

The double edged sword that deserves more funding: AIDN's policy submission on "the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict".

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About AIDN

AIDN's primary purpose is to advocate for more and better international giving and investing from Australians. We encourage collaboration, highlight the good and urgent work being done in the sector, and foster an environment for the exploration of what "more" and "better" giving means today. We do this through coordinating, encouraging and facilitating initiatives between the private sector, corporate, government, philanthropists and investors ultimately leading to greater international engagement from Australia.



Executive Summary

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), through the Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee, has commenced an inquiry into the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict. The inquiry was referred by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong.

The Chair of the JSCFADT, the Hon Shayne Neumann MP, stated, 'we are operating in a geopolitical context of change and uncertainty, and we are deeply concerned at how conflicts around the world are exacerbating existing humanitarian crises in many regions.'

The Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee, the Hon Tim Watts MP, said, 'in an increasingly complex and contested international environment the challenge of conflict prevention is becoming more acute.' The inquiry will consider the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict, with particular reference to:

- the role of Australia's international development program in building resilience in fragile states, including by strengthening community and civic participation, governance, security reform and human capital;
- the strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific;
- options for effective support through Australia's aid program in pre-conflict and/or post-conflict zones;
- the impact of international development in the maintenance of peace and prevention of conflict, including for early identification and mitigation of conflict; and
- any related matters.

In this policy submission, AIDN argues that Australia's international development program and wider ecosystem already plays (with a limited budget) and should continue to play (with an expanded budget) a decisive role in building healthier and inclusive societies that can prevent and are more resilient in conflict. To make this submission:

AIDN demonstrates how Australia's international aid and development ecosystem, often facilitated via Official Development Assistance (ODA) but also by other funding mechanisms including philanthropy, is inherently committed to building resilient, democratic, fair and peaceful institutions. It is also underpinned by the mission to leave no one behind (including people living in poverty, women and people living with disabilities) and increasingly works in complex and contested settings (including war and climate change).

When nations are healthy and thriving the threat of violence and conflict is reduced. On the other hand, the prospect of long-term peace and sustainability flourishes. Australia's committed international development ecosystem already has the expertise to achieve these policy objectives and is working hard everyday to do so - even amid a bleak funding landscape.

Importantly, we further demonstrate how these areas of development expertise are not only already in line with Australia's international development policies and national priorities, but that by investing in these policy areas, Australia will also have the opportunity to engender good will and bilateral relations between Australia and other states. This in itself will also be critical for Australia's defense policy priorities and reducing conflict in our contested and multipolar world.

To finish the submission, we reiterate that given the double edged nature of international aid and development - that it both underscores a commitment to reducing poverty and promoting equity but can also prevent conflict and reduce fragility - that it is time for additional investment in Australia's ODA budget.



Image: Thailand. Credit: [Leo Visions on Unsplash](#).

Policy Submission

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Australia's international aid and development ecosystem already plays (with a limited budget) and should continue to play (with an expanded budget) a decisive role in building societies that are stronger and more resilient in the face of conflict. When nations are healthy, inclusive and thriving the threat of violence is reduced. On the other hand, the prospect of long-term peace and sustainability flourishes. Australia's committed international development sector already has the expertise to do this and is working hard everyday to do so - even amid a bleak funding landscape.

1. Investing in resilient, peaceful, just and strong institutions to reduce violence and conflict in our region.

First, international development and aid, often facilitated via ODA but also via other funding channels such as philanthropy, has both a commitment to and potential to build strong, democratic, fair and peaceful institutions overseas. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, ODA from bilateral donors and multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, United Kingdom and US, supported the rebuilding of state institutions and public financial management in order to strengthen the government capacity's to deliver healthcare, education and peace building. When development aid is tied to strong donor institutions, it has also been shown that multilateral aid combined with peacekeeping can improve governance quality, support peaceful transitions ([Lee, 2024](#)) and reduce conflict risk ([Esposito et al, 2025](#)).

Australia's international development sector already has significant expertise and experience in this area. We should look to organisations such as [The Asia Foundation's](#) work on democratic governance and conflict resolution or [Conciliation Resources'](#) work on inclusive political dialogue in post-conflict zones. AIDN also strives to shine a light on the strategic role that overseas philanthropic giving and Australia's development organisations are playing in conflict reduction, management and response. See our 2025 "[Emergency Webinar on the Ignored Crisis in Sudan](#)", alongside the [Minderoo Foundation](#), [Médecins Sans Frontières Australia](#), the [Sudanese Australian Medical Professional Association](#) and [UNICEF in Sudan](#).

Crucially, this area of development expertise is already in line with Australia's international development policies and national interests outlined in Australia's [International Development Policy \(2023\)](#) and [Development Finance Review \(2023\)](#), Australia's [Humanitarian Policy \(2024\)](#), [Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy \(2024\)](#) and [Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy \(2025\)](#) - reinforcing the double edged sword of aid not only as a practice of economic, social and political development but as an instrument for reducing conflict and Australia's defense priorities.

For example, in 2024, the Australian Government's Humanitarian Policy (2024) marked the first overarching policy document setting the future directions of Australia's humanitarian program since 2016. As outlined in Minister Wong's Ministerial Forward the "Policy [was] not just about saving lives and meeting humanitarian needs. It [was] also about promoting the peace, stability and prosperity that we want for Australia, our region and the world" (p.4). The Humanitarian Policy (2024) focused on Australia's role as a global development actor by seeking to "reinforce the international humanitarian system" and legal system (p.7).

The policy also called for a focus on the protection of humanitarian workers, as aligned with Australia's leadership on the declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel. AIDN wholeheartedly welcomed these policy objectives at a time when we are facing serious humanitarian crises across the globe. In the context of 2025's global aid cuts, and ongoing escalation of conflict in Sudan, Iran, Israel and other nations this objective has never been more important.

2. Supporting healthy and inclusive societies to reduce conflict.

Second, investments in international development programs with a focus on diversity and inclusion have also been proven to be critical for peacebuilding and resilience. In particular, it has been shown that investing in gender equality and women's empowerment is critical for peacebuilding and resilience in fragile contexts ([OECD, 2023/24](#)). For example, reflecting on the numerous peace deals brokered in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2025, Vianney Dong recently argued that the exclusion of women from peace processes is not only unjust, but is ineffective and dangerous. In the weeks following the 2025's Washington Accord and Doha Declaration, sexual violence surged by over 270 per-cent in DRC. Decades of research has shown that when women are meaningfully involved in peace negotiations, agreements are more likely to last ([Dong, Alliance, 2025](#)).

Research has also shown that disability inclusion in development projects and climate action can contribute to stable policy outcomes. We are strongest when we invest in policies that support long-term systemic change rather than exclusionary and reactionary responses ([UNICEF et al., 2025](#)). In these circumstances, we might look to Australian development organisations such as [CBM](#) for their expertise in disability inclusion. We should also spotlight [IWDA](#)'s work on feminist advocacy, security and programming, including their convening of the [Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition \(AFFPC\)](#).

These areas of development expertise are also already in line with Australia’s international development policies and national priorities produced over the past five years - reinforcing how much of Australia’s international development sector (both funded by ODA and other mechanisms) is already actively working to reduce conflict and fragility by virtue of their work on inclusive societies and should be acknowledged as such. For example, AIDN welcomed the Development Policy (2023)’s focus on poverty alleviation, incorporating First Nations leadership and agency, and policy objective to “harness the valuable connections, knowledge and expertise that reside in local communities” (p.26). Likewise, the new Humanitarian Policy centred on the fact that women, children, people with disabilities and LGBTQTI+ communities experience increased risks in crises (p.22-23).



Image: Young boys in Agra, India. Credit: [Dulana Kodithuwakku](#) on Unsplash.

3. Building climate-safe futures to reduce conflict.

The Australian international development sector’s growing emphasis on climate change will also be integral to reducing conflict and fragility in our region. Research is increasingly showing that climate change acts as a ‘threat multiplier’ by increasing displacement, poverty, resource stress and livelihood loss - particularly for people living in poverty, with disabilities and for women. Recent case studies on land governance from Nigeria, Somaliland, South Sudan, Sudan and Chad demonstrate that whilst climate change does not cause land conflict; it exacerbates it and brings with it unique and gendered impacts on women ([Daley, AIDN Beat 2025](#)). Organisations like [MSI Asia-Pacific](#) have also demonstrated how climate change is not only an environmental crisis, but simultaneously a gendered health crisis with devastating impacts on the sexual and reproductive rights of women in low-income contexts ([Bista, AIDN Beat 2025](#)).

What we do know is that well-designed climate adaptation and resilience programs can mitigate these risks and reduce conflict pressures ([ODI, 2018](#)). We should be looking to Australia's existing innovative and streamlined international development approaches to disasters and conflict. [Emergency Action Alliance](#) is a group of 15 aid organisations in Australia who have combined their expertise and resources to create a targeted and effective response to international emergencies. [CAN DO](#) is a consortia of nine faith-based organisations working in response to disasters globally. Within the AHP [Disaster READY](#) program, CAN DO is implementing preparedness activities in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, PNG and Timor-Leste.

Crucially, these areas of development expertise are not only in line with Australia's international development policies and have the potential to reduce conflict, but can also provide the opportunity to engender good will between Australia and other states. It has been shown that ODA directed towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention objectives can sustain peace by preventing conflict outbreak and recurrence ([OECD, 2023](#)). When there is sustained coordination among donors to increase the effectiveness of aid, trust and good relations between donor and recipient governments is also more likely to emerge ([Bigsten and Tengstam, 2015](#)). Many of our neighbours in the Pacific are consistently calling on Australia to step up and lead in the climate policy space. This will be critical for Australia's defense policy priorities in an increasingly multipolar world with a number of increasing threats, changing geopolitics and alternative powers.



Image: 3 women in Uganda. Credit: [Ninno Jack Jr](#) on Unsplash.

4. Conclusion - the double edged sword that deserves more funding.

At the end of March 2025, the Australian Government released their [latest Federal Budget and 'ODA Development Budget Summary 2025-26'](#). AIDN welcomed the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to previous levels of ODA at a time when aid budgets have been slashed globally.

However, given that our mission is to foster “more” and “better” giving and investing overseas, AIDN will always advocate for more ODA. We do this simply because we believe that all communities in the Majority World should be able to access dignity, human rights, and opportunity; and are free from the worst impacts of poverty, inequity or conflict. We do not need an additional instrumental argument for aid and development (such as defense or avoiding conflict).

Nevertheless, in a context where:

- Australia's ODA remains a tiny share of federal spending (0.65%) ([ACFID, 2025](#));
- Where investments in just institutions, diversity and inclusion, and climate change are already in line with Australia's international aid and development program and national priorities; And
- ODA can serve the double purpose of simultaneously preventing conflict and reducing fragility in line with national defense interests...

We call for further investment in Australia's ODA budget. This position, developed throughout this document, reaffirms our alignment to the [Safer World Campaign](#), which advocates for an increase of Australia's aid budget to 1% of the Federal Budget.

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