

The big issues in aid and development: the Devpolicy brainstorming

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On April 19th Devpolicy [launched](#) our first annual report. A video of the proceedings is available [here](#).

As well as summarizing our [progress over our first full year](#), we also asked a panel of distinguished thinkers to give us their ideas of what the big issues are in aid and development policy in Australia and the region. Here is a summary of their suggestions, and an invitation for you to contribute yours.

Andrew Leigh: politics, China and evaluation

In a wide-ranging speech, ALP Fraser MP Andrew Leigh highlighted three key areas for further research.

First, we need a better understanding of the politics of foreign aid. Foreign aid by its very nature is a vulnerable area of government spending, especially as Australia's aid program scales up. We need to understand how to better make the aid arguments and how to maintain a strong bipartisan consensus for aid.

Second, we need to focus on the rise of China as an aid donor. We need to work towards shifting China's aid program towards poverty alleviation and away from political positioning.

Third, we need more randomized trials of aid projects. AusAID, like many government agencies, currently does no randomized trials. While they might not be the complete solution, they do provide the best evidence as to what works, and need to be brought into the mix, as part of a focus on aid effectiveness.

Julia Newton-Howes: effective for what?

The presentation of CARE CEO Julia Newton Howes can be found [here](#). Julia argued that the big issues we needed to grapple with were: the evolution of the global aid architecture and disappearance of a single accepted aid paradigm; the central importance of inequality and discrimination; the growing impact of population pressures and climate change; and the need to look at good governance from the bottom up, through civil society.

Julia also highlighted the need to move beyond talking about aid effectiveness and start talking about

“effective for what.” She highlighted three recent articles in *The Australian* (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) that underline the confusion in the public of what an effective aid program actually is: is it one which reduces poverty, or promotes Australia’s image, or encourages cultural exchange?

Simon McKean: low-hanging fruit and defence

2011 Australian of the Year and prominent businessman Simon McKean highlighted four major issues.

The first is the vital importance of communication. How can we effectively communicate the aid program to the broader public? We need to show that poverty eradication is doable within our generation. We need to take advantage of low-hanging fruit, by tackling what is doable (such as the eradication of polio), committing to it and ticking it off the list. This could then be effectively communicated as a definitive aid success.

The second is the defence budget. Simon argued that anyone who is passionate about development and aid should have an unashamed second objective of winding down our defence spending. If we are truly interested in self-preservation we will do a lot better investing more money in our neighbours’ prosperity through the aid program than funding armed forces.

The third is PNG and the Pacific. Australia is already about the most prosperous nation in the world, but we need to look beyond that to becoming a part of the most prosperous region in the world. PNG and the Pacific needs to be taken much more seriously in political discourse in Australia.

The fourth and last is private sector. Inclusive development as a goal for the private sector has a long way to go in Australia (further than in other countries).

What do you think?

What do you think are the big issues facing aid and development policy in Australia and the region? What should we be researching? Please add your suggestions in the comments below or get in touch with us through email, Twitter or Facebook.

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