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Date: March 13, 2015

2014 Annual Report

Our 2014 Annual Report is now available. From our PNG service delivery report with NRI, to supporting the establishment of the Case Management Centre in Lae, and securing new support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Australian aid program, it was another big year for our Centre. Thank you to all those who continue to support our efforts to provide sound analysis to advance good public policy here and in the region through reading the blog, attending events and collaborating on and sharing our work.

Getting ready for the 2015 aid budget

The budget will be handed down on Tuesday 12 May, and once again we'll be holding our Annual Aid Budget Breakfast the following morning—we'll open registrations soon.

With a billion dollars to be cut from aid, there will no doubt be much tension in the air in the lead up for the development community. In a blog post last week, Terence Wood looked at one scenario for making the cuts in order to inflict the least pain on countries that are more dependent on aid. Robin Davies earlier outlined his thoughts on where the cuts should fall. Both Robin and Terence agree that, if $1 billion must be found, aid to Indonesia should be cut much more than PNG: Robin argues that aid to Indonesia should be more than halved, while PNG is cut by 10%. Terence is slightly more moderate, but still concludes that aid to Indonesia should be cut by just over a third, and aid to PNG virtually not at all.

SWP reforms

It's not only the academics who have good ideas. Over the last couple of weeks, we've published a series of blogs by two employers (one farmer, one recruiter) of workers under the Seasonal Worker Program. They are both strong supporters of the scheme, but they have lots of suggestions for how it could be improved. Grant Owen of Owen Pacific Workforce had three main points: don't require employers to pay super (which gets refunded to the worker minus tax on departure); remove the requirement on the employer to cover travel costs; and abolish labour market testing. Susan Jenkin of Ironbark Citrus agreed with these points, and had several more suggestions to reduce the costs, risk and administrative burden faced by employers.

The ongoing problem with the SWP is the lack of employer demand. If we want the scheme to grow, these views should be heeded.

A third-order evaluation
In a recent blog Robin Davies critiques the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) evaluation of development research released last month. According to Robin, the evaluation asks the wrong question. What is really important is whether Australia is funding good development research. Unfortunately, the evaluation focuses on whether AusAID (or DFAT) itself uses the research it funds. Since much of the research is, rightly, not intended for aid managers, this is, as Robin puts it, a third-order question.

For more discussion of this and other Australian aid evaluations (recent releases are on Syria and service delivery; and there's also the annual aid report card) we'll be holding our annual evaluation forum with ODE on Wednesday 29 April. Save the date.

Mari Pangestu: Third Harold Mitchell Development Policy Lecture

Last night, we hosted the 2015 Harold Mitchell Development Policy Annual Lecture presented by Professor Mari Pangestu. Professor Pangestu spoke to a packed audience on “The new economy and development: an Indonesian perspective”. She also discussed some of the recent challenges in the Australia-Indonesia relationship with ABC’s The World, and Radio National Drive. We’ll be bringing you the podcast soon.

PNG Update call for papers extended

Our annual PNG Update in conjunction with UPNG School of Business Administration will be held in Port Moresby on 18–19 June. The deadline for papers has been extended to Tuesday 31 March.

The PNG Update, which recommenced at UPNG last year after a gap of some years, is the premier forum for the discussion of research and analysis relating to contemporary economic and public policy issues in PNG.

More details on how to submit an abstract are available here.

Blog highlights

Dame Meg Taylor on regionalism and gender.

DFAT is not Procter & Gamble.

Are aid agencies expecting recipients to volunteer too much of their time?

On the blog

Vilu War Museum: tourism in Solomon Islands by Matthew Dornan

Volunteering an opinion by Melissa Demian and Gordon Peake

Reforming the Seasonal Worker Program: suggestions from an employer by Susan Jenkin

Regionalism, sub-regionalism and women’s empowerment: an interview with Dame Meg Taylor by Meg Taylor and Tess Newton Cain

Issues with the Seasonal Worker Program: an employer’s perspective by Susan Jenkin

Benefits of the Seasonal Worker Program: an employer’s perspective by Susan Jenkin

Missing, one kangaroo with crossbones: ODE evaluates DFAT’s support for development research by Robin Davies

Australia’s billion-dollar aid cut: where to cut a billion dollars in a hurry by Terence Wood
Snakes and ladders: development NGOs in tough times by Jonathan Pryke and Stephen Howes

In brief

Weekend links: communicating aid, bitcoin, corporate tyranny and inverting township tours

A virtual trip down memory lane: accessing AusAID’s old website

UK locks 0.7% aid commitment in law

Two new NRI scoping studies

What aid workers think of ‘what journalists really think’

Labor promises to make aid volume commitment

Weekend reading and listening: WHO’s woes, IMF and Ebola, and happiness

NRI seeks consultants for research on SOEs

Jo Chandler on Manus

This is the fortnightly newsletter of the Development Policy Centre at Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University, published every second Friday.