Introduction

Like many similar programs around the world, Australia’s approach to foreign aid has undergone major changes in recent years. Substantial cuts in Government funding have been accompanied by a shift in focus from development and humanitarian goals to advancing the national interests of donors and fostering private enterprise. A preference has been expressed in favour of public-private collaborations rather than a reliance on projects initiated and funded by government. To effect these changes, aid policy has been brought under more direct political control.

The changes have generated significant debate in the community, reflecting both recognition of the deficiencies of conventional approaches to aid and concerns about fulfilling global responsibilities. They have also posed major challenges for the various stakeholders in the aid sector, including NGOs, academia and government. It is widely recognised that there is a need for a national debate about Australia’s approach to foreign aid, including the relative emphasis on its various components, intended outcomes, and methods for assessing effectiveness.

To contribute to this process, the Centre for Global Research (RMIT University) together with its event partners, Global Reconciliation, and the Humanitarian Advisory Group, was proud to host this round table discussion. This preliminary discussion focused on formulating the problem, identifying aims and goals, and outlining alternative models of aid and methodologies for assessing outcomes, and planning a strategy. We aim to use the occasion to establish a working group, with the objective of developing position papers and other resources that can help guide the future development of the aid sector in Australia. We also aim to organise an ongoing series of meetings, including a larger public event planned for the first part of 2016.

This report is based on the proceedings of the round table discussion. The purpose of the report is not only to register the opinions and statements of the discussion, but to work as a facilitating tool to design the next steps of a ‘Rethinking Foreign Aid’ working group.

Methodology

The round table discussion comprised of four sessions, the first being an hour and each of the following 50 minutes each. Each session began with a five minute introductory presentation (a key idea, or several key points) to initiate discussion. The purpose of the event was to focus on formulating problems, identifying aims and goals, outlining alternative models of aid and methodologies for assessing outcomes, and planning a strategy. It incorporated short presentations only, with the emphasis being on discussion.

Four sessions were mapped out to ensure that a variety of issues were covered. As expected, there was overlap between the conversations as well as emergence of additional themes. Each session was facilitated to allow short interjections (for instance 30 seconds to make a correction or add information) as well as more extended comment (for instance up to three minutes).

The workshop finished with a 20 minute session to map out resolutions for next steps. The proceedings of the day were noted in detail (with anonymity) by four event assistants – the intent being, to capture and make available the ideas generated by the discussion. The proceedings report includes all the statements made by the participants during the five sessions of the roundtable. These statements have been organized in discussion topics, and ordered in a manner that facilitates a continuous, fluent narrative, without adding any interpretative alterations.
1. The nature and purpose of aid

Introduction

— Massive global issues – unprecedented global action needed.
— Climate change requires climate justice.
— Global inequality - unequal distribution of natural resources.
— More refugees than at any other time since World War 2.
— Problems in low income countries: no participation or agency, extended violence against women, reproduction and health issues.
— Global humanitarian system is not anymore fit for purpose.
— There is an important power issue, since it is increasingly difficult to operate in a decreasing political space, which is becoming a global problem, as significant in Uganda as it is in Australia.
— Neoliberal economics suffer from a “free-market addiction”. It can become more part of the problem than part of the solution.
— Corporations can cause environmental damage and other harm, but are still partners of choice for aid programs.
— We all need to talk the same language, including the language of corporations.
— How do you challenge and confront power, when you are on a pay roll?

Discussion

Defining Aid

— The nature of aid depends on its origin. There is a difference between aid coming from the government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, NGOs or the community.
— Aid is no monolithic entity – we don’t need to solve all the problems at once, they can be segmented.
— Aid nature and purpose also include improving Australian society, building relationships and security.
— It would be useful, as a political exercise, to critically interrogate current government aid paradigms; what makes sense, including from a practical point of view, and what doesn’t. It is not easy for a government to change those paradigms.
— In any case, it is always difficult to move from theory to praxis.
— Where does the nature and purpose of aid come from? From outrage at poverty and inequality and from dialogue with other nations and local communities.
— Where are we headed? What’s the conversation designed to actually do?
— We have now a substantial opportunity to make a move forward
— We need to think about how to change this into something that we could actually do.
Changing global aid landscape

The rights of the global South and the incrementing prominence of global Southern voices are big issues currently discussed among NGOs.

Changing global landscape – shifting radically for donors, NGOs and recipients.

The so-called 5th generation of NGOs’ national staff features great capacity to do things.

Rise of South-to-South cooperation. Although it has always been there, it is now becoming increasingly important.

There is localization in the South and devolution from the North.

The implication for Australian NGOs is that there is no need for more people in Australian headquarters, but in the recipient country. There is a need for national staff heading organizations instead of expats.

How to transfer leadership to the global South needs to be critically interrogated. Social enterprises show potential for this endeavour.

There is an inconsistency in the foreign aid sector’s marketing. There might not be a need for transferring resources from North to South. People know some developing countries have resources to take care of themselves sometimes.

However, historically there was a resource transfer from South to North, which can’t be ignored. There is a need to acknowledge this fact.

People who have been deprived of their resources, now and historically, are coming back as the poor needing help.

Resource-transfer as endeavour is not going to disappear

Current NGO/Aid funding paradigms are transactional-based.

It is useful to observe the trends in donors, including NGOs, to understand where the Aid sector is going.

Neoliberal approach vs. alternatives

Assumptions of contemporary development approaches: promote private enterprise, market economy and growth.

We need industry and employment plans for economic sectors in developing countries, supporting local initiative and ownership and building local capacity.

We need to “call the bluff” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Some don’t believe in aid anymore – We need to be prepared in case the SDGs don’t go well, instead of expecting they will be met in 15 years.

We need an exit strategy by 2030, away from existing paradigms.

We need a humane policy, long term common goals that focus on human capacity.

However, we need to be careful with changing approaches. None of them will be perfect, but some will be less perfect.

Regarding SDGs, aid is part of the resourcing, but not the only one. They include great future plans.
Aid needs to focus on resource transfer, skills development and capacity building. Current aid paradigms are not perfect, but they are all we’ve got.

Practical example: medical use guidelines work better when locally customized by local practitioners.

We need to challenge neoliberalism concept of ethnocentric development.

There is criticism towards neoliberal paradigms of development, but nothing is done about it, there is no practical application of neoliberal criticism.

We need common guidelines, critically interrogate what growth means, and evaluate different approaches to it.

There is a need for a stronger interaction between civil society, enterprise and government in order to figure out what kind of corporations and products can contribute better. Cooperatives are good examples of alternative economic corporations.

We need to identify and check the politics that create inequality.

There is unequal resource distribution – Can we break the ‘developing vs. developed’ problem without resource justice?

We problematize poverty, but we do not problematize wealth.

Need to address growing inequities in Australia. If we don’t address our own society’s inequities, we can’t do it good in other countries.

Critique of ethnocentrism

Contemporary aid is characterized both by ethnocentric and neoliberal paradigms.

We are all facing global issues – it’s not anymore a developing countries’ issue, it’s global. We need solidarity in addressing global problems.

We can’t split the World in developing and developed countries anymore – Geopolitics are changing rapidly. Countries considered by some as “developing” have a strong role in global issues, like China and India.

There are different models to approach an aid-related issue; from a personal approach to whole communities identifying with it.

There is need for dialogue with other developing countries, so that joint goals and ideas can be established.

Development is not threatening for advanced countries because they consider themselves “developed”.

We need to challenge the terminology of foreign aid and change it. The frame can be changed from “aid and development” to “solidarity and global justice”.

The North seems to be more ready to help the North, sometimes ignoring the South. However, the transaction in a North-to-North aid effort is different from North-to-South, since in the case of the former it is the recipient who pays.

In the case of Australia, shifting the focus of aid from South East Asia to the Pacific Islands, only because the former looks like it is already “developed” seems like madness from a foreign policy point of view. The Pacific Islands aid is seen as a charity-only case. There is a need for a well-balanced global and regional approach.
— How to present the issue of national interest is a great challenge.
— There is a need for a change both in the conversation and the approach to aid. We need to move from the developing-developed framework, and the assumptions contained therein, towards a global approach, recasting the whole discussion around that.
— Aid is done by States for States. It is even used for State building. But sometimes there seems to be a disconnection between what happens on the ground and the notion of sovereignty, as the authority and functionality of recipient States is not guaranteed.

Hegemony of language
— There is a need for a change in language towards a more inclusive approach.
— We need to challenge current aid terminology to one of solidarity/justice.
— Language is sometimes limited because is driven by the need of agency coordination.
— Rethinking entirely aid language and nature might be too much of a challenge.
— Changing the language is very important, but a strong public connection is the real goal.
— It is not clear whether the problem is in aid language or in aid politics. Current foreign aid is a state-based system. State-to-State relationships can disregard socio-political realities in developing countries, where essential services and projects are not delivered by State entities.

Awareness and advocacy
— The conversation with the Australian people is instrumental.
— There is a strong need for public awareness on foreign aid. Surveys show that some Australians wrongly believe that the current foreign aid budget amounts for 12% of GDP.
— We need to figure out how to improve the connection with the people, how to improve our patch.
— We need to engage society at multiple levels and angles in responding to the aid question – multiple problems, models and discussions.
— The foreign aid community is far behind others like the climate change community in public awareness and advocacy – There is a need for a stronger base.
— There are lessons to learn from climate justice public advocacy.
— We can inspire from other frameworks, like environment legislation.
— The climate change industry is a good model; the “Global problem” approach works.
— We should influence new advocacy paradigms. Some of the issues in developing countries are not “developing country-exclusive” anymore; we need to find common grounds. For example, Kiribati and Australia share problems related to mining. This issue is related again with the use of language and the problem of ethnocentric approaches to foreign aid.
— We need to talk about “resource justice”, and link the conversation to climate justice.
— We haven’t brought the public with us, to sustain a national effort on foreign aid. Can we get a deeper, broader consensus about how we respond to these issues? Reframing them is very helpful, since the paradigm hasn’t shifted yet.
Who do we aim to influence? Are we trying to rethink it all?

We need to change the way we talk both to the public and to the Australian government and to politicians in general. We can also assist on how politicians convince people. If you can’t convince the public opinion, this whole conversation is redundant.

Changing public communication

- Nature of aid includes involving the Australian public.
- Communication seems to be stack in charity mode rather than human rights paradigms – Are charity-style paradigms really needed to engage the audience?
- Many different frames have been tried in NGOs fundraising campaigns. There have been attempts to avoid aid stereotypes.
- Fundraising is very difficult – optimistic, hope-based campaigns haven’t really worked; “Freedom and solidarity” vs. “emergency and need” is the main dichotomy.
- “Emergency and need” is dominant in the fundraising market: “Put a dollar here or a child will die”
- The charity model is one of the reasons why AusAID doesn’t exist anymore. It is a very limiting model.
- There is a need for big organizations to make the shift towards a different narrative in aid public communications and fundraising campaigns.
- Messages associated with the political right like using growth, investment, jobs, or business development to drive future have not been very successful in bringing donors. But the ones associated to the left, haven’t been too successful either.
- Currently, NGOs’ public relations and marketing departments are constantly rethinking communication to get better outcomes.
- The communication dichotomy in aid is the one of idealism vs. realism
- From an operational point of view, successful public communication is a constant challenge.
- The respect that public figures like Tim Costello have in Australian society can be a good reference.
- The Australian public is up to looking at things differently. However, the audience has been encouraged not to listen, since they have been overwhelmed by negative climate change, Ebola or refugee crisis messages.
- The prevailing view seems to be that the rest of the world is a mess, so the people’s attitude is sometimes “just go away [from Australia], take your problems somewhere else”.
- This is not so much the case with young people. Younger audiences have more of a global view, moving on from local or regional scopes.
- We need to build up messages like “People will not leave their house and migrate if they are OK at home, and aid plays a great role in that”.
- There is potential to focus on social and political change agendas, connecting with climate change, local problems, and other issues.
- The better communication is not only to connect with the public, but also with politicians.
- The government has not been active enough in public communication about aid for the last 4-5 years.
2. Serving humanitarian needs

Introduction

— Now is an ideal time to take stock and ask some hard questions about how we are serving humanitarian needs especially with the World Humanitarian Summit process gathering momentum.

— There are also no less than five global frameworks currently being renewed (including disaster risk reduction and sustainable development) and global reviews of peacebuilding, peace operations, women, peace and security and humanitarian financing underway - now is the time when real change can happen at the highest level.

— On the needs side: we know the humanitarian caseload of displaced people is more than 60 million. We also know that the most neglected aspect of humanitarian action is protection.

— Coverage of the humanitarian caseload is decreasing (both contributions and operational capacity), primarily because 80% of humanitarian work now takes place in conflict situations.

— The system is falling short in chronic crises, which are by far the bulk of its caseload.

— We know that humanitarian principles are under attack, with recent bombings of MSF hospitals in Afghanistan and Yemen being cases in point.

— Technology offers some interesting and novel approaches. But we also need to recognise the limitations associated with these – for example, just because you can use a UAV to gather information about an affected population, that doesn’t mean you can protect or assist them.

— Technology also poses unknown challenges. How are humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law applied in cyber war?

— The engagement of the private sector is also seen as a potential game changer.

— Corporations can be seen as agents for positive change, as indicated by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, going far beyond the remit of corporate social responsibility. How corporations interpret and subscribe to humanitarian principles is a real concern that is still to be fully realised.

— Although there have been improvements including humanitarian leaders on the ground being more effective, response efforts being better coordinated, pooled funding better supporting local actors and a trend towards increasing communication with crisis-affected people, in truth, only in the function of rapid response to major sudden-onset disasters can the system claim clear success and progress.

— Foreign aid fails affected populations when it places increasing strain on humanitarian principles as many agencies are seen to align with political/military agendas.

— We will increasingly see stabilization and counter terror agendas impact donors’ humanitarian funding decisions and the perception of increasing politicization of humanitarian assistance, not just by donors but also by affected states.

— We already have a plethora of tools, standards, benchmarks, guidelines and analysis. So how else do we operate?
The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 may go some way to addressing these challenges and address them we must, as at present, we are indeed failing in the attempt to serve humanitarian needs.

Discussion

Humanitarian aid and development

- There is a distinction between humanitarian and development agendas.
- It is now virtually impossible to separate the development and the humanitarian sector – the cycle needs to be recast.
- There are conflating agendas between organizations and also multi-mandated agencies.
- Raising the issue of climate change comes with a pushback from the humanitarian community, which is remarkable.
- Humanitarians are more vulnerable to attacks than other organizations.
- There are opinions against humanitarian aid – if we are going to spend any money assisting people, what would this look like? Let’s start from scratch as a concept.

Humanitarian aid and foreign policy

- There is no neutrality in a humanitarian intervention.
- Humanitarian aid itself is not neutral – there is something remarkable about the humanitarian intervention. In the 2004 Tsunami disaster, the humanitarian intervention arguably had as much impact as the tsunami itself. It brought in contact with cultures from which the aid receiving area had been isolated from. The society that has emerged is almost unrecognizable – there were cultural outcomes, in addition to rebuilding.
- The current humanitarian response design has been influenced by Orientalism.
- We need to focus on the Pacific and allow the Pacific Islands to lead their own systems, in order to strengthen the capacity of a very vulnerable region.
- We need to strengthen the capacity across the Pacific to deal with crisis in a different way, mixing decisions by the governments and collective action.
- The Pacific regionalism plan that was just signed off includes disasters and emergency measures. The Pacific region is a fantastic one to take this on board.
- How well does the model work on rapid onset disasters? In the case of Vanuatu, five years of work to build up local capability were suddenly smashed when the international community invaded - Is the model fit for purpose?
- There is a problem with conflating agendas of different organizations, and/or multi-mandated agencies. NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) are trying to disassociate themselves from political agencies.
- Global media spotlight has something to do with where our resources are applied – whether it is for short-term or long-term preventative responses.
- The fact that humanitarian support can make people feel safe and stabilize political regimes is important to communicate as well.
Good practice

— Accountability: potentially a commission could be established to regulate.
— We need to start thinking about accountability in a different way.
— If accountability is not monitored, the question becomes if there is an incentive. There is an inherent tension.
— It is about getting better practices/outcomes in the humanitarian space or more broadly – there is a constraint about what the public at large expects and sees as good practice. In other places there is a much more sophisticated dialogue that goes on.
— Protracted crises – issue is for the security of the humanitarian work and deployed forces. Sudden onset crises are more likely to be disaster-related as opposed to protracted.
— For example, in the public health sector, the biggest health challenges are lifestyle-related diseases and issues. There is an acute vs. chronic mindset and that influences on budget design.
— Rapid onset is exceptionally well-run but in protracted crisis, like Syria, the accountability of NGOs is inherently fraught and external monitoring is pivotal.
— Logistically, the sector works really well.
— About the effectiveness of rapid response, it depends who you ask. Rapid response and getting there quickly is done very well, whether we are effective on changing things on the ground is different.
— In the Vanuatu response, the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team was there and able to be used – there was an institution there but the humanitarian system came in and did not use it to the best of their ability.
— We need to build the ability to talk and listen into the capacities of people that go into humanitarian interventions. This is a critical component on how we achieve outcomes.
— Capability strengthening programs are diffuse and problematic at best. We need to work with civilians to work out what they want and a 5-10 year program for support.
— Who are we doing our learning from? Are we learning our own practice? Where are we getting our good practice from?
— There are too many master programs in Australian universities that compete, without talking much to each other.
— The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is running the Pacific Humanitarian Innovation Challenge. It is a $2 million challenge calling on innovators, entrepreneurs, designers, and scientists to rethink humanitarian response in the region. Applications open between 30 November and 7 February (www.pacifichumanitarianchallenge.org).

Communication and public engagement

With the Australian public

— There needs to be better communication with the public and private sector. The current lack of it is worrying.
— There are great debates between practitioners, behind closed doors.
— Until we have people who can bring the experience and stories and force the issues, we won’t exert the pressure needed to change things. A challenge is the fact that the dialogue about these issues nationally is feeble. Aid is not something that is going to generate a big level of public attention.

— Social media seems to show there is not much of an audience for development issues. It is hard for editors to get a space for this topic.

— Adding to this, how does our society operate with the media? Development and humanitarian issues are a small market.

— The way the messages about development and humanitarian issues are being controlled here is a problem.

— In terms of public communication, there is a positive agenda around DFAT and re-engaging with aid.

— If we wait for government to conduct public communication to raise awareness, we will be waiting a very, very long time. We should be out there persuading on big global issues in the public domain.

— The climate narrative has changed how some issues are framed– Climate affects us all, people will vote for someone doing something about it. This should be applicable to the public conversation about foreign aid.

— World Humanitarian Summit has a positive agenda around globalization.

— If we could get funding for a sit-com about humanitarian workers, it could be the best PR campaign.

— There is already a campaign for humanitarian aid going on – a cross sector campaign. It is funded and engaged. Whether it is doing a good job or not is another question.

*With the intervened populations during an intervention*

— The communication with intervened populations is currently fraught and difficult, and not done well.

— This kind of communication is linked with support to the intervention and securitizing the region.

— Communication with affected populations is increasingly important. The framework of World Vision to receive complaints and act on them is a good example. Agencies are afraid of feedback through technology. How do we harness these voices into this discussion? How do we allow people to understand the relationship between humanitarian response and community without jeopardizing humanitarian principles?

— How do we understand these linkages? - How do we do this without jeopardizing the safety of local minority groups?

*Engaging politicians*

— Politicians need to show some leadership regarding humanitarian aid. It is their job to provide it and to work on improving it. They don’t consult the citizens when they make other important decisions like going to war, why should it be different with aid?

— We want to work together with the government, which should open the roads for the private sector to contribute.
— It would be great to see deep engagement of the aid sector, knocking down the doors of media and parliamentarians and forcing these issues onto their agendas.
— At the end of the day politicians listen to people who vote – the people need to be educated so that they can vote for aid. Is this more likely if the language changes?
3. Assessment of effectiveness

Introduction

— We need to “look for the gaps”
— It is a given that we need to be monitoring, evaluating, checking methodologies, measuring, conducting community consultation, etc. But how do we do this work with concepts like poverty and justice?
— You can’t sit outside the politics of any of the questions discussed today.
— Who gets to decide what’s effective? Who is ‘monitoring and evaluation’ for?
— What’s the role of communities?
— Young people struggle to be heard, young women even more – the politics behind who is expected to produce and validate the truth need to be observed.
— Do our measurements help us to keep track? To reshape what we are doing? Do they distract us from our work?
— Do we create things damned to fail?
— How do we think about success and failure? Are we obsessed with success and avoiding failure?
— Do we give things time to fail?
— How are measurements used by politicians, academics, practitioners?
— Academics are overly critical; governments are overly risk adverse.
— What is ineffective? We can learn from things that don’t work.
— We don’t know if something is going to work, but we need to try and test. Failure is acceptable; there is no need to be afraid of it. We need to create a space to take risks, including a space to fail.
— We need to encourage doing new things.

Discussion

Defining effectiveness

— When talking about effectiveness, we need to take a step back. How does effectiveness take place?
— For instance, let’s analyse the paradigms of growth. An equitable distribution of resources is an instrumental issue in development. When it comes to growth measurement, we should be asking how much of it is absorbed by the lowest percentage of population.
— The question is not ‘how’, but ‘why’ we should measure performance.
— In evaluating foreign aid, we need to make questions like “do they still want us?” – If you measure who you are instead of what you do, you might get a clearer picture.
— In the case of PNG, the language about what Australia tries to do in the country is very carefully selected – the language around PNG might not be what the government is measuring.
— We don’t monitor what would’ve happened if we hadn’t conducted an intervention (which we have monitored) – How do you measure what could’ve happened in Vanuatu if there hadn’t been an intervention?
— Why is effectiveness the main criteria in Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)? This shows a lack of depth in the analysis.
— Measurements depend on what your goal and objectives are.
— Participatory approaches are the way to go. Good Key Performance Indexes help programs reflect the needs of local populations. If there is a good engagement with the community, the goals can change.
— Private sector approaches can work to involve the community in shaping what the goals should be.
— There needs to be a social consensus on what the goals and objectives are. A good example could be a collaborative approach via social enterprises, consulting the community when needed.
— DFAT is trying to promote private sector involvement. It is not just about corporate social responsibility, but about poverty alleviation through all the products and services that a company produces. It is essential to have the community identifying such products and/or services.
— ACFID acts as a regulator for its member NGOs. The goal of the system is to help improving the sector through the application of humanitarian standards, becoming the leaders of and in effectiveness.
— In the XVII International Humanitarian Congress held in Berlin this year, one of the main topics was the establishment of a global standard template for common principles, criteria, and definitions for NGOs.

The problems of effectiveness
— Politicians are very wary of any allegation of misuse of resources.
— Foreign Minister Julie Bishop built her critique of AusAid around a perception of misuse.
— In AusAID, everything was quantified in a narrow kind of way – at the end, everything was gone.
— Since there was distrust in the whole AusAID system, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) didn’t really matter because the decision to shut it down had already been done. This led to driving the business in a distortionary way.
— Some things go unplanned because we don’t have predictable patterns.
— The logic of M&E sometimes takes over the development/aid program itself. The M&E tools are made up to measure something so complex that can’t really be measured.
— The outcome of M&E is usually difficult to synthetize – how do we dig out what’s more useful out of an outcome report? This is a problem within NGOs and other organizations. The solution requires different ways of resourcing it – planning it differently.
— We need to understand the science we are using for M&E.
— Challenges associated to M&E are the donor’s evaluation pressure and closed timelines. Lot of people within the NGO sector don’t like M&E because they don’t see the point of doing it.
There is a need for NGOs to understand it is a tool that can benefit the organization, not just the donors or the public – that’s a challenge.

**Measuring the unmeasurable**

- Why does change happen?
- We need to be a lot broader about change.
- Are we good at measuring trends, scenarios?
- How do we measure variables like self-determinacy, the development of individuals?
- How do we evaluate reconciliation, leadership or prevention?
- What does success look in enabling environments, capacities, structures?
- Measuring cultural outcomes is challenging.
- Recent DFAT-funded projects don’t seem to be very specific in the outcome expectations, beyond results like “changing individuals from their existing position” – no influence on policy.
- We need to shift the language to make these things measurable.
- We try to use quantitative frameworks over unquantifiable variables – we don’t measure outcomes effectively because we are trying to put numbers on too many things.
- In academic research the quantitative vs. qualitative discussions are usually completely misguided.
- We feel like we need to make a decision between quantitative or qualitative evaluation – why not do both?
- What is measured? What’s worth measuring qualitatively? What’s worth measuring quantitatively?
- We should use quantitative/qualitative in a balanced way – “First get your facts; then you can distort them at your leisure” Mark Twain
- It matters how you interpret the numbers.
- Measuring institutional strengthening in the Pacific is difficult, but there is useful quantitative data. This can be used in the communications with stakeholders, and also to facilitate long term investment.
- If we don’t do measurement and performance in a practical way, we shouldn’t do it.
- Qualitative research is about understanding behaviour. It needs more recognition and emphasis.
- Qualitative research for a child-focussed organization is definitely important, but it is also a challenge, as consulting children in an emergency context can be harmful. However, there are ways of measuring effectiveness without harming.
- Measuring the outcome of partnerships is also complex. A partnership implies there is something larger than its partners coming out of it, but it doesn’t always work like that. It needs a different kind of evaluation – what looks different in the world as result of our partnership?
Academics could contribute with different research methodologies.

Academic-to-academic work is needed.

“There’s a world of difference between truth and facts. Facts can obscure the truth.” Maya Angelou

Creating a space for failure

The key to flourish as an organization is in identifying opportunities and gaps, which requires flexibility.

If people are not receptive or the context is not right, nothing is going to happen.

Tolerance for risk is changing in politicians’ narrative, but in reality there is low threshold for risk because of public opinion.

NGOs’ work is in communities with high risk thresholds – their methodology consists on trying to fail, doing it fast, and then moving on.

There are 3 things to bear in mind in M&E: monitoring for accountability, communicating to constituency and learning for improving rather than measuring for improving, the latter being the most important.

We are not set up to manage and/or measure complexity – in a complex environment you need to be prepared to fail.

NGOs have very conservative agendas – can’t lose a dollar here or there. But then how do you embrace and/or celebrate failure?

We don’t have a failure award – awards are only for great successes. We should know where the best spectacular fail is, what we can learn from it. You need to celebrate failure too.

Monitoring and Evaluation as communication

M&E can be a useful tool to help NGOs putting out there all the work they are doing. They can communicate that they are investing resources effectively and delivering positive outcomes.

For example, we need to build up a collective learning from Australia’s foreign aid investment in PNG since 1975. How do we create an M&E framework for PNG that actually tells that story to the public?

Measuring institutional strengthening in the Pacific region is difficult, but there is useful quantitative data that can be used for communications with stakeholders and to facilitate long term investment.

The outcome of M&E is trying to influence change through society, influencing decision makers, politicians and ultimately the public, which is very difficult.

We need to be able to learn from failure – there is a tendency to self-select only relatively positive M&E to be put out there to the public. Publishing failures could improve the conversation with the public.
MSF publishes books about their negotiation process, in a pioneering example of transparency. They are leaders in being out front about the complexity of NGO work on the field. Their high independence facilitates this to happen. They are very transparent not just about the outcome of their work, but also about the procedures and ways of working, publishing discussions and minutes of meetings. This makes it easy to learn from experience and mistakes.

The way evaluation outcomes are presented must also be examined. For example, in one case making a rap was more useful and engaging for the community than writing an 8-page document – it is important how the outcome is transmitted to the public.

The model of independent charity evaluators is also interesting. It allows the public to make informed decisions about donating. It is a good system to facilitate NGOs to be transparent.

Image (L-R): Nishani Nithianandan (AMSA), Dimity Fifer (Pacific Women’s Network) and Beth Eggleston (Humanitarian Advisory Group)
4. The workforce

Introduction

— What are the imperatives for training and preparing a humanitarian task force?
— The humanitarian task force requires support and training that allows people to respond flexibly to the situations they will encounter on the field.
— The workforce is complex and boundaries are blurred – different kinds of people, different kinds of things.
— Opportunities for these conversations are relatively limited – the ‘Rethinking Foreign Aid’ workshop has raised the question about how we can set up a framework for people to develop their skills and converse with each other.
— There is a need for skills about how to deal with people of different cultures, knowledge about legal structure, ethical awareness, and others.
— There are now quite a few opportunities through universities – the landscape has changed.
— The workforce has a great variety of needs – there is a need for a process of education and training. Some of it might simply be to provide a forum for which people can come together and learn from each other.
— What changes are needed to improve the skills and experiences of humanitarian and foreign aid workers?

Discussion

Professionalization and certification

— It is really interesting that there is a tension and discussion about professionalization having an effect of separating humanitarian workers from affected populations. Certification could lead to the use of technical, specific terminology, and the idea of owning the humanitarian enterprise.
— There is a tension; however I always fall back on the ‘brain surgeon analogy’ – a special job that is a lifesaving one. If you are professionalized and apply your skills to a high standard, that is a good thing. However, there is still a strong push back against professionalization.
— In the case of the pre-departure training for medical students, it is structured around setting goals and reflecting on intentions of going into this field: how can you reduce your risk of acquiring disease/injury, increasing cultural sensitivity, willingness to learn and humility, understanding of ethical issues involved, burden on host communities, sustainable relationships. We recommend them to choose organizations that are providing training and supervision. Ethics committees in host communities are a barrier that evaluates research project – there is nothing like this in the international development and humanitarian sector.
— What counts as experience in contemporary development? – People who can afford to go on ‘voluntourism’ programs.
— Students are looking for opportunities to volunteer overseas and are opting to pay private companies for ‘voluntourism’ experiences, which often do not reflect on the impact it has on the community.

— RedR partners with universities. Students learn there from humanitarian practitioners working on the field, learning directly from their experiences.

— Education is one thing, but there are way too many higher education courses in Australia that are not talking to each other. It is not about competition.

— Some of the humanitarian experiences can be deeply traumatising. We do not provide enough protection and support when they return from a traumatic area. Workforce development is also about caring for others and setting up the mechanisms.

**Workforce skills**

— It is really hard to train a foreign aid worker as they are placed in environments where they are dealing with things beyond their expertise. It is hard to train a workforce for the breadth of issues.

— Humanitarians need the ability to learn as they work – it comes back to the relevance of monitoring and evaluation.

— We need to build skills around collaboration and networking – knowing how to work with non-traditional partners and unlikely suspects.

— We need people who are able to hold a government to account, and to engage the public for change here that will have an impact offshore.

— In universities, we teach students, volunteers and aid workers cross cultural communication and reflexivity skills.

— We need to work with universities in developing countries to facilitate skills-building in Australia.

— RedR are teaching necessary skills, specializing in training rather than education.

— We need to know how to put the complex method humanitarians are educated for into simple measures to put in place on the ground.

— We have to be careful about how many resources are put towards qualifications for workers.

— The people who are going to do things in different environments have really good people-skills – this crosses all kind of boundaries and implies people are willing to learn cultural things.

— There are lots of people exposed to traumatic circumstances without proper training.

— Good intentions are a skill set, but not a qualification. It has something to do with who is being attracted into the workforce.

— Some people do not know how to conduct themselves regarding culture, religion and politics.

— There is a lack of language skills. There needs to be a greater sense of obligation to learn – note linguistic imperialism.

— Participating in military exercises is useful to develop necessary skills – we don’t see much NGO participation in military exercises.
The humanitarian sector needs midlevel managers that show flexibility, adaptability and change management skills.

It is important to deconstruct the idea of skills and the concept of skills as a property of an individual obtained through educational processes. The way in which we think about what a skill is and how they are developed is a very important and slightly different conversation.

Some of the most important skills needed in the humanitarian workforce are:

- Capacity to work with ambiguity and complexity, i.e. ways of working, is very important.
- Empathy, reflexivity and skills in diplomacy – capacity to engage in conversations without being overly critical.
- Diplomacy – reflecting on the fact that the idea that people from other nations come in to delivery services separate to government is a crazy idea.
- Being flexible and adaptive is very important because humanitarian work is quite challenging.
- Disaster or conflict – you need to be prepared for how you deal with both and their differences.
- There is a consensus that it is attitudinal, knowledge about how to interact and good practice.
- Self-care, security, cross-cultural sensitive, financial awareness skills.
- Sense of humour.
- Self-awareness and self-care – ability to stay calm in difficult situations.
- Working in international affairs does ask for experience – someone can have a master and still not know anything about life.
- Working in remote areas is the experience that you are looking for.
- Politics – need to know what these interventions mean. Workers need to know how to operate in a political way.
- Intercultural skills.
- People skills – cross all sorts of boundaries.
- Note expertise relevant to future NGOs, marketers (distinct from fundraising), economists, futurists.
- Collaboration and networking skills – how to work with unlikely and non-traditional partners.
- Introspection.
- Humility.
- Ethics.
- Listening.
- Flexibility and adaptability.
- Passion.
— Resilience.
— Interagency awareness.
— Change management skills, including the capacity to empower others.
— Awareness/Learning from experiences in past disasters.
— Financial assessment skills.
— Recruitment skills.
— Calmness in the face of difficulty.

Workforce diversity
— Not too long ago no one knew who the work force was; it was a very fluid work force. People came in and out of the work force very rapidly; there was no systematic training or accreditation.
— Quotas and targets around gender do work. A diversity-run culture is very important. The flowing of different ideas is necessary. Recruitment skills need to be more valued.
— An important part of the workforce is sourced off caring professions such as early education or nursing, which are much gendered professions. We need to make sure that the humanitarian sector does not become a gendered space that is paid less.
— Our best volunteers come from remote Australia. It is about how recruiters read applications?
— Difficulties to access the sector leads to lack of diversity – often to get into the sector you need to volunteer which is a white, middle-classed privilege.
— The workforce is composed of disparate groups, like students who are going on internships and fieldwork overseas, and volunteers.
— People with the political smarts are going to be needed. Engaging economics, marketers, digital experts, futurists and thinkers – these are the people that we need to get on board.
— The sector in Australia has dropped in numbers of people, it is shrinking – there is more demand from students than there is supply.
— Demand is actually in the global South – nationalization and localization is an issue.
— Recruitment as a technical skill is missing – we do not have enough diversity, not enough aboriginal Australians, not enough women in leadership roles and not enough people from diaspora communities. Recruitment skills are absolutely instrumental and we do not do it very well at all.

Cultural and political impact
— Humanitarians need to understand the baggage that they pack when they go overseas.
— Humanitarian workers need intercultural communication skills and an awareness of the potential impact they will have.
— International internships with students – they often have no awareness that their presence will have some kind of impact.
The politics of the interventions are very important. We can focus on technical skills but if you cannot assess the political implication of interventions we do ourselves a massive disservice.

Diplomacy – reflecting on the fact that the idea that people from other nations come in to delivery services separate to government is a crazy idea.

Diplomacy is really important because you need to respect local structures. The intervention after the Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu is an example of bad influence on a recipient government.

Understanding accountability principles and being able to coordinate well. The most counter-productive attitude is the idea that recipient people should be grateful for any assistance that humanitarians provide.

Humanitarians need to understand the context that they are going to work in.

Empathy – humanitarians assume that they will get this, but they cannot take it for granted that people are empathic – not sure how to teach this.

Resilience – cultural awareness. All players need to have a cultural awareness of different agencies.

All recipients need is people that can come in and do things that they cannot do.
5. Where to from here

New government, new opportunities

— Recent political changes, including a new Prime Minister and an additional Minister for Aid in the Pacific, who has been quite active, represent new opportunities for the foreign aid sector. It is an opportunity to recast the conversation in a positive way.

— We need to do a good synthesis, facilitated by collective sharing, and analyse potential options.

— We need to keep the discussion about effectiveness going.

— We need to reinforce the ongoing dialogue with the government – this round table may help shaping different ways for evaluation and change.

— Caution: There is a risk that this will settle back into established patterns with tweaking here and there – need to think about what prevents that.

— How can new options be crystalized and be very provocative in a good way? How do we get to that point?

— There is a new ACFID website to facilitate engagement.

— The Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade is happy to help in whatever way they can.

New public communication strategy

— The sector needs to be more advanced in communicating.

— There is a fertile ground for a cross-disciplinary team to help NGOs communicating and campaigning – merging area, not only for his roundtable, but in all campaigning organizations.

— Ideas can be messaged through the “supporting AusAID” campaign – university coalition

New engaging opportunities

— We can engage foreign university students – how do they see the future of their countries?

— We can design strategies to make it happen, involving some of the people present at the ‘Rethinking Foreign Aid’ round table.

— There is a very diverse students’ background in RMIT – there are weekly debates, which could be good to mix with members of the ‘Rethinking Foreign Aid’ round table.

— There are over 500,000 Latin American students in Australia – We need to think about how to more broadly collaborate with them.

— Australian students are thinking more about the global South than an average exchange student.

— How do we keep this space going? – Next January there is a young people congress in PNG on nation building at a university, where issues like a new constitution and foreign aid will be discussed. Could we get involved, as in “we have a similar debate going on”? – We could learn about the PNG and Melanesian ways of thinking.
New working group

— There is a lot of work to be done – unsolved problems, opportunities arising.
— The ‘Rethinking Foreign Aid’ round table is a preliminary conversation.
— We could organize workshops more focused on a series of ideas – is this worth continuing?
— Some people say “we’ve been through this before, didn’t go anywhere”, but this is not the case – there are a lot of opportunities and strategies we can try.

END OF ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Image (L-R): Fiona Tarpey (Red Cross), Marc Purcell (Australian Council for International Development) and Paul Komesaroff (Global Reconciliation and Monash University)
In Attendance

Conveners

Beth Eggleston
Director
Humanitarian Advisory Group
Beth Eggleston worked for fifteen years in the humanitarian sector specialising in civil-military interaction and humanitarian coordination. During this time she worked with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in Afghanistan where she developed civil-military guidance, policy on interaction with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and was involved in rolling out humanitarian reform including the cluster approach. Beth also has experience working alongside host governments and with local and international NGOs in Africa, Asia and South Pacific. She has co-authored publications on peace, development and civil-military cooperation.

Damian Grenfell
Director
Centre for Global Research, RMIT University
The common basis for Damian’s research is an interest in social change and transformation in the context of conflict, resistance and resolution. His research currently focuses on social change and post-conflict nation- and state-formation. There are two points of interest in the research, the first being the military and humanitarian interventions into societies, and the second the subsequent attempt at development, peace and state-building. He has worked extensively in Timor-Leste on a wide range of projects, including with Oxfam, Concern, Irish Aid and a wide range of local organisations and communities, and is currently the research advisor on a four year Ending Violence Against Women Program funded by DFAT and implemented by the Asia Foundation.

Paul Komesaroff
Board member and Executive Director, Global Reconciliation
Professor of Medicine, Monash University
Paul Komesaroff is a physician, medical researcher and philosopher at Monash University in Melbourne, where he is Professor of Medicine. He is also Executive Director of Global Reconciliation, Director of the Centre for Ethics in Medicine and Society, and Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Ethics Consortium. He is involved in a wide range of research and action projects nationally and internationally in the fields of reconciliation and ethics relating to health care delivery, global health and education. He is the Chair of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Bioethical Inquiry and the author of more than 375 articles and 14 books in science, ethics and philosophy.
Participants

John Ball
International Programs Coordinator
Act for Peace

John has a long history in policy and advocacy work. He has supported ecumenism through his work with the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), where he is now an International Programs Coordinator with Act for Peace –NCCA, working with project partners in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. Australian Indigenous issues, Sri Lankan peace advocacy and refugee and displaced peoples’ programs have been key past work foci. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) awarded John the Sir Ron Wilson Human Rights Award in 2009 for his contribution to the international development sector, especially on Sri Lanka.

Dimity Fifer
Convenor and Founder
Pacific Women’s Network

With a focus on ethical behaviour, results, sustainability and impact, Dimity combines innovative systems thinking with outcome management. As a dynamic and passionate leader, she has achieved many firsts in the ground breaking, globally recognised and awarded work she has led across Australia, the Pacific, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Dimity has developed extensive networks and mutually beneficial partnerships across all sectors, working with leaders at the highest levels of government, corporate, academic and community life.

Michael Hassett
Director, Humanitarian Response Branch and Partnerships
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Michael is the Director of the Humanitarian Response and Partnerships Section in the Humanitarian and NGO Partnerships Division. Michael’s team maintains partnerships with Australian NGOs – including World Vision, the Australian Red Cross and Australian Government Agencies to support the Australian Government’s response to humanitarian crises when they occur. Michael has previously served as the Head of the Australian aid program in Burma and Laos PDR.

Mary Hemming
Former CEO
Therapeutic Guidelines

Mary Hemming is a pharmacist and epidemiologist focussed on optimising the use of medicines. She was part of the group responsible for the notion of using prescribing guidelines to encourage better use of medicines. This group, with a small amount of government funding in the 1980s, was able to transform itself into an independent self-funding not-for-profit organisation, Therapeutic Guidelines Limited. Mary was the CEO from 1996 until she retired in 2012. Therapeutic Guidelines are part of the culture of the Australian health system—they are used by health professionals at all levels, and in all settings. With the support of WHO they are also highly regarded internationally. Mary arranged for health workers in developing countries to have free access to the Guidelines. She also instituted an editorial training program to help build capacity among health professionals from those countries.
Charles Hunt
Vice-Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellow
Centre for Global Research, RMIT University
Dr Charles T. Hunt is a Vice-Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Research Fellow at RMIT University and an Honorary Fellow at the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. His research focuses on peace operations, security and justice in conflict-affected societies and monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding programming. He has worked with the Australian government assessing their role in peace operations and performed consultancy roles with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the UN and several international humanitarian NGOs. His most recent book is UN Peace Operations and International Policing: Navigating Complexity, Assessing Impact and Learning to Learn (Routledge, 2015).

Elizabeth Kath
Board member and Executive, Global Reconciliation
Lecturer, Centre for Global Research, RMIT University
Elizabeth Kath is a Lecturer in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University, Honorary Research Fellow with the UN Global Compact Cities Programme and Co-Director of Global Reconciliation. Elizabeth has a political science background and now works within the interdisciplinary field of global studies. Thematically, she is interested in reconciliation, intercultural communication, and social inclusion / exclusion. Regionally, Kath has a long-standing interest in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Australia’s relationship with Latin America.

Drasko Kraguljac
Director of Operations
RedR
Originally qualifying as a lawyer, Drasko spent 15 years in the humanitarian field, predominantly working in the logistics operations for MSF, UN and Red Cross. He started working with MSF Holland in 1996 and continued to do so for 6 years in Asia & Africa (Central Asian -stans, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ukraine, Croatia, Bosnia) as well as on the HQ level in Amsterdam as the Field Support Adviser and Training facilitator. Drasko joined RedR Australia in 2007. As Director of Operations, Drasko oversees the recruitment, training and deployment of technical experts into surge roles during disasters and emergencies. RedR Australia deployed over 100 humanitarians into 28 countries last financial year.

Archie Law
Director
ActionAid
Archie Law has worked in conflict affected environments throughout Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Prior to joining ActionAid, Archie worked for the United Nations Development Program in South Africa and the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. Archie was a member of the UN team that developed the contingency plan for an emergency response to the conflict in Iraq in 2002-2003. He also spent four years heading up the Mine Advisory Group’s 500-person Cambodia Program. Before joining the non-profit sector, Archie was a drummer for the 1980s band Huxton Creepers. The group released three albums and gave over 500 live appearances throughout Australia.
Debbi Long
Medical Anthropologist
Global Reconciliation
Debbi is a medical anthropologist. Her research interests include health (in)equity, identity discourses (including gender) and the culture of western biomedicine. She has undertaken research in Turkey, Holland and Australia. She is on the boards of social enterprise NGO Lentil as Anything, and Swazi-based health NGO Possible Dreams International. She is an ambassador for the Indigenous mental health NGO Lateral Love, and is the Founder of the Health Anthropology network. Her university teaching includes medical anthropology, qualitative research methods and public/population health.

Richard Moore
Former Deputy Director - General, Asia
AusAID
Richard recently served as a Myanmar election observer in Bago region and Karen State. He is currently conducting an independent review of Myanmar aid architecture. Richard was previously Deputy Director General, Asia and Gender Advocate at AusAID. He also served almost four years on the Board of the Asian Development Bank in Manila. Richard worked on the Secretariat of the Simons Review that recommended a strong poverty focus for Australian aid. Before that, he was Principal Aid Adviser to the Minister for International Development and Pacific Island Affairs.

Nishani Nithianandan
Global Health Education Officer, Pre-Departure Training Course Convenor
Australian Medical Students’ Association (AMSA)
Nishani Nithianandan is a 5th year medical student, currently completing an Honours research year exploring perinatal mental health in women of refugee background. Her current roles include Australian Medical Students’ Association (AMSA) Global Health Education Officer, AMSA Academy Pre-Departure Training Course Convenor, Embrace Education Recruitment and Training Officer, and Victorian Medical Women’s Society Student Representative. Previously, she has had active involvement in student-led refugee health advocacy and education.

Lesley Pruitt
Lecturer, International Development, Centre for Global Research
RMIT University
Lesley Pruitt is a Lecturer in Global Studies and International Development in the School of Global, Urban & Social Studies and a member of the Centre for Global Research at RMIT University. A Truman Scholar and Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, Lesley received her Masters & PhD from the University of Queensland. Her book Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender & Change is available through SUNY Press, and her book on all-female peacekeeping units is forthcoming with University of California Press.
Marc Purcell
Executive Director
Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
Marc Purcell is the Executive Director of ACFID, having joined the organisation in 2009. Marc has worked for 25 years in the community, international development and human rights sectors in Australia. Marc was previously Advocacy Manager with Oxfam Australia from 2004 – 2009 and Executive Officer with the Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace from 2001-2004. He has also worked as Country Program Manager for Africa with Australian Volunteers International and was also an Australian Volunteer with UNHCR in Nepal assisting Tibetan refugees.

Sharmini Sherrard
Member of the National Centre of South Asian Studies and the Food Security Group
Monash University
Sharmini Sherrard has worked for United Nations peacekeeping operations in East Timor and Kosovo in the areas of humanitarian coordination, peacebuilding, stabilisation and electoral processes. She also worked for the Australian Council for Overseas Development Human Rights Office in Melbourne and the National Consortium of South Asian Studies as a senior researcher. From 2010–2014, she developed and delivered a Masters in International Crisis Management at Monash University. She was a research fellow at Monash Asia Institute and is currently a member of the National Centre of South Asian Studies and the Food Security Group, Monash University.

Judy Swann OAM
Director Civil-Military Concepts and Capability
Australian Civil-Military Centre
Judy Swann joined the Department of Defence in 2007 and has worked with the Vice Chief of the Defence (VCDF) Group, the Strategic Policy Division, and was appointed as the Senior Advisor in Defence Cabinet Liaison. In previous Defence roles, Ms Swann developed the strategic governance framework for the Joint Health Command, managed Defence’s strategic research contracts and was seconded to former Ambassador Bill Farmer to conduct the Review of the ACMC in 2010. Before joining Defence, Ms Swann worked in senior roles within the Non-Government sector, including General Secretary of YWCA Australia, Convenor Defence Families Australia and Executive Officer of the National Rural Women’s Coalition.

Fiona Tarpey
Manager, International Strategy, Policy and Communications
Red Cross

Emma Wanchap
Acting Manager and Senior Policy Advisor - Policy Research & Government Relations
World Vision
Currently, Emma Wanchap is acting Manager of Policy Research and Government Relations at World Vision Australia. She is also senior policy advisor with a focus on child rights and protection. Prior to this role, Emma was the Policy Advisor for World Vision’s Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs Team for a year. During that time she was deployed to WV’s Syria Crisis Response in Amman, Jordan as acting External Affairs Director. In both roles one of the main topics of discussion was humanitarian financing. Emma’s background is human rights and humanitarian law and has expertise and experience at the United Nations.
Event assistants

Sam Carroll-Bell  
Centre Coordinator and PhD Candidate  
Centre for Global Research, RMIT University  
Sam Carroll-Bell is the Research Centre Coordinator for the Centre for Global Research. This role includes event and publication management, financial monitoring and reporting, grant development, and oversight of the Centre’s human resources responsibilities. As a PhD Candidate, Sam’s research focuses on the epistemological framing and impact of international development activities in Timor-Leste.

Kent Goldsworthy  
Associate Lecturer, PhD Candidate  
Centre for Global Research, RMIT University  
Kent’s PhD research interests relate to the production of political, social and cultural relationships between the economically rich and poor worlds with a specific interest in the ‘commodification of good intentions’. The research encompasses globalisation, civil society in development, foreign aid, consumerism and popular culture. His teaching has predominantly been in the following courses: Theories of Development, NGOs, Civil Society & Development, Learning & Participation in Development, Governance & Democracy in Development.

Victor Lasa  
Researcher, PhD Candidate  
Centre for Global Research, RMIT University  
Victor’s research with the Centre for Global Research relates to military and humanitarian interventions, studying how they impact on- and are perceived by impacted local populations. He is also involved in researching civil-military interaction following armed conflict and natural disaster. Both topics relate to his PhD research, which explores the correlation between publicly-available information and conflict resolution in a context of international crisis. Through analysis of information released to civil society by conflict-relevant actors (Governments, NGOs, military, media) at local and global scales, his research seeks to identify how information contributes to conflict development and resolution.

Alex Lia  
Research Intern  
Humanitarian Advisory Group  
Alex is fourth year undergraduate student completing a double degree in Law and Arts with a major in International Relations at Monash University. She has completed a law and human rights internship in South Africa and has community development volunteering experience in Cambodia. Alex has volunteered at the World Vision Australia head office, Amnesty International Monash and is a member of the Law Institute of Victoria Young Lawyers’ Section Community Issues Committee. Alex is now undertaking a research internship with the Humanitarian Advisory Group. In this role, she contributed to the interim review for Australia’s National Action for Women, Peace and Security and other projects. Alex is hoping to pursue a career in the humanitarian sector.
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