

Some proposals for Malcolm Turnbull and Steven Ciobo

By **Bob McMullan**

I welcome the decision to [appoint](#) a Minister for International Development in Malcolm Turnbull's new portfolio allocations.

With the best will in the world it is not possible for a Foreign Minister to give aid and development issues the attention they require.

It seems to me to suggest the opportunity for a fresh start.

Of course I would like to increase the budget provision and restore some of my favourite initiatives like the Africa program but this is unrealistic in the short term.

Therefore, here are some suggestions within the existing framework.

1. Establish a Development Finance Institution focussed on the Pacific, preferably jointly with New Zealand. I have been [on the record about this](#) for some time. It is interesting to note the Centre for Global Development has [recently been pushing](#) a similar line for the United States.
2. Focus on remittances and reducing their cost. The World Bank and others have been looking at policy initiatives to assist the flow and improve the utilisation of remittances. Our region is one of those most dependent on such flows. (E.g. In Samoa, remittances have been assessed at 23% of GDP.)
3. Look at the new thinking about cash payments in disaster responses. The idea of empowering people to spend money on what they think is most important has real merit.

4. Refocus on mining and development. In my experience this is an area where Australian expertise is valued internationally.
5. Build on the temporary migration initiative in the Pacific. There has been solid progress on this but there is more that could be done.
6. Give more emphasis to volunteering. This [was cut](#) in the last budget but when well managed can be very cost effective.
7. Focus on taxation and revenue collection in developing countries. The OECD and others are focussing here following the [Financing for Development Conference](#).
8. Take the lead on food security to get it away from the cul-de-sac of self-sufficiency. This is another area of acknowledged Australian expertise. There is a policy dimension as well as the vital agricultural research function.
9. Re-examine the proposed Pacer Plus agreement and turn it into an economic development initiative.
10. Offer some hope for better times to come. If we can't do more now, make it clear that this is caused by short-term budget constraints and not by a sense that we are doing enough.

The other nine suggestions are important, but I consider number 10 to be the most important.

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About the author/s

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Bob McMullan has had a long and distinguished career in the Australian Parliament as one of Australia's pre-eminent Labor politicians. He is a former

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