

Geldof on Australian aid

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Rocker turned poverty advocate Bob Geldof is one of the star speakers at AIDS 2014 in Melbourne this week.

And when asked, he certainly [didn't hold back](#) on his thoughts about Australia's cuts to aid over the past few years.

"You are one of the richest countries in the world, despite your own problems... The Australian government gave its word – the Australian people gave their word to the poorest people on this planet."

"You can't mess with your sovereign promise to the poor, they're too vulnerable, they're too weak. It's like beating an infant."

"You can't f*ck around with your political promise."

And so on.

Passion is a good thing and there will certainly be many in the aid community applauding Geldof's smackdown of the weak political will in Australia for increasing aid as a percentage of GNI. But other parts of Geldof's remarks really didn't sit right.

For starters, is it in any way politically correct to compare the developing world to an infant (something that cries all the time, needs to be fed, have its diaper changed, then throws up on you)? A being that is completely reliant on external assistance in order to survive? Or to label the poor "too weak... too vulnerable". The poor are vulnerable to all kinds of shocks. But they show more resilience than many of us could imagine.

These kinds of comments hardly fit with an empowerment narrative or an anti-aid dependence narrative.

Geldof's [criticism](#) of Australia's Asia-Pacific focus is also strange, given that there is still so much need in the region. Africa does not have a monopoly on poverty and Australia is best placed to help in the region closest to home.

Geldof's comments are more spray than substance, and a rock and roll shakedown is unlikely to move the current government to backpedal on its belt-tightening blitz. But do comments like this, widely reported in the media, have the power to wake up a dozing public that has protested very little about government cuts to aid? That might be where the real value lies in an impassioned rant from a celebrity, whether it is politically correct or not.