

The need for leadership and ambition in Australian development policy



by Bob McMullan

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It was great to see Australia's lead on disability and development issues recognised by the UK's [House of Commons International Development Committee](#) recently. In their [Report](#) on Disability and Development the Committee recognises the role Australia has played in this sector and makes several recommendations which suggest DFID should follow that lead.

This is most important because the report points the way to more and more effective cooperation between DFID and DFAT on disability issues, both bilaterally and within multinational agencies and IFIs.

However, it was also important as an illustration of the way in which a middle sized power like Australia can take a lead if it is committed, clever and targeted. Just because we are not big enough to lead everywhere does not mean we cannot lead anywhere.

There are, of course, important examples from previous diplomatic initiatives, such as the Cambodian peace process, but overall in the development space we have not been ambitious enough. Even within the more limited financial ambition of the current aid program there is room for leadership.

I hope we will build on our world leading role in disability and development and avoidable blindness while looking very selectively at further opportunities.

Many worthwhile lessons can be learnt from following the lead of others (e.g. the suggestion for an Australian development finance institution for the Pacific) but from time to time we should not be afraid to lead.

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