

Supporting peace-building and community and civil society development

Overview

- 6.1 The joint DFAT/AusAID submission highlights a number of peace-building and community and civil society¹ development activities that the Australian aid program supports in the Pacific. These include:
- in the Solomon Islands, as a practical peace dividend, over 700 community level activities in all provinces to improve the provision of education, health, water supply and road maintenance;
 - in PNG, the Community Development Scheme which gives grants to organisations like the Peace Foundation Melanesia (providing mediation and restorative justice training to village court magistrates and village peace officers) and the PNG Church Partnership Program (where Australian faith-based organisations support their PNG church counterparts to deliver health and education services);
 - in Vanuatu, the Wan Smolbag Theatre which educates communities about development issues through plays about environmental, social, health and human rights matters;

1 'Civil society' includes organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups. Source: London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society, http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

- women's crisis centres in Fiji and Vanuatu and a family support centre in the Solomon Islands, that provide counselling and advocacy services for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse;
 - assistance to the United Nations Development Program in Suva to analyse sources of conflict in the Pacific;
 - the Regional Rights Resource Team in Suva, a regional legal literacy project aiming to enhance the legal and social status of women in various Pacific island countries; and
 - through the Australian Human Rights Small Grants Scheme, funding local organisations in Tonga, Samoa and Fiji to train women, youth, teachers, police and church ministers in human rights. The Scheme has also been used to build capacity for female candidates for elections in the Solomon Islands and Tonga.²
- 6.2 The White Paper states that the aid program will make continued and increased use of the non-government community as a delivery mechanism for Australian aid, mainly through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program which facilitates collaboration between the government and accredited NGOs.³
- 6.3 A new initiative *Mobilising New Australian Links to the Region* will tap into the skills and experience of the broader Australian community to contribute to the region's development.⁴ This will include greater support for community-based organisations that lack the formal arrangements needed to meet AusAID's accreditation standards, to qualify for smaller amounts of project funding, and using professional bodies and business links more. One option being explored is linking Australian schools with schools abroad to deepen children's perception of themselves as global citizens.⁵

Recognition of civil society

- 6.4 At a Canberra hearing, ACFID acknowledged that there has been an absolute dollar increase in funding for the AusAID-NGO Cooperation
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2 Submission No. 6, DFAT/AusAID, pp. 8-9, and Wan Smolbag website, <http://www.wan-smolbag-theatre.org/>

3 White Paper, p. 64.

4 White Paper, pp. 64-65.

5 White Paper, p. 65.

program from 0.9% to 1.2% of the total aid budget. However, in ACFID's view, the value of civil society partnerships remains an underutilised asset:

... it seems odd, given the strengths that Australia can draw on in this area (we have this whole fabric of connections, not only through the churches, but through service clubs and business links and so on), that we have about the lowest proportion of support of any of the OECD countries for civil society type mechanisms using the aid program ... Our American and Canadian colleagues do proportionally four times more than we do this way.⁶

6.5 In their written submission, ACFID referred to their members' expertise and long-standing relationships in many Pacific island countries and argued that making greater use of the NGO sector was more cost-effective relative to using 'for-profit' contractors.⁷

6.6 At the Sydney hearing, the Red Cross said that, in their opinion:

References to civil society partnerships are largely absent from the White Paper.⁸

6.7 Further:

The Australian aid program should explicitly recognise and strengthen the role of civil society as a partner in delivering health and HIV services.⁹

6.8 The Red Cross described the positive impact that one of its AusAID-supported health awareness projects, the Solomon Islands Health Awareness Project, has had in remote parts of the Solomon Islands,

... that set of activities has led to a reduction in community tensions and building of peace in those communities.¹⁰

6.9 AusAID told the Committee that it already had a track record in supporting civil society development in a range of Pacific island countries but the agency intends to do more, despite the fact that it was not always an easy area for an external donor to become engaged in.¹¹

6 Transcript, 27 November 2006, ACFID, p. 10.

7 Submission No. 18, ACFID, p. 2.

8 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Australian Red Cross, p. 27.

9 Submission No. 9, Australian Red Cross, p. 4 and Transcript, 2 May 2007, Australian Red Cross, p. 28.

10 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Australian Red Cross, p. 28. See p. 13 for more details of the Health Awareness Project in the Solomon Islands.

11 Transcript, 27 February 2007, AusAID, p. 14.

- 6.10 In its supplementary submission, AusAID outlined a number of civil society strengthening activities which it is currently supporting. In addition to those already mentioned in paragraph 6. 1, these include:
- a five-year \$4.5 million Community Partnership Program in Vanuatu for building the capacity of key organisations with local legitimacy, including the National Council of Chiefs and Transparency International; and
 - an Electoral Support Program which has funded civil society organisations to carry out voter awareness campaigns in the lead up to the 2007 election and a Media for Development initiative that supports civil society to produce media content dealing with development issues in PNG.¹²
- 6.11 AusAID reiterated that civil society is an important partner in service delivery and that it will continue to provide support for civil society – including churches – to work in partnership with governments to deliver essential services, and to consult all stakeholders during the development of its programs.¹³

Consultation

- 6.12 The Committee asked Oxfam and Red Cross to characterise their level of consultation with AusAID. Oxfam said:
- ... there is quite a healthy dialogue at the moment between our executive director and program director with [AusAID's director-General] and senior staff.¹⁴
- 6.13 Similarly, the Red Cross indicated that it had a professional and positive relationship with AusAID and that while differences may arise from time to time on specific technical matters they are able to be resolved, based on respect for the expertise and capacity brought by both parties. Moreover, there is a common desire to reduce poverty and vulnerability in the region.¹⁵
- 6.14 The Office for Women told the Committee that it had welcomed the invitation from AusAID to contribute to the development of AusAID's gender policy.¹⁶

12 Supplementary Submission No. 32, AusAID, p. 7.

13 Supplementary Submission No. 32, AusAID, p. 7.

14 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Oxfam, p. 21.

15 Correspondence from Australian Red Cross, 07/05/07.

16 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Office for Women, p. 15.

Media

- 6.15 In his submission to the inquiry, Mr Brown, editor of the Avaiki news agency in the Cook Islands pointed out that radio services were an important means for ordinary citizens to access governance information. Mr Brown declared that underinvestment in public broadcasting services throughout the Pacific had impacted on the quality and quantity of production output, and in his view, more support for independent media was also required. He recommended that additional funding be allocated to redress the various technical deficiencies.¹⁷
- 6.16 At the hearing, the Committee asked AusAID to comment on the status of the Pacific Media Initiative (PMI) which the Australian Government previously funded.¹⁸ AusAID responded that it had been replaced in recent years by the Pacific Media and Communications Facility (PMCF), which has a \$2.1 million allocation for 2004 through 2007 to build media capacity in the Pacific.¹⁹

Small arms security

- 6.17 In its submission to the inquiry, the Red Cross refers to the destabilising effects the use of small arms and light weapons have had in places like Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and East Timor.²⁰ The Red Cross notes that Australia has been instrumental in weapons control in the region, however, it believes that Australia should take a stronger stance on restricting civilian possession of small arms.²¹
- 6.18 The Department of Defence informed the Committee that it had constructed armouries through the region, in Fiji, PNG, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands and armoury projects were underway in Samoa and Tonga, with plans for the same in Tuvalu and Kiribati.²² Defence observed:

Had those armouries and magazines not gone ahead, then there could have been a leakage of weapons from the police force or the defence forces in the region to whoever wanted them.²³

17 Submission no. 13, Avaiki News Agency.

18 Transcript, 27 February 2007, AusAID, p. 18.

19 Supplementary Submission No. 32, AusAID, p. 9.

20 Submission No. 9, Australian Red Cross, p. 20.

21 Submission No. 9, Australian Red Cross, p. 4.

22 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Department of Defence, p. 20.

23 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Department of Defence, p. 23.

- 6.19 In addition to weapons security, Defence said it undertook weapons stocktakes in the region, and had been supporting a major PNG Defence Force stocktake:

We did a muster in 2002, and since then all those weapons have been destroyed ... as I understand it, there were 3, 426 weapons recently destroyed. That is a significant reduction in weapons.²⁴

- 6.20 The Committee asked Defence to comment on the extent of proliferation of small arms in the region, in particular in the PNG Highlands where weapons have allegedly been lost from police armouries rather than PNG Defence Force ones.²⁵

- 6.21 Defence later supplied some information on these matters. The Department remarked that proliferation of small arms in the region continued to be a significant concern. Defence reiterated that its focus in PNG was on developing the capacity of the PNG Defence Force and it worked to improve their weapons storage, stock control and weapons management practices, as part of an agreed bilateral project. Defence pointed out that leakage from armouries (be they Defence or police ones) was actually only part of the broader and much more difficult challenge, which is the very high ratio of private ownership of arms. These include illicit weapons gained from other sources, namely criminal networks (which by their nature are virtually impossible to count), and also many lawfully held weapons.

Lawfully held civilian stockpiles of small arms in the Pacific include 3.1 million firearms, or one privately held gun for every 10 people ... this surpasses the global ratio by 50%...²⁶

Building people-to-people links

- 6.22 The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) told the Committee that there has been a decline in people-to-people exchanges in the Pacific over the years, particularly in PNG, and in their view this needed to be addressed:

24 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Department of Defence, p. 23.

25 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Department of Defence, p. 23.

26 Supplementary Submission No. 30, Department of Defence, p. 3.

This is something that the Australian Strategic Policy Institute pointed to in its [Strengthening our neighbour: Australia and the future of PNG] report last year ...

... there is a real need to develop all sorts of diverse opportunities for different kinds of people-to-people as well as government-to-government encounters between Australia, Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.²⁷

6.23 ACFID concurred:

On a microscale the Church Partnership Program has shown what can be done ... We do need to draw more actively on the pool of Australians [from] churches, service clubs, trade unions, professional associations and NGOs.²⁸

6.24 Several submissions and witnesses supported the notion of forming denser networks of exchanges between Australians and Pacific Islanders, for development reasons and to promote a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation between the respective cultures. Some of the possible means to achieve this have been elaborated on elsewhere in this report, such as a seasonal labour mobility scheme (see Chapter 2), AusAID scholarships (see Chapter 4) and the PNG Church Partnerships Program (Chapter 5). Other ways, including already established as well as new professional and educational linkages and exchanges, and support for greater women's participation in decision-making at village, provincial and national levels will be explored further here.

Professional links

6.25 Defence told the Committee that it supported training places for Pacific Islanders at the Australian Defence College, and Pacific Islander cadets worked together with Australian officers to learn the core skills of their trade.²⁹

6.26 Defence also runs an annual program called 'Exercise Puk Puk' whereby Australian engineers work together with PNGDF engineers on various construction projects throughout PNG. Defence advised:

27 Transcript, 26 October 2006, ACPACS, pp. 3 - 4.

28 Transcript, 27 November, ACFID, p. 5.

29 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Defence, p. 26.

... it is a very visible and tangible sign of not only the ADF but also the local soldiers contributing to their community and that is very well received.³⁰

6.27 Similarly, the AFP reported to the Committee that it had begun incorporating Pacific Island nations into its IDG training faculty:

We have intentionally had Solomon Islanders join our training faculty on three separate occasions and it has been an outstanding success.³¹

Group partnership model

6.28 ACFID says there is potential for various 'group partnerships' (similar in concept to the PNG Church Partnership Program) to enhance the aid program to the Pacific, particularly in respect of health services. ACFID proposes for instance a *Partnership to Support Pacific People with Disabilities* – a substantial disability program to assist Pacific service providers, trainers and client support groups by utilising Australian development and disability expertise.³²

6.29 At the hearing, ACFID elaborated:

Through ACROD [Australia's National Disability Services peak body], the domestic disability organisation, we have world-class expertise. Linked with ACFID we could do some wonderful things in the region.³³

6.30 Subsequent to the hearing, ACFID informed the Committee that ACFID and ACROD had created an Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC) which formalises their intention to work together to build the profile of and improve disability services in the region. One of the consortium's first activities was to hold a photographic exhibition on disability and development in the region at Parliament House in Canberra in February 2007.³⁴

30 Transcript, 9 February 2007, Defence, p. 25.

31 Transcript, 9 February 2007, AFP, p. 40.

32 Submission No. 18, ACFID, p. 3.

33 Transcript, 27 November 2006, ACFID, p. 7.

34 Supplementary Submission No. 28, ACFID, p. 2.

Centre for Democratic Institutions

- 6.31 ACFID expressed concerns to the Committee that the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI)³⁵ has scaled back its involvement in supporting civil society in the Pacific.³⁶
- 6.32 At a private meeting in late 2006, CDI told the Committee that it had instigated a new mandate which focuses on strengthening (1) political parties and (2) parliamentary governance in the region.³⁷
- 6.33 In addition to producing research papers, some of the CDI's key practical activities, include:
- the Political Party Development Course (PPD) – a flagship training course which aims to give party officials and their equivalents in Australia's partner countries the skills to build stronger and more responsible party organisations. Working closely with the major Australian parties, the PPD course covers issues of party functioning such as candidate selection, membership, campaigning, finance, media relations, issue management, the role of parliamentary parties, and ensuring party discipline. PPD also feeds into a range of more targeted, in-country programs working with political parties in Indonesia, Timor Leste and Melanesia;
 - the CDI Political Party Assistance Roundtable which brings Australian policymakers and political party secretariats together with the major international organisations working on political party assistance in our region; and
 - the annual Pacific Parliamentary Dialogue whereby Pacific parliamentarians gather to discuss key challenges facing the region.³⁸
- 6.34 CDI invited the Committee to participate in its 8th annual CDI Parliamentary Dialogue which was held from 11-13th December 2006 in Samoa. These dialogues bring together Members of Parliament from the Pacific Island countries, Australia and New Zealand to discuss public leadership in the region. A special feature of the 2006 event was a full-day's program devoted to the subject of 'women in parliamentary

35 CDI responds to the needs of developing countries, concentrating on good governance and democratic institutions, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region. CDI receives its core funding from AusAID and is based at the ANU.

36 Transcript, 27 November 2006, ACFID, p. 5.

37 Details of the CDI's mandate, training courses and other activities can be found on their website, <http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/>

38 CDI website, http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/activities/Activities_HOME.htm

politics.’ The Committee Chair attended the conference and chaired a panel discussion on ‘Women in National Leadership’. The program, list of participants and conference report can be downloaded from the CDI website.³⁹

Office for Women - strengthening women’s links

Electing women to office

6.35 The Office for Women notes that just 3% of the region’s MPs are women.⁴⁰ At the Sydney hearing, the Office for Women referred to the under-representation of women in public office and the need to redress the balance:

There is a significant body of research that indicates that, where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower. There is also research that suggests that in order to influence parliamentary agendas, particularly in areas such as health and educational welfare there does need to be a critical mass of women parliamentarians – some say 15%-30%.⁴¹

6.36 The Committee heard that the Office for Women (whose primary focus is on domestic issues facing women in Australia) nonetheless makes a niche contribution to supporting women in the Pacific. Working together with AusAID, DFAT and CDI, recent efforts to build links between Australian and Pacific women leaders include:

- in September 2006, supporting female ministers from East Timor and Tonga and an election candidate from the Solomon Islands to attend the annual Commonwealth-State Ministers Conference on the Status of Women, known as MINCO;
- in October 2006, arranging a side program of events for the two female PNG participants in CDI’s inaugural Political Party Development Course, consisting of meetings with Australian women parliamentarians and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission;

39 http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/asia_pacific_region/2006-07/2006_12_AP_PRO_8thPacPD_Samoa.htm

40 Submission No. 21, Office for Women, Table on Women’s Political Representation in Pacific Island Countries: Source IPU 2006, p. 6.

41 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Office for Women, p. 12.

- co-sponsoring with AusAID and DFAT a delegation for 4 women from PNG to attend the APEC Women Leaders Network in June 2007; and
 - grants to Australian NGOs to build on their activities in PNG, the Solomons and Timor-Leste to promote women's participation in leadership roles.⁴²
- 6.37 At the Brisbane hearing, the Committee asked Dr Baines to comment on the extent to which he thought CDI's activities, including bringing women out to Australia for their courses on political party development and parliamentary strengthening, are making a difference in terms of supporting women to stand for office in the Pacific.⁴³
- 6.38 Dr Baines told the Committee that they certainly make a contribution. He went on to describe the determination of a group of women in Simbu province that had formed a coalition and 'contested every ward at election and every electorate that they could get a run in'. Dr Baines alluded to the very many difficult challenges that the women faced in trying to get elected to public office but said that eventually:
- They got one person up out of a field of 30-40 ...⁴⁴
- 6.39 At a private meeting with the Committee, Ms Robyn Slarke (human rights advocate, village courts magistrate trainer in the Highlands of PNG, and independent documentary-maker) showed excerpts from her films which include first-hand accounts of the many obstacles that women face standing for election to the PNG Parliament and their bravery in persisting in the face of a lack of resources, violent intimidation by men and fear of retribution. The film also attested to the difference that women parliamentarians like Dame Carol Kidu, PNG's Minister for Community Development, Women, Religion and Sports, are making to their community and country.

Linkages between Australian and Pacific women parliamentarians

- 6.40 At the Sydney hearing, ways to strengthen networks between Australian women parliamentarians and Pacific women parliamentarians were discussed. The Office for Women acknowledged the participation of several Australian female parliamentarians in CDI activities as well as others, and said it saw its role as facilitating access to people who would be most useful. The Office for Women said that:

42 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Office of Women, pp. 13-15.

43 Transcript, 26 October 2006, p. 34.

44 Transcript, 26 October 2006, p. 34.

The feedback that we have had from those [visiting] women is that it is incredibly morale boosting and they draw lots of ideas from how different Australian women leaders look at issues.⁴⁵

- 6.41 The Committee acknowledged that engagement had been somewhat ad-hoc but there were practical challenges to consider with pursuing more formal regional networks, like the logistics of travel within the region.⁴⁶

Indigenous connections

- 6.42 The Committee wanted to learn to what extent links were being made between indigenous women in Australia and women in the Pacific. The Office for Women said that women in the Pacific had expressed keen interest in this area:

The women that have come here from the Pacific have shown a real interest in what is happening in [the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination] – our colleagues in FaCSIA – in the women’s leadership area ... We [are] talking about what opportunities there might be to forge some linkages with their Indigenous Women’s Leadership Program.⁴⁷

Pacific expertise

Pacific studies at Australian universities

- 6.43 At the Brisbane hearing, the Committee asked Pacific Studies lecturer, Dr Quanchi to comment on the level of interest amongst Australian students for learning about the Pacific. Dr Quanchi replied that Pacific studies was less popular than Asian or European studies at his university, however there was certainly interest. Dr Quanchi teaches approximately 100 students each semester, and Pacific studies is also taught at several other Australian universities, including Griffith University, James Cook University and the ANU.⁴⁸ Dr Quanchi acknowledged that while his field work courses were particularly popular, these were limited, for practical reasons, to countries where there were flights available, at reasonable prices.⁴⁹

45 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Office for Women, p. 16.

46 Transcript, 2 May 2007, pp. 17 - 18.

47 Transcript, 2 May 2007, p. 17.

48 Transcript, 26 October 2006, Dr Quanchi, p. 43.

49 Transcript, 26 October 2006, Dr Quanchi, p. 42.

- 6.44 The Fijian High Commissioner to Australia, His Excellency Mr Naidu informed the Committee that there had been a reduction in the size of the Pacific Studies Department at the ANU since the seventies and eighties as the focus had shifted to Asia, however DFAT was directly funding several important programs like the [State, Society and Governance in Melanesia project]⁵⁰ and the CDI, both at the ANU.⁵¹
- 6.45 Both Dr Quanchi and the Fijian High Commissioner observed that there appeared to be a resurgence of interest in Pacific studies, with the ANU soon to commence undergraduate courses to complement its postgraduate ones, and the establishment of an International Centre of Excellence in Asia-Pacific Studies (ICEAPS), also at the ANU, which aims to develop a network which will promote excellence and collaboration in Asian and Pacific studies across Australia and internationally.⁵² One of the first steps of the ICEAPS has been to form a national association to represent the interests of Pacific Island scholars, the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies (AAAPS).⁵³ A Steering Committee comprised of academics from different states has been formed to progress the formation of the AAAPS.⁵⁴

DFAT and AusAID

- 6.46 At the Brisbane hearing, it was suggested by some witnesses that specialisation in Pacific issues is not encouraged within DFAT and AusAID in the same way that specialisation in Asian issues is. The Asia Pacific Business Council claimed that:

There is only a handful of people who you could say have developed genuine Pacific expertise and who are able to draw on that in developing advice for the government.⁵⁵

- 6.47 At a subsequent hearing, DFAT refuted the claims:

... I am thinking of people I know and, for example, the current High Commissioner in the Solomon Islands worked in the Pacific Division before he went there. The High Commissioner in the

50 See the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project website for details, <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/>

51 Transcript, 27 November 2006, Fijian High Commissioner to Australia, p. 37.

52 See ICEAPS website for details, <http://iceaps.anu.edu.au/>

53 Transcript, 27 November 2006, Fijian High Commissioner to Australia, p. 37 and Transcript, 26 October 2006, Dr Quanchi, p. 41.

54 See ICEAPS website, <http://iceaps.anu.edu.au/pacific.html>

55 Transcript, 26 October 2006, p. 61.

Solomons came back to a job in the Pacific Division ... the Special Coordinator of RAMSI went as High Commissioner to Fiji.⁵⁶

- 6.48 DFAT elaborated on the range of factors that contributed to staff turnover. Not least, every three years people at posts will change, because Australia has a posting system. The Department said it tried to balance drawing on expertise with 'refreshing with new blood' and that there was very good expertise in the Pacific Division, with people coming back from the Pacific to working on issues [in Canberra].⁵⁷
- 6.49 AusAID added that overseas posts generally had significant numbers of longstanding very qualified locally engaged staff that provided a degree of continuity.⁵⁸

Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development

- 6.50 Every year, the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program places 400 skilled young Australians (aged 18-30) on short-term assignments (3-12 months) in developing countries across the Asia Pacific region. AYADs work with local counterparts in partner host organisations across a diverse range of sectors including education, environment, gender, governance, health, infrastructure, rural development and trades. The program aims to strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and make a positive contribution to development.⁵⁹ Other similar AusAID supported programs like the already mentioned ABVs (see Chapter 3), Australian Volunteers International (AVI)⁶⁰ and Volunteering for International Development from Australia (VIDA)⁶¹ offer older more experienced Australians the opportunity to share skills and build relationships with people in developing countries in the region.
- 6.51 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Committee met with a small group of returned Australian Youth Ambassadors in Canberra (who had had placements in Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands), to discuss their experience of the AYAD program.

56 Transcript, 9 February 2007, DFAT, p. 16.

57 Transcript, 9 February 2007, DFAT, p. 17.

58 Transcript, 9 February 2007, AusAID, p. 16.

59 AYAD website, <http://www.ayad.com.au/>

60 See AVI website, <http://www.australianvolunteers.com>

61 See VIDA website, <http://www.vidavolunteers.com.au>

- 6.52 The AYADs with whom the Committee spoke felt they gained as much as they had contributed to the program and that it was a mutually worthwhile program for the AYAD and host organisation.
- 6.53 At a Canberra hearing, the Committee noted that it had long been an avid supporter of the AYAD program and particularly its engagement in the Pacific.⁶²
- 6.54 The Fijian High Commissioner agreed:
- The feedback that we have is that it is a fantastic learning opportunity both for the youth ambassadors and for the young people ... whatever areas they are assigned, they are making a huge dent.⁶³
- 6.55 The National Library of Australia's submission indicated that it had been working together with AusAID to promote library-based positions for the AYAD scheme in the Pacific, and observed that this approach had proved more successful than previous programs that had brought librarians to Australia for short training programs:
- There are few trained librarians in most Pacific countries, so longer-term training, as well as impartial assessment of existing services and aid opportunities, as is occurring through AYAD placements is proving more effective than narrowly focussed short courses.⁶⁴

Pacific Islander Youth Ambassador Scheme

- 6.56 The Committee asked the Fijian High Commissioner for his views on ACFID's suggestion to establish a reverse AYAD scheme⁶⁵ whereby young Pacific Islanders would be invited to Australia to be Pacific youth ambassadors in a similar way that Australians are placed in host organisations overseas.⁶⁶ The High Commissioner voiced his support for such a program:

I think it will be a great idea to have a youth exchange in that way through youth ambassadors.⁶⁷

62 Transcript, 27 November 2006, p. 35.

63 Transcript, 27 November 2006, Fijian High Commissioner to Australia, p. 36.

64 Submission No. 26, National Library of Australia, p. 2.

65 See Submission No. 18, ACFID.

66 Transcript, 27 November 2006, p. 35.

67 Transcript, 27 November 2006, Fijian High Commissioner to Australia, p. 36.

- 6.57 According to ACFID there would be tremendous value in hosting young Pacific Islander graduates in government departments, NGOs or the private sector here in Australia. It could also help dispel notions that the aid program was all one-way:

That would show too that we are not just saying, 'Okay, our young people can go out there and teach you something' ... I think it would strengthen relationships.⁶⁸

- 6.58 The PNG Students' Association submitted that in their view short term placements for Papua New Guineans in the Australian civil service would be very valuable, and suggested that perhaps these attachments could be facilitated through the AusAID scholarship program:

Much can be gained from exposure. Seeing how things are done elsewhere and then applying those methods, suitably adapted, in PNG.⁶⁹

- 6.59 Oxfam was similarly enthusiastic about the value of Pacific Islanders being placed in Australian organisations:

As an ex-employee of Australian Volunteers International, I think it is an idea whose time has come. It was always bothering me when I was [working overseas as a volunteer] that we were sending Australians [abroad] and there was not the opportunity to reciprocate.⁷⁰

- 6.60 Oxfam added that such a scheme could complement its international youth partnerships program well, by allowing Pacific Islanders to have a more substantial work placement in its Australian office:

Our own experience shows that where they come and work in our office with our staff [as part of Oxfam's international youth partnerships program] the value to both parties is enormous.⁷¹

- 6.61 ACFID suggested that the most practical way to establish the Pacific Islander Youth Ambassador Scheme may be to link it with the existing AYAD scheme.⁷²

- 6.62 The Committee is mindful that it is a requirement of the Australian public service that employees are citizens or permanent residents and that this

68 Transcript, 27 November 2006, ACFID, p. 7.

69 Submission No. 35, PNG Students' Association, pp. 4-5.

70 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Oxfam, p. 25.

71 Transcript, 2 May 2007, Oxfam, p. 25.

72 Transcript, 27 November 2006, ACFID, p. 7.

may preclude placements in an Australian government department or agency, under current visa arrangements. However the Committee is encouraged by and supportive of the Australian Foreign Minister's recent remarks to the effect that he is considering expanding opportunities for Pacific public servants to gain experience through temporary work placements in Australia.⁷³

- 6.63 The Committee notes that organisations like Rotary and academic institutions already provide for a range of cultural exchange opportunities. And, the Committee is aware that Pacific Islanders can apply for DEST Endeavour Awards which facilitate short term placements in Australian organisations.⁷⁴
- 6.64 That said, the Committee is supportive in-principle of the concept of a reverse AYAD/Pacific Islander Youth Ambassador scheme, whereby young skilled Pacific Islanders could apply for stipend-supported placements in host organisations within Australia.
- 6.65 The Committee appreciates that a new visa class and/or special arrangements may need to be created in order to accommodate such a scheme, especially with respect to secondments in the Australian public service.
- 6.66 It is the Committee's view that a reverse AYAD program could fill a niche by providing skilled young Pacific Islanders with valuable work experience in their fields of expertise and interest in Australia, to take home. A Pacific Youth Ambassador Scheme would add value to the educational and other opportunities that already exist for young Pacific Islanders. Moreover, a cultural exchange of this type would build personal contacts and cooperation between Australians and Pacific Islanders and our respective governments – essential for goodwill between our nations into the future.

73 Speech for the Biennial Sir Arthur Tange Lecture on Australian diplomacy, Australia's Commitment to the Pacific, The Hon. Alexander Downer, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 8 August 2007, p. 13, http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2007/070808_tange.html

74 See the DEST Endeavour Programme website for details:
<http://www.endeavour.dest.gov.au/>

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider establishing a Pacific Island Youth Ambassador Scheme (similar to and possibly linked with the Australian Youth Ambassador Scheme, or AusAID scholarships), whereby young skilled Pacific Islanders can apply for placements in an Australian host organisation workplace for the purpose of work experience and cultural exchange.

