

ARE WE GETTING VALUE FOR MONEY OUT OF AUSTRALIA'S AID PROGRAM?

**Speech by Jenny Goldie, Policy Officer, ARHA
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The question we are being asked today is: "Are we getting value for money out of Australia's aid program?" With all due respects to the person who framed the question, I don't like it much because it focuses on the donor rather than the recipient. A better question might be: "How effective is Australia's aid in relieving poverty in our region?" or "Is Australia's aid money leading to truly sustainable development?"

The implication in that last question is that development is more than economic growth; more than the simple eradication of poverty; it is development that is both socially advantageous to the people receiving it and involves no long-term environmental damage in its implementation. What is the point of building a road if it leads to excess logging and destruction of the forests; or exacerbates the sex trafficking of women and children?

The question is also in the present tense which makes it a little difficult because our aid program is essentially in transition. The white paper on Australia's overseas aid program called "Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability" sets the scene from now until 2010 by which time we will be giving \$4 billion annually in aid.

In addition to the white paper, a health paper called "Helping health systems deliver" - a policy for Australian development assistance in health" was released in August. So, on the assumption that Australia's aid program will now be guided by these two documents from now until 2010, I will focus on them.

Both are worthwhile documents, particularly the health one which stresses that 'improving that health and longevity is an end in itself, a fundamental goal of economic development'. It cites the World Health Organisation's constitution that: 'The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being...'

We at the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) believe it is important that we take a rights-based approach, not only to health in general, but to the provision of reproductive health. It is good that the health paper addresses the priority needs of women and children, including reproductive health. Indeed, ARHA would like to claim *some* credit for reproductive health's inclusion and relatively high priority in the health paper.

As the paper reminds us though, at the 2005 United Nations Millennium Summit, heads of state agreed to work toward universal access to reproductive health by 2015. And, indeed they did, because earlier this month it was agreed that a new target would be included under Millennium Development Goal 5 - the one that relates to reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters by 2015 - the new target aims for universal access to reproductive health by 2015.

What, do I hear you ask, is so important about reproductive health? It not only includes such maternal matters as skilled birth attendants close to the community and access to back-up emergency obstetric care, it includes measures that ensure women are not only prepared for pregnancy but can also choose whether and when to get pregnant. This includes improved nutrition for girls and adolescents, it means comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, and safe and effective contraception based on informed choice.

But reproductive health has to go beyond women as mothers or as future mothers. It must include men, and it must include women who have needs beyond motherhood per se. Large numbers of women are being infected by sexually transmitted infections, notably HIV, each year.

We are seeing an HIV/AIDS pandemic emerging in our nearest neighbour PNG. Every effort needs to be made to integrate efforts to prevent and manage HIV into reproductive health services and thereby increase their effectiveness and efficiency. Fortunately, the health paper recognises the need to do so.

Health makes up about 13% of the aid budget. Of that 13%, about 9 per cent goes to reproductive health. This is not enough. The UN believes that all donor countries such as ourselves should give 0.7% of their GDP in ODA. Australia gives 0.33% - less than half what it should.

With the aid budget, it is agreed that 4% should go to family planning or reproductive health. It's hard to get the figures, but we *are* up to about that within the current budget, but that includes the large injection of funds that have recently gone to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria. It's good that money has been injected into this area, but it appears funding for reproductive health per se has NOT increased and falls far short of this 4% target. And that's is of the current aid budget, not one that should be more than doubled if it is to reach the overall target of 0.7% of GDP.

I have spoken of the human right of people, particularly women, to health and especially to reproductive health. And that should remain our primary focus. But in delivering reproductive health - or the family planning component of it - there are enormous benefits to the environment and to the development agenda as a whole. In our region we see some of the highest birth-rates in the world: in PNG, the Solomons and Timor Leste. The latter had the distinction last year of having the highest birth rates in the world and being the poorest country.

I think Niger in Africa now has the distinction of being the poorest country, nevertheless, worldwide there is a very high correlation between poverty and high fertility. Timor Leste's birth rate has come down from over 8 children per women to 7.5 but that is still a huge number of children for any woman to bear, let along a poor one.

If Australia's aid program has failed in the past, it is in this area of family planning. We have virtually condoned unsustainably high birth rates in our region. And what do high birth rates result in down the track? Youth bulges. Large numbers of young

people who are poorly educated who cannot get jobs and who are likely to get into conflict.

What are we seeing in Timor Leste and the Solomons and to a lesser extent in PNG? Conflict. In the Solomons we see conflict over land - that is one reason the Australian police were sent in. Why is there conflict over land? Too many people for the resources available, including land. Why have the forests been cut down in the Solomons? Apart from rapacious loggers who share responsibility, it comes down to too many people needing land to farm and grow food.

The Australian Government in its white paper is belatedly recognising that over population - by definition, a population exceeding its resource base - is a hindrance to sustainable development and to good governance. Having recognised that, however, they need to put their money where their mouth is and up the funding for reproductive health generally and for its family planning component and get the birth rates down as soon as possible.

Economic growth is all well and good but it's no use doubling the national GDP if you double population at the same time. You end up with per capita GDP just the same. Double GDP and keep the population stable, however, and you double the per capita GDP and actually DO something about lifting people out of poverty.

For all the good in the white paper, there is something lacking. And that is a sense of urgency about the changing global situation. I want to quote you an article from yesterday's Sydney Morning Herald from someone called Ian Dunlop. I don't know him, I wish I did, and I wish I had written this myself because he sums it all up. He writes:

We are about to experience the convergence of three of the great issues confronting humanity. Climate change, the peaking of oil supply and water shortage are coming together in a manner which will profoundly alter our way of life, our institutions and our ability to prosper on this planet. Each is a major issue, but their convergence has received minimal attention.

Population is the main driver. In the 60 years since World War II, the world population has grown at an unprecedented rate, from 2.5 billion to 6.5 billion today, with 9 billion forecast by 2050. That growth has triggered insatiable demand for natural resources, notably water, oil and other fossil fuels. Exponential economic growth in a finite world hitting physical limits is not a new idea; we have experienced limits at a local level, but we have either side-stepped them or found short-term solutions, becoming overly confident that any global limits could be similarly circumvented.

Today, just as the bulk of the world's population is about to step on to the growth escalator, global limits emerge that are real and imminent. The weight of scientific evidence points to the fact the globe cannot support its present population, let alone an additional 2.5 billion, unless we embrace change.

"Unless we embrace change" he says. That is the message. And, with all due respect, I think we now need a new white paper that seriously deals with these three converging catastrophes of climate change, peaking of oil supply and water shortage. I think we

are all in for tough times, and our poorer neighbours in our region will take the brunt of it.