

Cuts and Changes Undermine Overseas Aid Effectiveness

Micah Challenge is deeply concerned that the vast and sweeping changes being made to the Australian aid program could seriously undermine its effectiveness.

Mr Abbott announced yesterday that the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) would be integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). While it is not yet clear how this change will be made, any reduction in AusAID's capacity, staffing and mandate to tackle poverty, poses a grave threat to Australia's contribution to saving and improving people's lives in our region, where two-thirds of the world's poorest people live.

"If AusAID is fully absorbed into DFAT then its purpose 'to help people overcome poverty' could be entirely subordinated to and undermined by DFAT's purpose, which is to 'advance Australia's interests'", said Ben Thurley, Micah Challenge's Political Engagement Coordinator.

"We are concerned the needs of the poorest people in the world and the priorities of the aid program could be pushed aside in favour of other, more self-interested, commercial, diplomatic or political considerations", said Mr Thurley.

Mr Abbott has promised methodical and purposeful government with no surprises, yet this announcement adds to a growing list of significant surprises with regard to Australian aid which started when Mr Hockey announced cuts of \$4.5 billion to the aid budget just two days before the election.

"As yet, we have no indication from the government as to what programs and communities will miss out on promised funds if they go ahead with cutting \$656 million already budgeted and committed to aid this year," said Mr Thurley.

"We now have a lack of clarity around governance structures to go with the lack of clarity around the aid budget. One thing we know is that clarity and predictability are essential ingredients for effective aid."

Micah Challenge is calling on the government to revoke the planned cuts to the current year's aid budget, and to provide more detail about the planned changes to AusAID. Nothing less than the lives and livelihoods of some of the world's poorest communities are at stake.

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For more detailed analysis of these cuts and changes see -

<http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/blog/n/is-aid-being-streamlined-sidelined-or-undermined-130919>

Ben Thurley, Micah Challenge's Political Engagement Coordinator, is available for interviews.

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