

# Towards a new development policy

by Pat Conroy

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Hon Pat Conroy MP, Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific, at AAC2022

*Photo Credit: Alexandra Orme Photography*

*This is an edited extract from the [opening address](#) delivered by the Hon Pat Conroy MP at the Australasian AID Conference (AAC2022) on Tuesday 29 November.*

This conference has grown into a pre-eminent fixture on Australia’s international development calendar, since it began as a humbly named “workshop” in 2014. And now, I am thrilled to be here today as Australia’s Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

I’m proud to be here as a champion for the Australian aid program. I see an effective development program as critically important to advancing our national interests.

As you know – the new Australian Government is designing a new development policy. The policy will be finalised in the first half of next year. Without getting ahead of the careful work developing the new policy, I’d like to flag some of the things I think we may want to do differently.

I’d like to find a way to embed a First Nations approach in our development work.

This is likely to guide not only what we do through the development program but also how we do it. As Foreign Minister Wong has said, “with daunting challenges facing the world, we have much to learn from First Nations peoples – both at home and in international fora”. Elevating First Nations perspectives into how we find solutions to shared problems – including through our development program – has never been more important.

There are also other elements that I would like to integrate throughout our development program, in particular: gender equality, climate change and disability.

We have already reinstated the target that 80 per cent of our aid investments

advance gender equality. And we have a new requirement that any future aid investments over 3 million dollars have a gender equality objective. So we have a good basis for action, but I would like to explore this further.

On climate change, I think I've already made it clear – the Government knows that for many countries in our region, if not most, dealing with climate change is the number one priority. We will act accordingly.

On disability, I'm proud that under the last Labor Government, Australia was the first donor country to develop a disability inclusion strategy, which led the way for many others to follow. Yet 13 years on, it's clear that people with disabilities are too often excluded and left behind.

With that in mind, I'm pleased to announce here today that Australia will develop a new disability strategy for our development program. This will follow the launch of our new development policy.

I would also like to explore how we can work more with local organisations in developing countries. We should look to draw in local knowledge and on-the-ground expertise to make our programs better. We're currently working through this with the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, which we boosted by \$30 million in last month's budget.

Another element I would like the new policy to address is our approach to ensuring quality, transparency and accountability in our development program. We need to develop a more rigorous, evidence-based approach so we can evaluate whether our aid is effective, and build public support for the program.

One final element I want to flag here that I will seek to embed in our new policy – particularly when it comes to how we implement our new policy and programs – will be a focus on local content. Our investments across the region must deliver local jobs and local procurement wherever possible. It's the most direct economic contribution many of our programs can make to communities, and it's the best way for us to strengthen relationships.

We are, of course, consulting widely as we design our new development policy.

I'm sure that many people in this room have already provided input. Your views and experience are valued. We are expecting to receive hundreds of public submissions, which will be carefully studied. We've held around 30 roundtable discussions across Australia. Our overseas posts have led consultations with their partner governments and local organisations.

In the input we've received so far, some themes have begun to emerge.

One theme is that some want to increase investments in the areas of climate, gender, disability and civil society. I think you'll have noticed from my remarks today that I agree. As always, the issue is what to prioritise – within the budget we have.

Another theme emerging from our consultations is the need to strengthen development capability to help translate policy into action. I'm committed to strengthening development capability in DFAT.

Before I finish, I'd like to summarise the key messages I hope you'll take away from my presentation today.

This government takes international development seriously. We're putting it at the heart of our engagement with our region.

We're thinking deeply about how to make it more effective – so that it produces good outcomes for our partner countries and for Australia.

We're better aligning it with all of the other instruments we have at our disposal – diplomatic, economic, educational, cultural and personal – to accelerate the deeper engagement that we want with our region.

And we're listening – to partner governments, to civil society, to academics, to the private sector and to ordinary Australians – to make sure we get it right.

I wish you all the very best for your conference. You are grappling with some of the most important issues for our nation, our region and our world.

Thank you.

*Read a [transcript of the Minister's full speech](#).*

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The Hon Pat Conroy MP is the Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

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