

Aid Buzz (November 29): AusAID Transparency Charter | Aid rankings | Busan | US partnerships

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Date : November 29, 2011

AusAID launches Transparency Charter

AusAID released its [Transparency Charter](#) last week, committing to the publication of detailed information on AusAID's work 'in a timely fashion and in a format that is useful and accessible'.

The charter also promises local language summaries of aid projects, participation in the International Aid Transparency Initiative and the publication of annual targets for improving transparency in the aid program.

Coinciding with the release of the charter, the first two of AusAID's improved country pages also went live, for [Vanuatu](#) and the [Philippines](#). The new pages show progress towards MDGs, Australian aid spending by sector, the number of Australian Volunteers in-country, Australia Award recipients from the country and a summary of aid project results, funding and research. There is also information on why and how Australia gives aid to these countries, advice for how business and community can get involved, and perhaps most useful of all, a listing of projects by sector. The [Transparency Framework](#) details more of what is to come.

In his [speech](#) to the House of Representatives marking the launch, Kevin Rudd stated that AusAID would also be regularly releasing its internal audit reports.

Despite the new transparency commitment, opposition foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop has said [she is concerned](#) that the government has not sufficiently focused on the 39th recommendation in the Aid Review to establish performance benchmarks.

Mixed results in aid rankings

A number of new aid rankings have been released this month by various organisations — AusAID's performance has been mixed.

AusAID's transparency charter move is perhaps very well timed, given that Australia's performance in Publish What You Fund's international transparency rankings was rated as 'poor'. [According to the report](#), AusAID's transparency placed it below the average for multilateral and bilateral donors. It ranked 36th out of 57, with the [key criticisms](#) being a lack of information on AusAID's activities, a lack of local language information, and a lack of impact and results publications.

Brookings also published its [Quality of Official Development Assistance](#) (QUODA) assessment. The assessment focuses on four dimensions of aid quality: maximising efficiency; fostering institutions; reducing burden; and transparency and learning. Australia performed above average on transparency and learning

and was average on the other three dimensions. Australia showed year-on-year improvement in all dimensions except reducing burden. On fostering institutions, its improvement was the largest of any country or multilateral.

The CGD also released its 2011 [Commitment to Development Index](#) (CDI). On this, Australia ranked 9th out of 22 bilateral donors. Australia scored well on its trade, security and investment linkages. However its aid, migration, environment and technology commitments relegated it to the middle of the pack.

Business for development

Rudd's [speech](#) to the House included remarks on the importance of engaging businesses in the development process. As recommended by the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness earlier this year, AusAID will seek to further engage with the private sector. AusAID's first Annual Consultative Forum with Business is slated for June 2012. The aid agency is also [encouraging businesses](#) to participate in the Millennium Development Goals Business Call to Action and Business for Millennium Development initiative.

Catherine de Fontenay from the Melbourne Business School sees [significant opportunities](#) for Australian businesses through involvement in such programs.

Busan HLF4

The international aid community has been busy preparing for this week's 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan and AusAID has been no exception.

The Office of Development Effectiveness has published a useful [Busan resource page](#), bringing together case studies, interviews, podcasts and briefs on aid effectiveness.

The ODE has also recently published a [brief](#) looking at mutual accountability, discussing how it looks in practice in the Australian aid program and why progress on donor-recipient relationships have been stagnating globally. The brief also provides recommendations for the donor community to discuss at Busan.

All Children Reading and other US partnerships

During President Obama's recent visit to Canberra and Darwin, AusAID committed to a new partnership, [All Children Reading](#), with USAID and World Vision. The program aims to improve reading outcomes for 100 million children in primary school. Australia will contribute \$5 million to the program over the next two years. According to USAID, in total the partners will commit [\\$20 million over 'several years'](#) to the literacy program.

AusAID also announced that it would be [partnering with the US](#) on a program to reduce the gender gap in mobile phone ownership in developing countries and to strengthen justice and governance in Afghanistan.

East Asia Summit

The East Asia Summit was held in Bali this month and the Prime Minister took the opportunity to announce a number of aid commitments for the region.

- [\\$24 million](#) to assist Australia's Asian neighbours to combat infectious diseases.
- A joint Indonesia-Australia initiative to improve regional responses to [natural disasters](#), with Australia pledging \$1 million to support a disaster coordination secretariat in Jakarta's ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre.
- Up to \$15 million to help Vietnam with [climate change](#) adaptation, in partnership with the German Government, as well as a further \$15 million for civil society groups addressing climate change in SE Asia.
- [Research collaboration](#) on urban sustainability and water management.

A hardly scandalous fraud story

[Figures published in Hansard](#) have shown that some 32 contractors have been sacked by AusAID in the past five years for fraud or for botching projects, and the aid agency has torn up the contracts of two organisations delivering programs.

An AusAID spokeswoman told the West Australian that the cases of fraud or mismanagement cost taxpayers \$218,500. Almost \$171,000 had been recovered so far.

In brief

- What impact do illicit drugs have on development? Robert Ali calls on Australian aid to [better tackle the problem](#).
- Has Australian aid and immigration detention [helped Nauru bounce back](#)?
- Have RAMSI and AusAID [excluded women from the peace process](#) in the Solomon Islands?
- An AusAID program in Flores, Indonesia, is bringing together the knowledge of traditional birthing attendants and trained midwives to [improve maternal health](#).
- Pacific donors such as Australia and New Zealand need to [better realise the potential of information communication technologies](#), says the regional head of 'One Laptop Per Child'.
- AusAID has [opened a new office in Zimbabwe](#) to increase its ties in Africa.
- AusAID and UNDP have funded [an email group network](#) in the Pacific for climate change for countries to share ideas and experiences.
- Some \$5 million in funding has been provided by AusAID to [enhance food security](#) in Indonesia's drought-prone East Nusa Tenggara province.
- AusAID has provided funding to 32 [civil society organisations](#) in Fiji.
- [Julia Gillard has vowed](#) that Australia will complete its training and transition mission in Afghanistan.
- Is AusAID's focus on education in Papua New Guinea [misplaced](#)?

Ashlee Betteridge is a Researcher for the [Development Policy Centre](#). Aid Buzz is our monthly round up of the issues and news in Australian aid.