

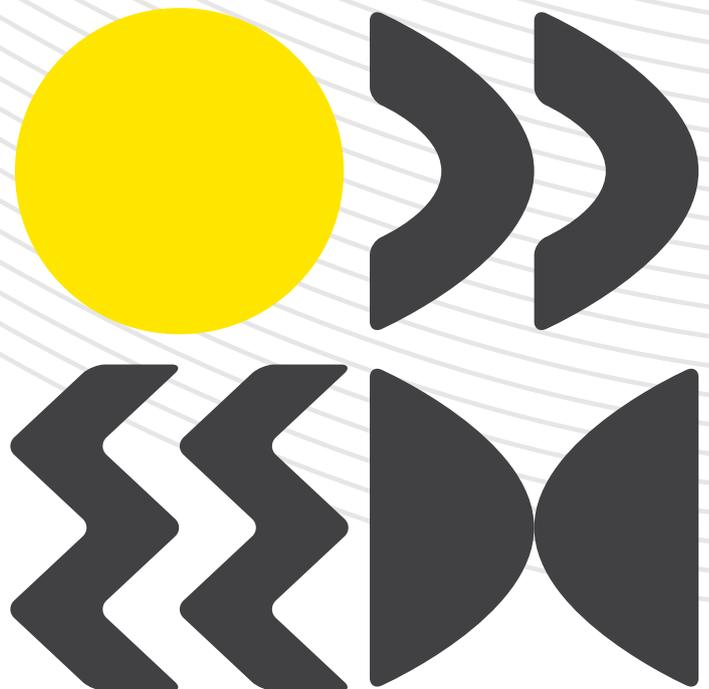


UNSW
SYDNEY

Australia's
Global
University

Institute for Global Development

Expanding University
Engagement with
Australian Development



Foreword

In late 2019 DFAT established an Expert Panel to review Australia's International Development Policy and called for inputs to the review. A large number of organisations from across the development sector provided short written inputs. This document is a slightly edited version of the submission prepared by the Institute for Global Development on behalf of UNSW. The content was decided through a consultative process, led by Kirsten Ridley (IGD) with the advice and support of Nerida Dalton (Government Relations Adviser, UNSW).

The IGD spearheads the UNSW's Strategy 2025 commitment to ensuring that high quality research and education activities translate into impacts that can transform lives and promote equitable and sustainable development. The IGD aims to demonstrate how universities can bring their knowledge, expertise and resources to contribute to global development goals, and particularly the current agenda for Sustainable Development. We were thus keen to respond to DFAT's call on behalf of UNSW.

The call for inputs elicited an enthusiastic response from colleagues across UNSW who recognised the importance of having a voice in this process. Our internal discussions coalesced around the unique contribution that universities, through their research, expertise, education and capacity building activities, can make to international development goals and to the projection of Australian 'soft power'. These roles are central to the development and wider diplomatic ambitions of the Australian government, and yet tend to receive little visibility or recognition in existing policy documents.

Like many universities, UNSW has significant, deep and long-standing partnerships for research and education in many countries that are or have been part of Australia's aid program. These activities range from working with students and academics on teaching, training, mobility and various forms of exchange, to curricula development and institutional strengthening, as well as research collaborations. Our partnerships extend to countries which may not be a current priority for Australian aid, but nonetheless provide important insights and build relationships relevant to addressing global development challenges.

Like other development sector institutions, IGD is also engaged in the critical analysis of development and how it is practiced, of the changing nature and relevance of aid in the current context, and of the new approaches needed to understand and address disruptive global challenges. Research, dialogue, convening and publications on these issues can be an important input into Australia's development program. Like many academics, we feed into these discussions through advisory and consultancy roles as well as research publications.

Such university partnerships and activities are foundational for development progress. By building strong relationships in many countries, they support the soft power relationships on which Australia's standing in the Pacific, the region and globally depends.

Our purpose in this submission was in part to make more visible and give recognition to these contributions and to call for more concrete ways in which they can be used to advantage in progressing Australian's development program. We look forward to continuing the conversation on how to strengthen the role universities can play in implementation of the future International Development Policy and contributing to the global sustainable development goals.

We appreciate the opportunity to engage with DFAT and its expert panel in this consultation. On behalf of the team at IGD I would like to thank all who contributed to this submission.

Dr Sarah Cook

Director, Institute for Global Development



Context: University Engagement in Agendas on Development

As knowledge producers and educators, universities play a key role responsibility for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

Our submission highlights the considerable opportunity for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to engage the University sector as a key partner in informing and implementing its development policy.

Universities actively collaborate with development-focussed organisations and institutions, including at the international, national and local levels. Academics work with partners to ensure that development policy and practice is evidence informed and incorporates local and indigenous knowledge. Universities also contribute to the promotion of Australia's interests, priorities and reputation abroad.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a step up in the commitment of universities to seek solutions and actively share knowledge that contributes to global development goals. Universities increasingly seek new forms of institutional partnership, student engagement and research collaboration to strengthen the relevance and impact of their work.

At UNSW, a commitment to global development reflects our wider strategic commitment to ensuring our research and education activities deliver positive social impacts. The flagship Institute for Global Development leads on this commitment, working in collaboration with Faculties, centres and specialised institutes at or affiliated with UNSW.

Within this context, our submission highlights the need to recognise the significant contributions the university sector already makes to international development and to Australia's position in the region and beyond. These contributions are embedded in enduring, mutually beneficial partnerships with organisations and communities globally. Our five recommendations for the International Development Policy outline key priorities to recognise and strengthen these contributions.



Strengthening Recognition of Universities as Strategic Development Partners

Recommendation 1: The International Development Policy explicitly references the university sector as a key stakeholder group.

Explicit recognition in the new policy of universities and research institutions as key partners and stakeholders that contribute to Australia's international development program, innovation and thought leadership would be an important step in facilitating the sustained interaction required to maximise the impact of this contribution.

Australian universities have been long-term partners in advancing international development goals, with a long tradition as active partners of Australia's international development program.

UNSW, like many others in the Australian university sector, already make a significant contribution to Australia's global development efforts through research, education, training, policy advice and capacity building partnerships, as well as delivering contract research and evaluations. Many Australian universities have developed enduring and mutually beneficial relationships globally, including within Australia's priority countries for development assistance.

"Science, research and academic communities test new ideas that can accelerate development transformation.

Advances in science, research and technology in every country will need to be leveraged to enable evidence-based implementation of the SDGs."

- UN Sustainable Development Group, 2020¹

The university sector produces research and innovations which address critical societal challenges, shape public policies and improve lives. Their research plays a crucial role in shaping development thinking, guiding policy and building the frameworks for innovation in models of international development. Australian universities also play an important role in building the capacity of future development practitioners and leaders; for example, through teaching international students; offering short courses for international delegates, facilitating Australian student experiences abroad, and contributing to curriculum development and course teaching in universities in development partner countries.

Despite the important contribution of research and education activities for achieving global development impacts, highlighted in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the university sector is not visibly acknowledged as a key stakeholder or partner in key documents of Australian aid. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper highlights 'NGOs, the private sector and multilateral organisations' (but not universities) as key partners in helping to 'magnify the impact of Australia's development assistance program' while the words 'research' or 'universities' do not appear within the current International Development Policy.

Prioritising Strategic Research for Development

Recommendation 2: A comprehensive Research for Development Strategy is developed to underpin the International Development Policy.

An expanded research for development portfolio would bring a wide range of benefits for the Australian development program as well as Australian foreign relations in the region. Investing in research and related tertiary education capacity building provides an effective means for the Australian community to develop and retain critical networks within and *beyond* the Asia Pacific. These may include countries and regions not currently prioritised for ODA. Such investments also ensure that Australia is well-informed about emerging trends and development issues affecting other countries and regions, including trends that may impact Australia's future.

Given that the former 'AusAID Research Strategy 2012-16' is now outdated, the current Expert Panel review of the International Development Policy provides an opportunity to consider a comprehensive Research for Development Strategy.

A Research for Development Strategy can facilitate a wider and deeper evidence base to inform current and future development policy and programs, contribute to major evaluations and reviews, and foster a stronger and more diverse Australian development research community which would help to position Australia as a thought leader in a range of critical areas.

One element of the former AusAID Research Strategy which remains reflected in DFAT's current approach to research funding is the highly decentralised commissioning of research through country programs. While such user-led and implementation-focused research has an important place in Australia's development program, we would propose a broader conceptualisation of research for development to support the policy.

Such an approach should encompass different types of research as well as research at different scales. It should enable comparative, cross-context and longer-term research projects, and encompass multi-disciplinary research programs that address significant global and regional development challenges. The former Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) was the last mechanism that supported such research, and its discontinuation has left a void in the research funding landscape.

A comprehensive research for development strategy would enable the identification of key themes, including knowledge gaps, neglected issues or emerging challenges linked to the priorities of Australia's aid program and the needs of development partner countries. While priority themes would need to be identified in a consultative process, the UNSW consultation for this paper has identified several strategic areas. These are highlighted on page 13.



Funding the Research for Development Strategy

Recommendation 3: Appropriate mechanisms are designed to fund and deliver on the research strategy and to support the use of research findings.

Australian government funding is critical in supporting Australian university-led research and global engagement for development impact, including related education and training activities through programs such as the Australia Awards short course delivery programs, and the Endeavor and New Colombo Plan scholarship programs.

At present, research funding is made available through several different departments and budgets, including as part of overseas development assistance, and through a range of funding mechanisms. These include competitive research council funding (such as the ARC and NHMRC); specialist research or institutional support in high priority areas (such as ACIAR and the Centre for Indo-Pacific Health Security) and commercial tender-based contracting of research, evaluation and advisory services linked to country level programs.

Substantive research, as well as effective overseas partner university research and institutional capacity building and tertiary sector development, requires both time and predictability of resources. Currently, there is no obvious mechanism to support research that cuts across a wide diversity of development-related themes and engages a variety of academic disciplines, institutions and geographies.

A new strategy would better support policy-oriented and practice-relevant research focussing on issues of concern to the Aid program while also encouraging stronger links with policy makers, practitioners and other end-users to maximise potential impact. It would provide a mechanism for reducing the fragmentation among different funding pathways, and potentially encourage greater collective efforts among researchers from different disciplines and institutions to address common problems.

“Long-term financing of research in the areas of foreign, security and development policy is a prerequisite for the production of relevant, high-quality new knowledge... The development of strong specialist institutions takes time, and predictable financing is a prerequisite for their maintenance. Similarly, long-term programmes are needed to achieve the aim of improving capacity among research institutions in developing countries.”

- NORAD, 2017²

Committed funding linked to a comprehensive research strategy would facilitate longer term planning and investments in institutional partnerships, increasing the long-term developmental impacts of the activities. Models of funding arrangements that link development agency priorities with research councils or which focus on building networks and partnerships to ensure joint knowledge production and its application are found in several OECD countries.

Examples include the ESRC-DFID 'Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research', the Swedish Research Links 'Network Grants' and USAID's 'The Higher Education Solutions Network' and 'Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research' programs, all of which, importantly, incorporate an explicit north-south research partnership approach.

Acknowledging the importance of research and capacity building to an effective aid program and the need to resource it adequately, the aid program as a whole, needs to be better resourced to be effective and meet Australia's international commitments. We highlight the recommendation included in the 2019 parliamentary committee inquiry on aid effectiveness of a commitment to an interim allocation 0.5% GNI, increasing to 0.7% within 10 years.

"A university system is an important part of the development of a country. It allows a country to research into topics of relevance to its population, provides competent personnel to the public and private sector, helps the government base its policies on evidence, provides higher education with teachers, and helps generate innovations that can help the economy.

In high income countries, private and public research support is self-evident. By supporting the university system, we put the low income countries in the driver's seat".

- SIDA, 2015³



Establishing Mechanisms for Engaging with the Research Community

Recommendation 4: A dedicated forum and mechanisms for regular engagement between DFAT and the university and wider research sector are established.

Universities and research institutes are the main knowledge producers and important actors on global development issues. They bring considerable expertise to support Australian development initiatives to remain innovative, informed and responsive in a rapidly changing world. This potential is not being fully utilised.

Mutual benefits of closer engagement between DFAT and the research and academic development community could be significant. These would include the provision of evidence-based advice and guidance in identifying and shaping program and policy priorities and their means of implementation; while also helping to ensure that research is responsive to the concerns and priorities of the aid program and development partner countries.

To facilitate closer university-DFAT engagement, we propose the establishment of clear mechanisms of engagement such as an identified DFAT university focal point, and/or a DFAT-University engagement office, along with regular forums or opportunities to promote two-way sharing of expertise and experience. Such forums could provide space for reflective conversations about the aid program and amplify the contribution of research and academic discourse to aid and development programming.

A communication channel should not be overly formal or onerous. It could, for example, involve an annual DFAT-university sector meeting adjacent to the annual Australian Aid Conference, the biannual Research for Development Impact (RDI) Conference, or the more recently established Development Studies Association of Australia conference. The IGD and researchers from the UNSW community would be enthusiastic to participate in such a forum.

Supporting Tertiary Education Institutions in Development Partner Countries

Recommendation 5: The Australian aid program includes a stronger focus on tertiary sector development and university-university partnerships.

The importance of a strong university sector in achieving a range of development outcomes is widely recognised. The Sustainable Development Goals, for example, include a target for more equitable access to tertiary education (Target 4.3), while strengthening the sector will be a precondition for maintaining progress on many of the SDGs.

Australia's future IDP and related research strategy should include the goal of strengthening partner country tertiary education and research institutions. The sector is critical for the development of a skilled workforce which in turn provides essential services, from health care and basic education to infrastructure development, entrepreneurship and innovation. Strong local research capacity facilitates locally driven research agendas, which in turn support effective local development strategies and outcomes.

"Higher education institutions train the teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers and other professionals that contribute knowledge and advanced skills—which drives economic growth and productivity—as well as basic competencies and research."

- USAID, 2018⁴

In most developing countries, tertiary education institutions suffer severe deficits in human and institutional resources and capacities. While there is enormous expertise housed within these institutions, they lack qualified educators, researchers, facilities and infrastructure. UNSW, like many Australian universities, invests in long-term research and education partnerships aiming to share knowledge and expertise with partners in developing countries, but resources for investing over the long term are scarce. Development assistance has a role in facilitating such partnerships, including through incentivising joint research and promoting exchange activities at institutional as well as individual levels.

As noted earlier, DFAT already invests in initiatives such as the Australia Indonesia Centre, PAIR, and Partnership with the University of the South Pacific. There is an opportunity to further leverage the expertise of Australia's university sector, supporting such institutional capacity strengthening partnerships or collaborations in ways which directly contribute to the goals and priorities of Australia's development program.

Consultation

This submission was compiled in consultation with stakeholders from the UNSW community. Insights were sourced from an online questionnaire and small group discussions.

A number of key issues emerged as specific areas of concern through these consultations. Some of these are already prioritised within Australia's aid program; many are linked to the SDG agenda; while some are emerging as newer concerns for the development and humanitarian communities. Gender equity and inclusion in programming,

- Food and income security,
- The food, water and energy nexus,
- Climate change,
- Migration and rapid urbanisation,
- Development practice and aid delivery,
- Mining, extractives and development,
- Humanitarian engineering,
- Water issues and management of oceans,
- Waste and recycling,
- Peace and conflict prevention, and
- Governance and human rights.

Endnotes

1 United Nations Sustainable Development Group (2020) *Primer on the Sustainable Development Goals*: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/UNSDG-SDG-primer-companion-piece.pdf>.

2 NORAD (2017) *Research strategy for the Foreign Service and Norad 2017–2024*: https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/research_strategy/i_d2571111/

3 SIDA (2015) *About SIDA's Research Co-operation*: <https://www.sida.se/English/partners/Resources-for-specific-partner-groups/research-cooperation/about-sida-research-cooperation/>

4 USAID (2018) *The What, Why and How of USAID Higher Education Programs*: <https://www.edu-links.org/learning/what-why-and-how-usaid-higher-education-programs>

Acknowledgments

This submission was prepared by the Institute for Global Development on behalf of the University of New South Wales. It has been edited for wider dissemination.

For their contributions, our thanks go to:

Kirsten Ridley, submission lead (*Senior Project Officer, Institute for Global Development*)

Michael Burnside (*Senior Project Officer, Institute for Global Development*)

Betsy Marks (*Manager, Institute for Global Development*)

Kayla Lochner (*Program Support Officer, Institute for Global Development*)

Nerida Dalton (*Government Relations Adviser, UNSW*)

Valentina Bau (*Senior Lecturer, UNSW Arts & Social Sciences*)

Paul Munro (*Senior Lecturer, UNSW Arts & Social Sciences*)

Susanne Schmeidl (*Senior Lecturer, UNSW Arts & Social Sciences*)

Anthony Zwi (*Professor, UNSW Arts & Social Sciences*)

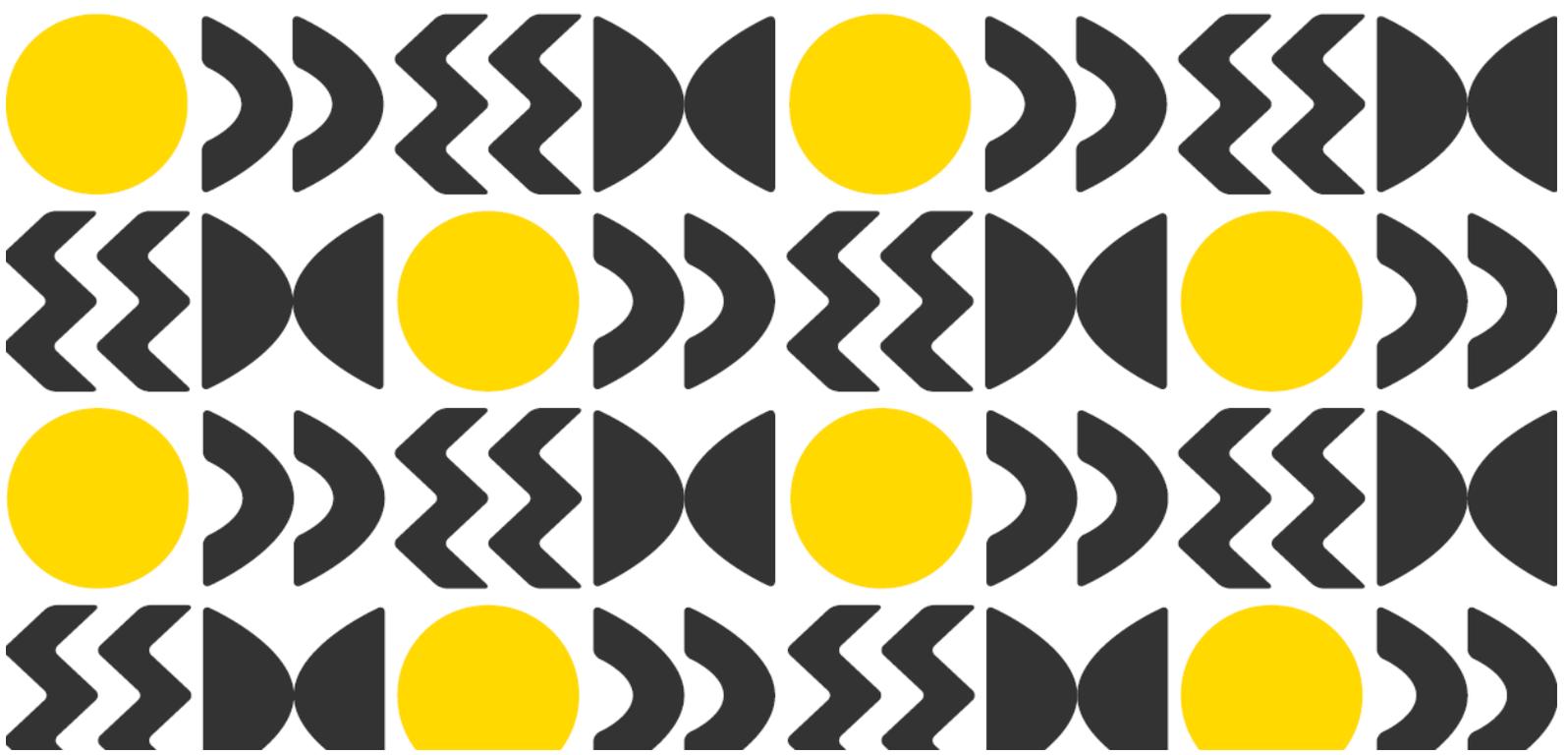
Laura Bruce (*Research Associate, UNSW Built Environment*)

Greg Leslie (*Director, UNSW Global Water Institute*)

Andrew Dansie (*Senior Lecturer, UNSW Engineering*)

Heather Worth (*Professor, UNSW Medicine*)

Daniel Robinson (*Professor, UNSW Arts and Social Sciences*)



The Institute for Global Development is an ambitious UNSW initiative to tackle significant local and global challenges.

Translating knowledge and evidence into impact involves working in partnership with communities, practitioners and policymakers.

Find out more on our website.



**Institute
for Global
Development**

www.igd.unsw.edu.au