



Submission No 56

Review of Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa

Organisation: World Vision Australia

World Vision supplementary comments to the Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into Australia's Relations with the Countries of Africa

World Vision Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide supplementary comments to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Australia's Relations with the Countries of Africa. This submission is informed by World Vision's initial submission to the Committee and recent submissions to the Australian government in response to its *Draft Framework for Development Assistance to Africa 2009 – 2016*.

Australia's reengagement in Africa presents an opportunity for Australia to be a more sophisticated and strategic leader on humanitarian issues. The Australian Government has allocated for 2009-2010 \$299.8 million to its humanitarian, emergency and refugee programs that aims to protect lives and alleviate suffering caused by conflict, natural and other disasters through timely and effective assistance to promote prevention, preparedness and risk reduction and assist recovery.¹ However, at present a critical gap in Australia's enhanced development assistance program to Africa is a humanitarian action strategy that outlines how Australia will determine and proactively respond to Africa's humanitarian crises. World Vision understands that the Australian Government intends to develop a humanitarian strategy for Africa that will support Australia's new revised Humanitarian Action Policy. This submission will focus on how Australia can enhance the effectiveness of its humanitarian assistance to Africa, in particular its assistance to protracted crises, where at present there remains little in the way of established good international practice.²

Australia has defined its approach to humanitarian assistance through its Humanitarian Action Policy (2005). It has often led international responses in the Asia and the Pacific to natural disasters and sudden onset emergencies or crisis contexts such as Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands. Australia uses a range of funding modalities to administer its humanitarian assistance such as providing assistance to United Nations (UN) humanitarian agencies or to UN administered coordination mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). It also administers a Periodic Funding Agreement for Disaster Risk Management with Australia's leading humanitarian and development non-government organisations (NGOs) that has been effective at increasing Australia's response capacity to rapid onset humanitarian emergencies in developing countries in Australia's region.³

However, in recent years, increasing concern has been made by Australian humanitarian and development NGOs around Australia's response to complex emergencies and protracted crises.⁴ World Vision's initial submission highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan, a protracted conflict that is now in its sixth year and has affected an estimated 4.7 million people. It recommended the Committee provide increased funding support for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) still operational in Darfur. Darfur at the height of the conflict in 2004 and 2005 was one of Africa's highest profile humanitarian emergencies, attracting significant international attention, public interest and outrage. However, it has like many other crises in Africa largely fallen from the public radar as other humanitarian crises have emerged, despite remaining one of the world's largest humanitarian protracted crises.

¹ Australia's International Development Assistance Program Budget - A Good International Citizen 2009 – 2010 Australian Agency for International Development pg. 62.

² Ibid

³ Turner, R and Bennett, C (2009) *Final Report Independent Review of the Period Funding Agreement for Disaster Risk Management* prepared for Australian Agency for International Development pg. 4.

⁴ UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Policy gaps in complex emergencies policy brief available at <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/a0800e/a0800e05.pdf>

Protracted crises or complex humanitarian emergencies can arise from state vs. state or intrastate civil conflicts. They can occur as a result of a continuing series of external shocks such as political instability, poor rains, drought, high food prices and epidemics aggravating existing community vulnerabilities. Complex emergencies can combine internal conflict with large-scale displacements of people, mass famine and fragile or failing economic, political and social institutions. Protracted crises can span many years and or decades, stifling long term development and stability. They differ from humanitarian crises arising from unforeseen rapid on-set emergencies or natural disasters such as flood or earthquakes. The vast majority of the world's protracted crises are in Africa, including but not limited to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Chad, The Central African Republic and Sudan.

The UN Humanitarian Reform Agenda (2005) has resulted in the international donor community channelling increased funds through the UN humanitarian system to ensure effective coordination, leadership and funding for humanitarian situations.⁵ This included expanding support for the CERF⁶, the UN administered pooled donor humanitarian funds, Common Humanitarian Funds and Emergency Response Funds for specific countries and support for the UN led "cluster approach."⁷ One of the greatest sources of concern arising from the reform process relates to the composition of funding recipients, with the greatest percentage of humanitarian funding now being channelled through the UN. Funds administered through UN agencies can often be delayed, slow and inefficient and can take considerable time to reach affected populations/communities. World Vision does not discount the value of Australia providing funds to UN agencies or Australia's support for strengthened UN administered coordination mechanisms, as this forms a crucial part of Australia's humanitarian assistance and facilitating greater international humanitarian cooperation. However, it does recommend Australia encourage UN agencies to improve the efficiency with which funds are transferred between them and their implementing partners.

The Humanitarian Reform process has seen NGOs receive proportionately less direct funding humanitarian funding from governments including the Australian government and become increasingly reliant on UN agencies to access funds. Local NGO capacity building and participation also largely continues to receive lip service from most donors.⁸ This is despite many UN agencies being unable to directly implement aid themselves and predominately using other actors such as

⁵ Action Aid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, IRC, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam and Save the Children *Enhancing UN-NGO humanitarian financing partnerships to contribute to effective humanitarian response* March 2009 available at <http://www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/>

⁶ The CERF provides advance multilateral funding that can enable a quicker response for major new emergencies. Grants are made for two general purposes: (a) for rapid response to sudden onset emergencies or rapidly deteriorating conditions in an existing emergency and (b) to support activities within existing humanitarian response efforts in underfunded emergencies. One-third of the CERF grant facility is earmarked for underfunded emergencies. Australia has provided \$60 million over four years to the CERF. NGOs are not eligible to apply for CERF funding directly but can be recipients of funds. For further information please see <http://ochaonline.un.org/cerf/WhatistheCERF/Underfundedgrants/tabid/1708/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁷ The cluster approach was launched in 2005 as part of the humanitarian reform process and is an effort on the part of the humanitarian community to address identified gaps and strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Global and country-level clusters (comprising of UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement) were formed for each area of humanitarian activity where there was thought to be a need for strengthened leadership and coordination was identified such as in water and sanitation, shelter, protection etc), and various UN agencies were designated to lead the clusters and hence nominated as 'cluster lead agencies'.

⁸ Stoddard, A (2008) *International Humanitarian Financing: Review and comparative assessment of instruments – A Study for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative* commissioned by the Office of United States Foreign Disaster Assistance pg. 2.

NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross to often undertake the “last mile” of real time service delivery in many humanitarian contexts.

In protracted crises, Australian and other donor governments funding remains inconsistent and unpredictable, with a bias towards short-term programming. However, protracted crises by their very nature stretch into the longer term and require extensive planning with a mix of humanitarian, early recovery and development assistance to meet immediate and longer term needs. The Australian Government does not have an appropriate established funding mechanism for rapidly distributing humanitarian funds to NGOs in protracted crises. Indeed the 2009 Humanitarian Response Index which ranks all 23 OECD –DAC donors found that where AusAID ranks lowest as a humanitarian donor is in funding to NGOs and in longer term funding arrangements.⁹ This finding is also supported by a 2009 independent review commissioned by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) on the PFA mechanism.¹⁰

World Vision recommends that if Australia is to be strategic and genuinely committed to reengaging with Africa, it should look to allocate a greater percentage of funding to NGOs (including both local and international) under its new Africa humanitarian strategy. The historically reactive and short term nature of Australia’s humanitarian funding to NGOs in protracted and complex crises does not promote sustainable NGO program delivery to affected populations nor adequately assist in addressing their immediate and longer term needs.¹¹ Greater flexibility in Australian funding timelines would also better reflect the unpredictable nature of operating in insecure environments where threats on staff safety can adversely influence humanitarian access to affected populations and delay program implementation. Australia’s new humanitarian strategy for Africa should also be accompanied by 12 monthly practical implementation plans that include among other things, an annual outline of Australia’s country priorities in Africa, the selection criteria used, funds to be allocated and the response to be implemented.¹² The European Union’s Directorate – General for Humanitarian Aid 2010 Humanitarian Operating Strategy Working Document provides an example of one such publicly available humanitarian strategy that outlines the European Union’s commitment to “forgotten crises”¹³ and is used as a working document by European Commission humanitarian aid staff.

Increased Australian funding to NGOs could be distributed through the establishment of a number of potential funding options that this submission will not outline in great detail. However, some potential options include:

- The creation of an Australian NGO multiyear funding agreement for protracted crises that would rapidly release funds on 24 month funding cycle to leading Australian humanitarian agencies. The establishment of this funding mechanism would allow for more predictable

⁹ Development Assistance Research Associates *Humanitarian Response Index 2009* pg. 11.

¹⁰ Please see Turner, R and Bennett, C (2009) *Final Report Independent Review of the Period Funding Agreement for Disaster Risk Management* prepared for Australian Agency for International Development pg. 32.

¹¹ Stoddard, A (2008) *International Humanitarian Financing: Review and comparative assessment of instruments – A Study for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative* commissioned by the Office of United States Foreign Disaster Assistance pg. 5.

¹² It is also essential that funding allocations are protected from temptations to make aid conditional or to use it for political or media purposes. To do this, the founding humanitarian principles that NGOs have signed onto and support, independence, impartiality and neutrality, should be made more widely known amongst donor government agencies and those who can influence them such as politicians and the general public.

¹³ The European Union’s Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Operational Strategy 2010 available at [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SODA-7XJMDK/\\$file/echo-strategy2010.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SODA-7XJMDK/$file/echo-strategy2010.pdf?openelement)

funding and also address unforeseen humanitarian spikes such as rapid on-set food security created by large internal displacement as a result of increased violence, as we have most recently seen in South Sudan; or

- The expansion of Australia's "humanitarian plus" approach in Zimbabwe that goes beyond purely humanitarian / emergency relief to also include longer-term measures to help restore essential services, such as water, education and healthcare to other priority African complex and protracted crises. In Zimbabwe "humanitarian plus" assistance is provided to UN agencies, the ICRC and NGOs.¹⁴

Providing predictable long term funding to NGOs also supports the expectations of the Australian public as there is significant public interest in Africa, demonstrated through the high level of public donations to Africa. For example in 2008, nearly 34 per cent of Australian private donations were expended in Africa.¹⁵ The OCED Development Assistance Committee peer review of Australia also recommended Australia continue to increase the amount of aid channelled through civil society organisations in light of Australian NGOs' high public credibility and the scaling-up of the development assistance program. It also suggested that this could help to strengthen the Australian aid programme in Africa, where many Australian NGOs are actively engaged.¹⁶

NGOs, through their humanitarian and development programs, provide an important link between affected communities, developed and developing country governments and their publics. Australia's engagement in Africa provides an opportunity for the Australian government to support program innovations to ensure that Australia's humanitarian response and funding mechanisms addresses immediate as well as longer-term priorities.¹⁷

World Vision's submission has outlined the need for Australia to develop an effective and proactive humanitarian strategy and implementation plan for Africa that works in particular to improve Australia's current response to protracted crises that has often been reactive and slow. We have recommended that as part of Australia developing a more strategic response to its humanitarian assistance it should establish a predictable and timely multi-year funding arrangement between Australian Agency for International Development and leading Australian humanitarian and development NGOs for protracted crises. This would provide rapid assistance to affected populations and help to better serve their immediate and longer term needs.

¹⁴ For further information please see <http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2010/fa-s100319.html>

¹⁵ In 2008, the Australian public donated \$812.19 million to Australian NGOs. In the 2009-10 Aid Budget, \$163 million was allocated to Africa out of total \$3.8 billion in ODA. This excludes multi-lateral commitments.

¹⁶ 2008 OCED Development Assistance Cooperation peer review of Australia - main findings and recommendations available at

http://www.oecd.org/document/55/0,3343,en_2649_34603_41877687_1_1_1_1,00.html

¹⁷ Pingali, P Alinovi, L and Sutton, J (2005) Food Security in Complex Emergencies: Enhancing Food System Resilience Agricultural and Development Economics Division, UN Food and Agriculture Organization.