

Aid and Asia Buzz (Aug 17): New donors for Burma | North Korea & Manila Floods | China's \$20 billion for Africa | Clinton & SE Asia

Author : Ashlee Betteridge

Date : August 17, 2012



Welcome to the first Aid and Asia Buzz. Our newest monthly wrap compiles the latest news and analysis on aid to and from Asia.

Burma catching the eyes of donors

Whether or not you believe the declarations of growing openness in Burma following the elections this year, the country has certainly attracted the attention of donors. With one in four people living in poverty and three out of four not having access to electricity, donors are seeing potential to assist in Southeast Asia's poorest country as the regime opens up to international investment and makes shaky steps toward democracy.

The World Bank opened a new office in Yangon at the end of July and [looks set to resume lending to the country](#) after a 25-year hiatus. The Bank has said it will be submitting plans to its board to offer up to \$85 million in grants to build schools, roads and other projects.

The Asian Development Bank also [opened an office and dispatched staff](#) in late July and has completed preliminary needs assessments in a number of key sectors.

Some bilateral donors are increasing their commitment, while others are re-engaging. Australian [aid to Burma](#) in 2012/13 will be \$63.8 million, up from \$48.8 million in 2011/12, with Foreign Minister Bob Carr [announcing \\$5 million will be targeted towards child and maternal health](#). While USAID still primarily targets its assistance towards refugees on the Thai-Burma border, it is currently [taking steps](#) to re-establish an in-country mission.

Anyone who has been keeping their eye on development job listing sites will also have noticed the growing number of ads for new Country Directors and Operations Managers in Burma, flagging the growing number of NGOs looking to start up programs there.

While interest from donors has been rising, Burma's treatment of the Rohingya Muslim minority group and the ongoing conflict in Rakhine state has been drawing strong criticism — as has the response of neighbouring South Asian countries [such as Bangladesh](#). Authorities in the country reportedly told three international aid agencies to [stop assisting the Rohingya refugees](#).

The conflict has led to large numbers of displaced. UNHCR has [assisted some 30,000 displaced persons in Rakhine state](#) and is distributing humanitarian supplies donated by South Korea. The International Committee of the Red Cross is providing [medical assistance in the state](#), and has highlighted the difficulties faced by humanitarian operators in gaining access. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has ordered that [\\$50 million in aid](#) be sent to help the Muslim minority, while Turkey's Foreign Minister is [negotiating delivery of aid to the group](#). ASEAN countries are also [considering providing humanitarian aid](#).

Floods: North Korea and Manila

Devastating floods that have killed some 169 people in North Korea (with a further 400 people reported missing and a [reported 60,000 made homeless](#)) have led the closed country to [approach the UN for aid](#). The World Food Programme announced in early August that it would [begin sending food aid](#) after a UN mission visited affected areas and found considerable damage to maize, soybean and rice fields. In the wake of the natural disasters, leader Kim Jong-un held a public meeting with Chinese diplomats in early August, leading to speculation that North Korea is ['again seeking food and material assistance from Beijing.'](#) Food security has been an ongoing problem in the impoverished country since widespread famine in the 1990s.

Widespread monsoonal flooding inundated Metro Manila in early August, with more rain and flooding [expected to continue](#) until the end of the month. It was estimated that [some 80 percent of the city was underwater](#) at the peak of the flooding on August 9, with two million people affected. The flooding has had a wide range of impacts — including [food price hikes](#) and challenges for the country's [call centre industry](#). While the Philippines has deployed domestic resources to help those affected by the flooding, it has also [appealed](#) for international assistance because of the scale of the disaster. Australia released [\\$2 million worth of food and emergency supplies](#) for the country, while the Singapore Red Cross donated [\\$80,000 of relief supplies](#). Other donors have included the [European Union and Canada](#). Catholic agencies such as [Caritas](#) and [Catholic Relief Services](#) have also started appeals.

China pledges loans for African nations

In a speech to a gathering of African leaders, China President Hi Jintao announced that China would [lend some \\$20 billion to African governments](#) over the next three years. The loans would be primarily focused on infrastructure and agriculture. The President also pledged to train 30,000 Africans, offer 18,000 scholarships and send 1,500 medical personnel to the continent.

Chinese aid to Africa has been a continually divisive issue — [some](#) have [welcomed the announcement](#), while others have [expressed suspicion](#).

US to expand SE Asia aid

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton toured Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in early July, coinciding with the ASEAN Forum. While [talks at the forum](#) mostly revolved around the ongoing South China Sea dispute, Clinton used the trip to announce a modest [\\$50 million commitment](#) over the next five years to improve health, education and the environment in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma. Clinton also spoke on the US plan to reinvigorate its development assistance to the region through the [Asia Pacific Strategic Engagement Initiative](#).

Her four-hour visit to Laos was the first by a US Secretary of State in 57 years. [During the visit](#), she pledged greater US assistance in de-mining efforts and support for investment. In Cambodia, Clinton was seen to make a subtle dig at [Chinese aid to the country](#) when she talked on how USAID was about helping people instead of being able to 'point to a big building we have built.'

AusAID revitalising knowledge sector in Indonesia

AusAID's [knowledge sector support program for Indonesia](#) is generating interest among development bloggers. The [design document for the program](#) was released in July. The program aims to build the supply

of knowledge products and financial support for research in the country to ultimately increase the quality of pro-poor policy making.

Bloggers are largely positive about the program. Enrique Mendizabal calls AusAID's initiative 'by far one of the most interesting programmes related to think tanks out there', though he offers some [recommendations](#). Rick Davies has [provided some input](#) on Monitoring and Evaluation considerations for the program. AusAID's Scott Guggenheim and Ben Davis wrote a [public response to Mendizabal's recommendations on AusAID's blog](#), generating more [positive dialogue](#).

Hopefully this refreshing engagement with bloggers will extend to the dynamic Indonesian blogosphere during the implementation of the program.

In Brief

USAID and AusAID have signed a [Memorandum of Cooperation](#) to work on pandemic disease threats in Southeast Asia.

The role of South-by-South development cooperation, including growing Asian donors China and India, was examined at the [2012 Development Cooperation Forum](#) at UN HQ in July.

The United Arab Emirates is providing aid to [mobilise food caravans](#) in Pakistan to help impoverished families break their fasts during Ramadan.

U.S. efforts to [build major infrastructure in Afghanistan](#) are running far behind schedule and may not survive the military pull-out, a government watchdog has warned.

South Korea is [scaling up its aid to Uganda](#) and to Africa as a whole.

Bangladesh is looking at options to continue the Padma Bridge project after the World Bank pulled out, including [financing the project themselves](#). This has raised concerns that money will be redirected from other key areas of the country's development budget.

A highly critical [new book on the Afghanistan war](#) shows some of the [failings of USAID's operations](#) in the country, including in the [Afghan cotton sector](#) and with [human resource challenges](#).

Drying up of international donor funds could have a serious impact on Asia's [fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemic](#).

Land grabs [continue to be an issue in Cambodia](#), with international and regional human rights groups expressing concern and calling for a halt to all aid in response – following the example of the World Bank which suspended aid last year over land issues.

Ashlee Betteridge is a Researcher for the [Development Policy Centre](#).