



Best of the blog 2015

By Camilla Burkot and Stephen Howes

In what has now been established as a Devpolicy tradition, for our final blog post for 2015 we again take the opportunity to remind you of the wonderful analysis brought to you by the Devpolicy blog over the last year.

Our top blog

Every year we nominate a top blog, one that speaks to our hearts as well as our heads. This year we're nominating Robin Davies' moving ten-year anniversary reflection on the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. Robin was living in Indonesia at the time, and was in Aceh within days of the tsunami. Robin concludes his [two-part](#) blog as follows:

I have a photograph of an unknown New South Wales Fire Brigades search and rescue officer, looking down from one of the bridges over the wide Krueng Aceh river. The waterway is half-clogged with what appear to be thousands upon thousands of pieces of charred lumber, but which are mostly people's dead bodies. While he and the other emergency responders who were there will always carry such images with them, far worse and more pervasive memories must haunt the people of Aceh and Nias.

Your Christmas reading

This year, thanks especially to Terence Wood and Camilla Burkot's [fortnightly links](#), but also due to a number of individual reviewers, we brought you an increased number of book reviews and reading suggestions. If you want something for Christmas, try [Honor Among Thieves](#), [Indonesia Etc.](#), [Give a Man a Fish](#), or [Inside the Crocodile](#).

For those who'd prefer to spend their holidays reliving the year that was, here are the highlights across our three major research areas:

Australian aid

By far the biggest story of the year in Australian aid was the billion dollar cut to the aid budget in the 2015-16 federal budget. Following on from the December 2014 MYEFO announcement, [Robin Davies](#) and [Terence Wood](#) placed their bets on where the hatchet might fall. All was revealed on Budget Night in May, with [Stephen Howes](#), [Matthew Dornan](#), [Robin Davies](#), and [Anthony Swan](#), among [others](#), providing a breakdown of the budget papers. Joel Negin [mourned](#) the virtual end of Australian aid to Africa, and Ashlee Betteridge [assessed](#) the potential impacts on Australian volunteering. Amid all the doom and gloom, Matt Morris and Julia Newton-Howes offered some more positive [thoughts](#) on what might be done to repair the damage.

Beyond the budget, we continued to analyse Australian aid policy. Benjamin Day [examined](#) the Coalition's 'new aid paradigm' through the prism of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's speeches. The Minister's comments around the possibility of partnering with Coke to deliver aid in the Pacific also [generated](#) lively discussion; more generally, the government's emphasis on private sector engagement was dissected as part of a [parliamentary inquiry](#) and [research](#) in the NGO sector. We also examined the new [Health for Development strategy](#), Australia's [response to the Syrian crisis](#), and the launch of the long-awaited [innovationXchange](#).

The change of government in September represented another opportunity to reassess the aid program. We took a closer look at Malcolm Turnbull's [track record](#) on aid and international development-related issues, and former Parliamentary Secretary Bob McMullan offered some [proposals](#) for the new Prime Minister and his Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Beyond government aid, we continued to share analyses of the [slowdown](#) in Australian public giving for development and the [effectiveness](#) of NGO fundraising. We also [wished](#) ACFID a happy 50th birthday, and presented new research on Australian [public opinion](#) on [aid](#).

PNG and the Pacific

The outlook for PNG was bleak at the outset of 2015 – Bal Kama wondered whether this was to be [‘the year of the state of emergency’](#), while Stephen Howes queried whether PNG was [‘heading for a crisis’](#). The PNG economy was seriously shaken by the global collapse of oil prices, justifying a number of these concerns. Paul Flanagan’s [very late 2014 analysis](#), though controversial at the time, proved remarkably prescient. Paul subsequently provided commentary on the [March](#) and [September](#) monetary statements, [MYEFO](#), [Supplementary Budget](#), and [2016 Budget](#), while Rohan Fox gave us a comprehensive analysis of [PNG’s exchange rate problems](#).

Foreign relations also proved challenging this year. [Events](#) on [Manus](#) and [Nauru](#), and their implications for Australian aid and foreign policy, were critically questioned by a number of commentators. Allegations that Australia and New Zealand have been spying on Pacific Island countries [raised questions](#) of sovereignty and statehood.

In happier news, Kath Taplin [documented](#) the impact that Femili PNG (which Devpolicy provides pro bono support to) is having in supporting PNG women to escape from family and sexual violence. Lindy Kanan also [summarised](#) new research on the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on business in PNG, and Ashlee Betteridge [spoke](#) with Linda Van Leeuwen about steps that PNG’s resources sector is taking to respond to GBV. Devpolicy’s partnership with the UPNG School of Business and Public Policy also commenced this year, providing an opportunity to reflect on the teaching of economics at UPNG from [1969](#) to the

[present](#).

Elsewhere in the Pacific, natural disasters and climate change were dominant themes. Cyclone Pam devastated Vanuatu in March; Colin Collett van Rooyen [reported](#) on the country's resilience in the face of natural disaster, while Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain assessed the storm's [economic impact](#) and [cost of reconstruction](#). The need to establish a strong regional response to climate change was a [leading topic](#) ahead of the 46th Pacific Islands Forum, though the outcome of the Forum was ultimately deemed [underwhelming](#).

Climate change issues also [intersected](#) with Pacific labour mobility, which continued to be a major area of analysis for Devpolicy. We reported [findings](#) from the most comprehensive survey of Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) employers yet, and presented perspectives on the SWP from both [recruiters](#) and [employers](#). We also [discussed](#) the possibilities for enhancing Pacific labour mobility offered by White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, and the barriers posed by the [high cost of sending remittances](#) to the Pacific.

Global development issues

2015 was marked by a number of landmark events for global development. The outcome of the 3rd Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa was [applauded](#) by Ewen McDonald and Jonathan Kings, while Robin Davies seized the occasion to [explore](#) two dogmas of development financing. Our [series](#) on the newly-adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) elicited a range of responses, both [positive](#) and [negative](#), and drew analogies from myriad [musical genres](#). And we all took away some valuable [lessons for development](#) from this year's Rugby World Cup.

The blog also kept pace with China's growing role in global development. On the launch of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), we [offered](#) a Chinese

perspective on the AIIB, and [traced](#) China's historical emergence as a development leader. This year we also asked whether there is still a role for [the WHO](#) and how developing countries think [DAC aid agencies should evolve](#), and debated whether aid practitioners should [worry about economic inequality](#). Grant Walton reflected on the politics of working with civil society, and on the latest corruption debates, [global](#) and [closer to home](#).

Humanitarian aid and disaster responses featured prominently on the blog in 2015, with pieces on [improving the efficiency and effectiveness](#) of humanitarian aid, on the [failures of the humanitarian system](#) in Yemen, and on [strengthening local actors](#) to improve disaster response. On capacity building and training more generally, Jim Adams [spoke](#) at length on capacity building as part of his keynote address at the 2015 PNG Update, while Jo Spratt [proposed](#) some core competencies for development professionals, and Joel Negin [outlined](#) a new model of health workforce training. Across these pieces, both learning and context emerged as inescapable themes - a trend Terence Wood would [no doubt approve of](#).

Thank you.

Well, that's a wrap, as they say. If we didn't mention your post, don't take it personally - there just wasn't enough room! We appreciate every one of the 142 authors who wrote our 271 blogs and 149 'in briefs' in 2015, and who thereby kept the blog alive and well through its fifth year.

Many thanks also to everyone who read, shared, liked, tweeted, and commented. Enjoy the break, and see you in 2016.

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About the author/s

Camilla Burkot

Camilla Burkot was a Research Officer at the Development Policy Centre, and Editor of the Devpolicy Blog, from 2015 to 2017. She has a background in social anthropology and holds a Master of Public Health from Columbia University, and has field experience in Eastern and Southern Africa, and PNG. She now works for the Burnet Institute.

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