

One-page summary

This is the first Australian aid stakeholder survey. It is a survey of aid workers and experts. Its purpose is to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the Australian aid program and provide suggestions for improvement.

Australian aid is delivered through a complex set of partnerships. The views of those involved in its delivery should be heeded. We rarely hear from those involved in the delivery of aid. Yet they are the best informed, and the most aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of Australian aid.

Altogether, 356 respondents participated in the survey, which ran from June to August 2013. The responses include the staff of NGOs, development contractors, multilateral organizations, the Australian government and developing country governments, as well as consultants and academics. A representative sample of NGOs and development contractor senior executives was selected; others self-selected.

While in some cases views differ across and between stakeholders, there are surprisingly many areas of agreement. Key findings include:

- The aid program is viewed as good and improving.
- There is an unfinished aid reform agenda: while there is overall satisfaction with the geographical and sectoral focus of the aid program, a wide range of aid effectiveness weaknesses are identified.
- High staff turnover is identified as the most serious aid effectiveness weakness, and slow decision making as the second most serious.
- Strategic and commercial interests are perceived to have significant weight as aid objectives. Combined, they are perceived to have more weight than poverty reduction, and more weight than they deserve.

The survey offers invaluable guidance for the Coalition government as it seeks to redirect the Australian aid program. The sense of the survey is that Labor put in place a good aid effectiveness reform agenda, but failed to follow through on it. The current uncertainty around the aid program and its management is a risk to aid effectiveness, but there is also an opportunity for positive change. The survey results suggest that aid and the national interest are already well aligned. The real challenge is lifting aid effectiveness, where weaknesses are perceived to exist across the board. Aid effectiveness reform efforts need to be redoubled. Aid benchmarks should track whether the weaknesses identified by the survey are being remedied.

The richness of results from the survey suggests its worth. The results of the survey are interesting: many could not be predicted. They show that the broader community of aid stakeholders has a lot in common. They point to the need for that community to make its voice heard, and do a better job of getting aid and aid effectiveness onto the policy agenda. We plan to repeat the survey in two years' time.