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*Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability – The White Paper on the Australian Government’s Overseas Aid Program*

The White Paper released on 26 April 2006 sets objectives and priorities over the medium term (ten years). It emphasises “investing in people” through addressing the health needs of women and children, though a strong focus remains on governance and security concerns.

The overarching objective for the aid program has been re-formulated from:

*“Advancing the national interest by helping developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development”*

to:

*“To assist developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, in line with Australia’s national interest”*

The overall thrust still provides for more economic opportunities and benefits for Australia than our partners. However there is a welcome move to wards a development agenda although security and anti –terrorism remains high.

**Key initiatives for PGPD in the White Paper :**

- *“gender equality is a consideration that will apply across all aspects of the strategic framework” (p22)*
- A commitment to increasing investments in primary health care and education, particularly for women and children. Specifically *“focusing on maternal health, sexual and reproductive health, access to safe and effective contraception based on informed choice, nutrition and education for girls and programs to combat gender-based violence” (p22&49)*
- Recognition of the vital role health and education play in addressing gender inequality and maintaining social stability. Investments will be made *to’ strengthen health and education systems, and provide services*

*where this does not either supplant existing or excuse the local government from providing similar (p47&53)'.*

- A doubling of the available of Australian development scholarships over the coming five years is positive ( but appears to go against the 'untied' direction of the aid program) though it makes no mention of addressing gender equality through the scheme (p53).
- HIV/AIDS: The White Paper identifies ongoing participation/donations to large funds and foundations, the role of leadership forums, capacity building and enhancing partnerships (p50). The White Paper is a strategic document so the 'how' of participation is not outlined. However support for SRH-HIV integration was given in the HIV/AIDS thematic paper.
- Emergency preparedness. *Existing arrangements will be enhanced through the use of state and federal resources, expanding stores used in rapid responses and applying innovative sciences (p45-46*
- There is now a clearer articulation of the MDGs and Australia's support of these goals and targets. This will highlight the role SRH plays in achieving them.
- The importance of Parliamentary groups has been re-emphasised in the White Paper (p43). This engagement is intended to improve regional government performance and help develop future leadership. Specifically *"The growing engagement of parliamentarians and political parties in Australia with their counterparts in the region will continue...A particular focus will be given to strengthening the regional network of female parliamentarians and leaders"*. This bodes well for increasing engagement of PGPD group members with their counterparts and civil society in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Mention of the links between a large youth demographic in the Asia-Pacific region and security concerns (p12). Some of the worst case scenario outcomes of this '*youth bulge*' are highlighted, but there is little discussion on strategic steps that could be taken to address this.
- Imbalances in funding for the Asia region given the high population and high rates of poverty. Indonesia and the Philippines have been identified as countries where immediate specific support will be targeted (p27).
- The Paper commits to individual human rights, as articulated by individuals, but stops short of committing to a human rights approach to aid.

- At the 2005 UN World Summit the Prime Minister announced a doubling of the aid budget by 2010 to A \$4 billion. This is not a doubling in real terms as it will only raise Gross National Income (GNI) Australia distributes as aid from the current level of 0.28 to 0.36. This is still far below the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD recommended minimum level of 0.5, the UN target of 0.7 and 2004 average DAC member effort of 0.42. Australia currently ranks in the bottom half of DAC members in terms of their generosity.

*PGPD Secretariat.*

*(This does not necessarily reflect the views of the PGPD.)*