AusAID launches Transparency Charter

AusAID released its Transparency Charter last week, committing to the publication of detailed information on AusAID’s work ‘in a timely fashion and in a format that is useful and accessible’.

The charter also promises local language summaries of aid projects, participation in the International Aid Transparency Initiative and the publication of annual targets for improving transparency in the aid program.

Coinciding with the release of the charter, the first two of AusAID’s improved country pages also went live, for Vanuatu and the Philippines. The new pages show progress towards MDGs, Australian aid spending by sector, the number of Australian Volunteers in-country, Australia Award recipients from the country and a summary of aid project results, funding and research. There is also information on why and how Australia gives aid to these countries, advice for how business and community can get involved, and perhaps most useful of all, a listing of projects by sector. The Transparency Framework details more of what is to come.

In his speech to the House of Representatives marking the launch, Kevin Rudd stated that AusAID would also be regularly releasing its internal audit reports.

Despite the new transparency commitment, opposition foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop has said she is concerned that the government has not sufficiently focused on the 39th recommendation in the Aid Review to establish performance benchmarks.

Mixed results in aid rankings

A number of new aid rankings have been released this month by various organisations — AusAID’s performance has been mixed.

AusAID's transparency charter move is perhaps very well timed, given that Australia’s performance in Publish What You Fund's international transparency rankings was rated as ‘poor’. According to the report, AusAID’s transparency placed it below the average for multilateral and bilateral donors. It ranked 36th out of 57, with the key criticisms being a lack of information on AusAID's activities, a lack of local language information, and a lack of impact and results publications.

Brookings also published its Quality of Official Development Assistance (QUODA) assessment. The assessment focuses on four dimensions of aid quality: maximising efficiency; fostering institutions; reducing burden; and transparency and learning. Australia performed above average on transparency and learning.
and was average on the other three dimensions. Australia showed year-on-year improvement in all
dimensions except reducing burden. On fostering institutions, its improvement was the largest of any country
or multilateral.

The CGD also released its 2011 Commitment to Development Index (CDI). On this, Australia ranked 9th out
of of 22 bilateral donors. Australia scored well on its trade, security and investment linkages. However its aid,
migration, environment and technology commitments relegated it to the middle of the pack.

**Business for development**

Rudd’s speech to the House included remarks on the importance of engaging businesses in the
development process. As recommended by the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness earlier this year,
AusAID will seek to further engage with the private sector. AusAID’s first Annual Consultative Forum with
Business is slated for June 2012. The aid agency is also encouraging businesses to participate in the
Millennium Development Goals Business Call to Action and Business for Millennium Development initiative.

Catherine de Fontenay from the Melbourne Business School sees significant opportunities for Australian
businesses through involvement in such programs.

**Busan HLF4**

The international aid community has been busy preparing for this week’s 4th High Level Forum on Aid
Effectiveness in Busan and AusAID has been no exception.

The Office of Development Effectiveness has published a useful Busan resource page, bringing together
case studies, interviews, podcasts and briefs on aid effectiveness.

The ODE has also recently published a brief looking at mutual accountability, discussing how it looks in
practice in the Australian aid program and why progress on donor-recipient relationships have been
stagnating globally. The brief also provides recommendations for the donor community to discuss at Busan.

**All Children Reading and other US partnerships**

During President Obama’s recent visit to Canberra and Darwin, AusAID committed to a new partnership, All
Children Reading, with USAID and World Vision. The program aims to improve reading outcomes for 100
million children in primary school. Australia will contribute $5 million to the program over the next two years.
According to USAID, in total the partners will commit $20 million over ‘several years’ to the literacy program.

AusAID also announced that it would be partnering with the US on a program to reduce the gender gap in
mobile phone ownership in developing countries and to strengthen justice and governance in Afghanistan.

**East Asia Summit**

The East Asia Summit was held in Bali this month and the Prime Minister took the opportunity to announce a
number of aid commitments for the region.

- **$24 million** to assist Australia’s Asian neighbours to combat infectious diseases.
- A joint Indonesia-Australia initiative to improve regional responses to natural disasters, with Australia
pledging $1 million to support a disaster coordination secretariat in Jakarta’s ASEAN Humanitarian
Assistance Centre.
- Up to $15 million to help Vietnam with climate change adaptation, in partnership with the German
Government, as well as a further $15 million for civil society groups addressing climate change in SE
Asia.
- Research collaboration on urban sustainability and water management.
A hardly scandalous fraud story

Figures published in Hansard have shown that some 32 contractors have been sacked by AusAID in the past five years for fraud or for botching projects, and the aid agency has torn up the contracts of two organisations delivering programs.

An AusAID spokeswoman told the West Australian that the cases of fraud or mismanagement cost taxpayers $218,500. Almost $171,000 had been recovered so far.

In brief

- What impact do illicit drugs have on development? Robert Ali calls on Australian aid to better tackle the problem.
- Has Australian aid and immigration detention helped Nauru bounce back?
- Have RAMSI and AusAID excluded women from the peace process in the Solomon Islands?
- An AusAID program in Flores, Indonesia, is bringing together the knowledge of traditional birthing attendants and trained midwives to improve maternal health.
- Pacific donors such as Australia and New Zealand need to better realise the potential of information communication technologies, says the regional head of ‘One Laptop Per Child’.
- AusAID has opened a new office in Zimbabwe to increase its ties in Africa.
- AusAID and UNDP have funded an email group network in the Pacific for climate change for countries to share ideas and experiences.
- Some $5 million in funding has been provided by AusAID to enhance food security in Indonesia’s drought-prone East Nusa Tenggara province.
- AusAID has provided funding to 32 civil society organisations in Fiji.
- Julia Gillard has vowed that Australia will complete its training and transition mission in Afghanistan.
- Is AusAID’s focus on education in Papua New Guinea misplaced?

Ashlee Betteridge is a Researcher for the Development Policy Centre. Aid Buzz is our monthly round up of the issues and news in Australian aid.