable to provide up-to-date information about their performance against the health MDGs.

6. EDUCATION

Recommendation:

Expand access for children to primary education and improve gender targeting within the program.

There has been progress in recent years in enabling more children to access primary school in the developing world and the stark gender disparity in access to primary and secondary school of recent decades has begun to decline. However, 75 million school-aged children still remain out of school and literacy rates in some Pacific Island countries and East Timor remain low.¹⁹

The Prime Minister's announcement in April 2008 of an initiative to improve access for primary school age children in our region was most welcome²⁰. By scaling up AusAID's program in this area and supporting a World Bank trust fund for the Philippines' basic education reforms, Australia's aid program is now more balanced. While acknowledging the significant improvement in this part of the Australian aid program, ACFID recommends that additional funding be committed between 2009/10 and 2011/12 to achieve improved access in the group of regional countries with the lowest proportion of entry and where literacy rates remain especially low.

A more focussed investment in early childhood development is also recommended to supplement the other important education program strands. As in Australia, a modest investment in infant development would greatly assist regional countries to meet MDG2. This significantly improves parental engagement in pre-school developmental activity for children, thereby, leading to better outcomes for those children to primary school.

A disturbing implication of the global food crisis is that some children are being withdrawn from school due to financial pressure on the income of very poor families. Girls tend to be at greatest risk of being withdrawn. ACFID

¹⁸ World Health Organization (2003). *Integrating Gender into HIV/AIDS Programmes*. Geneva.

¹⁹ World Bank. (2008). *Global Monitoring Report 2008*.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2008/Resources/4737994-1207342962709/8944_Web_PDF.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page15209.asp>

recommends that AusAID's education program specifically address this development so that gains over recent years are not lost. It also recommends support for school-lunch programs in those regions and countries of greatest need and targeted nutrition and health sub-programs for early childhood groups. Such initiatives would improve educational outcomes and help to minimise the withdrawal of children, especially girls and those children from the most marginalised communities.

ACFID also recommends increased funding for programs specifically to strengthen access to post-primary school opportunities for girls. Achieving MDG 3 in regional countries will depend on a major increase in the number of girls gaining access to post-primary education. Australia could achieve a major impact over the next decade through a variety of measures, including targeted scholarships, ensuring that the design of school sanitation facilities does not discourage parents from sending their daughters to school and similar steps to maximize the entry and retention of girls at school.²¹

7. DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND REDUCTION

Recommendation:

Expand the disaster risk management program for targeted regional countries and contribute to regional leadership of ideas on this topic.

Along with other aid donors, the Australian government has increasingly recognised that the capacity of local communities is the pivotal factor for successful disaster responses and disaster risk reduction. ACFID welcomed recent statements by Prime Minister Rudd, after meetings with his Japanese and Indonesian counterparts, about the need for enhanced regional cooperation on this subject. Improvements in AusAID's disaster-risk management (DRM) and disaster risk-reduction (DRR) programs in the last two federal budgets were also welcome. ACFID now recommends bolder action to leverage Australia's considerable practitioner-based expertise in relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness.²²

The World Bank and other donors have strengthened their focus on capacity-building for disasters and supply-chain management. ACFID urges the Australian government to follow this course by treating DRM as a cross-cutting issue for the whole aid program. This means applying DRM principles to all areas. It includes targeted measures for gender sensitisation and adaptation to climate change and disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation.

It is recommended that new funding for DRM be integrated fully into the main AusAID program and, thereby, link effectively with related programs on vulnerability (child protection and disability), protection, gender and climate change. The UK's time-bound DRM policy framework provides a useful model.

²¹ United Nations' Development Programme. (2005). *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Gender-complete.pdf>

²² AusAID. (2005). *Humanitarian Action Policy*. http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/humanitarian_policy.pdf

With additional investment, Australia also has the capacity to leverage world-class research on risk reduction and capacity-building for DRM. This would draw on federal and state agencies, think tanks, NGOs, academics, aid contractors and others. This is currently a notable weakness. A modest investment in communication and promotion of DRM best practice to the Australian public would also be desirable.

Australian NGOs and local civil society provide a critical role in promoting supply-chain management at a community level and providing education and support for preparedness and rehabilitation. ACFID urges the government to build on its regional approach to NGO capacity building in the Pacific and the institutional capacity funding provided as a component of AusAID's existing Periodic Funding Agreement (PFA).

ACFID commends the Prime Minister's focus on improved regional collaboration in this field during his recent discussions in Japan and Indonesia. While the role of existing regional disaster-related mechanisms needs to be taken fully into account, including that of the Asia Disaster Preparedness Centre and South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, ACFID urges the government to pursue an enhanced regional cooperation agenda with vigour.