

What about the private sector?

By Mel Dunn

Like many who watched live, or later observed the social networks light up, I was pleased to hear the Australian aid program [get some airplay](#) reasonably early in this election. I thought it was strongly delivered by a very articulate and sensible leader - importantly the message came across as authentic, delivered by someone who believes in our role on the global stage through aid and development. It was also great to hear Tanya Plibersek talk with conviction about the importance of the aid program and the impact of budget cuts.

This weekend, however, I was left with the feeling that something was missing. It is still not clear whether I see this as a purposeful omission, or just that not everything can be captured in a soundbite. Maybe the strong presence of the NGO community at the announcement naturally influences the shape of any message. Regardless of the why, the lack of consideration of the role of the private sector in development in this announcement was curious.

I am not for a moment saying I am against the NGO community and their leadership - to the contrary, their leadership and public stance should be applauded. However, it would be hard to imagine addressing the SDGs more completely than we did the MDGs without the involvement of the private sector, in all of its permutations.

Some might recall me publicly opine similar subject matter when the Foreign Minister launched the new aid paradigm a while back; I shared my [cautious optimism](#) at the future with the acknowledgement of the role of the private sector in contributing to positive development. Similarly articulate and well-reasoned by someone who I still think cares about development.

I am not advocating for any particular political party. I am hopeful at some point

in time that regardless of political affiliation all our nation's leaders align on the importance of the aid program and invest in it accordingly.

Involvement, for me, is a key word. We are all in this together. I remain convinced that no NGO (either in its own right or as a conglomerate), no single UN agency, no single donor and certainly not the private sector alone is the panacea for what is needed. Together, though, we might be.

Now that the role and value of the private sector in development has gathered some momentum, it would be a shame for this feature of the Australian aid program to recede. Let's hope this topic's relative silence in this announcement is more to do with speechwriting and the maturity of NGO advocacy than it does with future policy framing.

About the author/s

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