

Aid stories you missed in the holidays

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Welcome back to the Devpolicy Blog for 2014! We hope you were off doing other things besides trawling the internet for aid news over the Christmas and New Year break. We've gathered a quick list of what you may have missed during our hiatus to bring you (and us) back up to speed.

- The PNG drugs procurement issue was back in the news, with [confirmation](#) that Australia would be withdrawing \$38 million in support for the distribution of medical kits. The move follows the PNG government's awarding of the contract for medical supplies to a high-cost bid from a company that does not meet international standards. Stephen Howes [spoke with ABC News](#) on the issue, saying that Australia should be calling for a joint investigation into what went wrong with the procurement process. Gary Juffa, the outspoken governor of Oro Province, [told The Australian](#) that Australia's withdrawal from the distribution process would mean 'certain death for many Papua New Guineans' and called on PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill to intervene.
- Tanya Plibersek [wrote](#) on the importance of Australian aid in *The Guardian*, once again questioning the Coalition's lack of detail on where the planned aid cuts will fall.
- Staff from the Mae Tao Clinic on the Thai-Burma border are [continuing to speak out](#) after losing \$420,000 in Australian aid funding for their work – though this was a Labor not a Coalition cut.
- Timor-Leste's Kirsty Sword-Gusmao [weighed in](#) on the recent spying scandal, where the Australian aid program was allegedly as a cover for espionage. Sword-Gusmao criticised both the cuts to the aid program and the conduct of the Australian government.
- Cutting the administrative costs of aid will be a big priority of the Coalition government, [according to News.com.au](#). The OECD [released](#) its detailed final 2012 aid figures in December and the story draws on this data in relation to administration costs.
- A [report](#) from the Crawford Fund found that Australian agricultural development projects were [bringing benefits](#) for Australian farmers as well as aid recipients.
- Julie Bishop has [criticised](#) the performance of the Australia Network, as she did in her [Devpolicy speech](#) back in 2012.
- Looking beyond Australia, South Sudan has been in the headlines for all the wrong reasons in the past fortnight, with a [mounting humanitarian crisis](#) and renewed conflict leading to questions about [whether aid is the answer](#) for the fledgling nation. There have also been [increasing calls](#) for more humanitarian aid for those fleeing the Syria conflict, with *The Australian* [backing the cause](#) in an editorial. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon also [called for more assistance](#) for the Philippines, which is still recovering from Typhoon Haiyan.
- If you still have that holiday feeling and have time to read a longer article, Paul Farmer's piece on [Rethinking Foreign Aid](#) in *Foreign Affairs* is worth a look. And if you are looking for some radio, RN Rear Vision's [two part series on aid](#) is available to download.