

Response to the Australian Senate Enquiry on the SDGs

I come from a health promotion background. I currently work for several small NGO's and two big NGO's in rural Victoria.

I have worked as a volunteer in countries in Asia and the Pacific in the field of family health over 14 years with both government and non government agencies. I now offer my thoughts regarding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with particular reference to:

The understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community.

There appears to be little understanding regarding the change towards sustainable development and the benefits of this approach in the wider Australian community. Little has been done to help the wider community understand these important changes.

Sustainability is a word that generally means 'the environment' for many Aussies. For example the only information we see on TV is generally is organisations requesting donations after a crisis rather than information about these goals of sustainability, primary prevention and Australia's part in working towards them proactively.

Your average Australian does care about the MD goals but does not get to hear about them and sustainability and is unaware of changes and how to help. It takes so much more effort to mobilise communities in Australia to help with these goals if the ground work has not been done to prepare people for an interest in and knowing they have the ability to help We need a different approach to engaging people who have the time and resources to help but there are unmet needs at every level due to lack of knowledge understanding.

The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDG;

There are lots of cost effective NGO's working to achieve these goals of sustainability, often below the radar of government understanding and have a huge impact working "on a shoe string budget". For example, the Vanuatu Prevention of Blindness Project, Days for Girls Australia, Medical Sailing Ministries etc. These NGO's work with little to no government funding, but need to be linked into the bigger picture and supported so they can achieve even better outcomes. Support for these organisations does not always involved direct funding grants but could be in the form of training. There are huge opportunities for expansion for these low cost organisations but locals need to embrace them and feel part of the bigger picture of making positive sustainable changes in developing countries working cooperatively with government for mutual benefit.

What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes;

While maintaining a level of independence to promote innovation some NGO's would benefit by being offered extra support and then guided towards sustainability and meeting the SDGs in a systematic way. However, most are already doing this I find but fail to document it. There's a whole 'hotch potch' of small to medium NGO's doubling up or working independently that would benefit from being more linked in with government funded agencies.

To help integrate these small to medium NGO's who are helping to meet the MDGs there needs to be a focal point of support, a website with advisors, listings of which organisation is doing what, lists of

advertises for volunteers to work in various projects in differing countries similar to what already happens with Australian Volunteers International, AVI, offering training to volunteers online or workshops in capital cities would make a huge difference. Real outcomes can be enhanced with more accountability and working hand in hand, NGO's and government.

How can performance against the SDG be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society;

As mentioned previously small NGO's have the potential to enhance the work of government and this could be achieved by offering more strategic funding and training along with guidance and support, working as equals with government funded and run agencies. Ad hoc monitoring and evaluation occurs according to the expertise and knowledge of importance by various NGO groups I find.

Currently the voice of small NGO's is not being heard and this needs to change with support being offered to help to monitor their performance to add to the overall picture of what the Australian people are achieving through them. Publicity, across all forms of media is required to make the public aware of Australia's huge investment in overseas aid and how performance is being measured and the outcomes. The story telling of how businesses are working with NGO's and government is a simple, cheap way of enhancing what is already happening to enlighten people and benefit projects.

What SDG are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program;

Extreme poverty alleviation and crisis management seems to work well according to research and personal observation. I can only speak about specific areas of interest and it seems that a lot is being done to achieve gender equality (though slow progress) but little to help men deal with violence and gender issues. Men's behaviour change programs and support are sadly lacking across the Pacific where I am currently working. HIV AIDS programs are working well but non communicable diseases and lesser known tropical diseases need more attention. Global partnerships are helpful but more needed. Maternal and Child health issues are starting to be addressed in more recent years with widely varying outcomes.

Which of the SDG is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDG;

The SDG goal best suited to improved outcomes by ODA is that of Maternal, Child Health and Gender; though it needs to be called the more inclusive title of Family, Child Health and Gender. So much more could be achieved because families are at the core of where change needs to take place, with improved health, education and support. The ground up approach would be the preferred model.

Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.

One excellent example of best practice can be seen in North America and the support given by government for Days for Girls International www.daysforgirls.org It is a huge force in positively changing the lives of women and girls in developing countries as a grass roots organisation that is recognised by government. Australia has become part of this worldwide movement but more support needed. Staff and volunteers lack the vision of sustainability as well as the Host

Organisations in developing countries often. Trying to work with the Australian government representatives, as an Australian Partner Organisation when asked by Host Organisations to provide reproductive health education and distribution of reusable sanitary hygiene kits in developing countries has been nigh impossible. There is a fundamental problem of communication with staff or lack of understanding as well the bureaucratic processes needing to be streamlined with ODA programs.

If we want to change the world we have to change ourselves first!