TOGETHER
FOR THE PACIFIC

MICAH AUSTRALIA – POLICY PLATFORM
VOICES FOR JUSTICE DELEGATION
DECEMBER 2019
That is what we are advocating for.

Micah recognises that the world is changing. We respect the challenges this Government faces – Australia needs strong trading partners, reliable allies and close relationships in our immediate Indo-Pacific region. Each of these is key to ensuring Australia’s ongoing freedom, security and prosperity and we reasonably expect Australia’s aid budget to help fulfil such a vision for our nation.

However, we also believe that as a blessed nation that values fairness, kindness and compassion, we have a moral obligation to ensure Australian aid is supporting the world’s most poor, vulnerable and oppressed people beyond just their ‘strategic’ value, acknowledging that every life is of value and worth.

Thankfully, the reality is we can have both – an Australian aid budget that is strategic and moral - through a principled approach to Australian aid that is also in the national interest.

For these reasons, we welcome the announcement by the Government of a review into Australia’s aid program with the stated goal of developing a new plan in the coming months.
ABOUT MICAH AUSTRALIA

Micah Australia is a movement of Australian Christians, including individuals, churches and organisations raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty. It is the successor to Micah Challenge, building on a ten-year legacy of campaigning and community engagement.

Now led by Executive Director Tim Costello, Micah has renewed its focus on Australia’s aid program and tackling the most pressing global justice issues of our time: extreme poverty, the refugee crisis and modern slavery. This week over 200 Christians from across the country have joined Pacific Christian Leaders in Canberra to discuss Australia’s aid budget, with a focus on the Pacific Step Up and what that means for Pacific people, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable. The issue of global justice is one in which Christians are substantially invested. We believe that individuals, institutions and nations are called to respond to neighbours in need with generous love and compassion. Christian aid agencies in Australia collect $621 million in charitable donations each year. The supporters of Micah don’t just call for Government action, they act themselves.
Micah supports the Pacific Step Up.

We stand in agreement with Prime Minister Morrison when he says,

“This is our patch. This is our part of the world. This is where we have special responsibilities. We always have, we always will. We have their back, and they have ours. We are more than partners by choice. We are connected as members of a Pacific family.

~Address 8th Nov, 2018 - “Australia and the Pacific: A New Chapter”, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, QLD

And we say in response to that,

Australia’s Church Leaders and largest Christian development organisations are with you in supporting the Pacific Step Up. We are ready and willing to use our deep relational networks in the region, to help build stronger ties, through mutually beneficial partnerships that benefit Pacific communities, especially the poorest and most vulnerable members.

September 2019 - Prime Minister Scott Morrison with a delegation of Australian Christian Women Leaders organised by Micah Australia.
We have focused this year’s Voices for Justice gathering on sharing ‘Pacific Perspectives’ on Australia’s aid program, in recognition of the focus being brought to the region by the Pacific Step Up announced in Nov 2018.

For this reason, the recommendations we are presenting here are also based primarily on the Pacific, though they have strong pillars of truth that can be applied across the entirety of the aid program (i.e. the thematic focuses on localisation, listening to partners, focusing on gender and children and the need to address the impact of climate change on increasing natural disasters).

The final recommendation (recommendation #5) is however deliberately global in its orientation, and a key point the Micah Australia coalition feels strongly on that is not to be missed.

Despite this year’s theme ‘Voices for Justice: Pacific Perspectives’, we note crucially that we do not speak for all Pacific people. While a number of Pacific Christian Leaders have joined this delegation, we are in an ongoing dialogue with our partners and networks throughout the Pacific to help them find ways of sharing their views with Australian Parliamentarians more directly in 2020 through further activities we are currently planning.

1. Ensure the new aid policy empowers local communities in the Pacific to lead their own inclusive and sustainable development.

2. Ensure the new aid policy recognises the needs of the most vulnerable members of our Pacific family, particularly women and children.

3. Work with the Australian Church and Christian development agencies to leverage and amplify the strength of the Pacific Church as a key partner for human development.

4. Recognise the impact of climate change in the Pacific including the increasing risk and impact of natural disasters.

5. Ensure the Pacific Step Up is not at the cost of ‘stepping down’ elsewhere in the world.
RECOMMENDATION 1.

Ensure the new aid policy empowers local communities in the Pacific to lead their own inclusive and sustainable development.

Australia’s aid to the Pacific should focus on poverty alleviation, be built around locally lead partnerships, and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

We believe that:

- More attention must be given to the long-term benefits of aid and development programs based on sustainable and inclusive development in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to ‘leave no one behind’.
- Through reducing poverty and empowering communities to lead their own positive change, aid strengthens relations between donor and recipient countries, embodies and advances Australian values, is a stabilising force, and creates lasting, mutually-beneficial partnerships. In this way it is a highly effective, if not underutilised and underappreciated, soft power asset.
- Where infrastructure investment is called for, it should be accompanied by the same development rationale of sustainability and inclusivity by ensuring all financed infrastructure projects are gender-sensitive, climate-resilient and that they pass an additionality test, bundling hard infrastructure with soft infrastructure and community development programming to maximise development outcomes. Applying these principles will not only achieve better development outcomes, it will also differentiate Australia from other governments and multilateral lenders providing loans and aid in the Pacific region.

How?

1.1 We urge the Australian Government to create a new aid strategy based on consulting openly and genuinely with the aid community, including those who are directly impacted by Australia’s aid investments.

1.2 The Micah Australia coalition of Churches and agencies - with its extensive church and development networks - stands ready to be of assistance in this.

1.3 The strategy should define clearly the contribution the Australian Government’s aid program is going to make to achieving the SDGs in our region and around the world.

Ensure the new aid policy empowers local communities in the Pacific to lead their own inclusive and sustainable development.
RECOMMENDATION 2.

Ensure the new aid policy recognises the needs of the most vulnerable members of our Pacific family, particularly women and children.

Australia’s aid to the Pacific should have dedicated funding mechanisms, programs and reporting to ensure the needs of women and children are placed at the centre.

Despite their critical role in society, women and children in the Pacific face significant challenges:

- More than 60 per cent of women in some Pacific Island countries have experienced violence.
- Men outnumber women in paid employment outside the agricultural sector by approximately two to one.
- Women make up just over seven per cent of parliamentarians in Pacific Island countries (the lowest rate in the world).
- 1 in 4 adolescent girls experienced physical violence, and 1 in 10 sexual violence.
- Women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to experience physical or sexual violence.
- In PNG 65% of children are not ‘growing well’ – defined as being free from stunting, wasting or overweight. The rate is 59% in Indonesia and 57% in Timor-Leste.

How?

2.1 We commend the Australian Government on its Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program. This impressive 10 year, $320m program is making strong strides towards its goal for the full and free participation of Pacific women in political, economic and social life. Current funding for the Pacific Women program is set to expire in 2021-2022. This commitment should be renewed as a priority for the Government, along with other new innovative forms of funding targeting this issue specifically.

2.2 The following two reforms to should be made a priority towards achieving this.

a. Create and resource a dedicated Child Rights Unit to mainstream children’s rights across Australian Aid Programs.

b. Introduce Child Impact Assessments to measure and regularly report on our contribution to protecting the world’s most vulnerable children.

“Pacific women are hardworking, creative and resilient. They make significant contributions to their societies and economies, and there is a growing recognition among governments and the private sector that investing in women and girls has a powerful effect on economic growth and wellbeing.”

DFAT, Pacific Regional Program on Empowering Women and Girls
Micah Australia wants to help deepen the partnership between the Australian Government and our coalition of Australia’s largest churches and Christian development agencies - who have the networks, infrastructure, reporting, and DFAT accreditations in place - to scale up in the Pacific.

**Six reasons to partner with the Church in the Pacific:**

1. Significant existing physical and social infrastructure.
2. Deliverer of primary services like health and education in remote communities (where government service delivery is often weak or non-existent).
3. Trusted community leaders capable of addressing underlying beliefs and attitudes to produce sustained behavioural change and social transformation.
4. Strong indigenous leadership and institutional capacity.
5. An orientation towards justice and public good.

**How?**

3.1 Work with Australian church and Christian development agencies to map the full extent of the development, service delivery, disaster response and preparedness work that Pacific churches are currently supporting.

3.2 Utilise the strength of the existing relationships and knowledge of Australian church and Christian development agencies to engage in meaningful consultation with Pacific churches and faith leaders, to shape the direction of the new aid policy.

3.3 Leverage the unique role played by Australian churches and Christian development agencies in partnership with Pacific churches, as a key focus in the Pacific of the new aid policy, with clear goals, timeframes and new funding commitments to expand and deepen this work.

Micah Australia is ready and able to play a key facilitating role between the Australian Government and its member organisations with their partnerships with Pacific churches, in order to achieve the above three goals.

This includes our active support for and participation in the Government’s new Pacific Church Partnerships Program.
Churches in Partnership - Agents for Transformative Social Change

With over 90% of Pacific peoples self-identifying as Christian, churches hold a powerful role within families, community and nations as a whole. In PNG, people of influence in Government, and law enforcement are often members of churches and listen to what is preached from the pulpit every Sunday. Churches can reach to the highest levels of decision-making and the remotest of communities. And when churches work together, whole populations can be affected for change.

In 2012 in PNG, two respected Pacific Theologians addressed the church Leaders Council on a Pacific contextual Gender Equality interpretation of biblical theology as part of the Australian Aid funded church Partnership Program (CPP). The presentation challenged a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible that held men as the “head” and women as submissive and violence as easily justified. The male church leaders, recognising the authority of the Biblical presentation, were emotionally moved and committed to lead change within and through their churches.

Ms Helen Vavia, the Gender and Social Inclusion coordinator for the United church in PNG, alongside their Australian church partner, UnitingWorld (UCA) worked with these leaders to develop a PNG contextual Gender Equality Theology. 18 months later, despite doctrinal and structural differences between the churches, through the support of the Australian church partners, a PNG Gender Equality Theology had been developed as part of the CPP and fully endorsed by all seven mainline denominations.

As we meet in Parliament House today, in Goroka, PNG, representatives from the seven mainline churches, theological training institutions and Goroka University are also meeting together. This group is engaging in further training in the Gender Equality Theology and sharing how they have been spreading the theological conversations through their church networks. And today in Fiji, PNG theologians are joining with representatives from across the Pacific to write Gender Equality curriculum to be registered and made available for teaching in theological colleges and schools, across denominations, regionwide.

This work isn’t just limited to Gender Equality. Through the CPP and other church partnership engagements across the Pacific, churches are working in partnership to support interventions in Health, Clean water, Education, Climate Resilience, Child Protection and Care and responses to natural disasters.

Such is the reach of Pacific churches and the opportunities within relationships between Pacific and Australian churches.
RECOMMENDATION 4.

Recognise the impact of climate change in the Pacific including the increasing risk and impact of natural disasters.

As Australian churches are responding to unprecedented natural disasters in Australia, church leaders in the Pacific are asking us to increase our support to the Pacific as they respond to the impacts of climate change. We acknowledge DFAT’s new Climate Change Action Strategy as an important recognition of the impact climate change is having on development and humanitarian action.

Why prioritise action on DRR in the Pacific?

- The Asia Pacific region is the most disaster prone region in the world, with a person living in the region almost twice as likely to be affected by a disaster as a person living in Africa and 30 times more likely than a person living in North America or Europe.
- Paradoxically the challenge of climate change is seeing an increase in both rapid onset disasters such as cyclones and floods along with increased droughts. The severity of these events is also on the rise with the Pacific experiencing three of the most severe cyclones on record – Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji and Tropical Cyclone Gita in Tonga.
- Beyond the human consequences of a disaster, the economic consequences in our region are significant with Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu inflicting damage greater than half the GDP of Vanuatu.
- The case for supporting DRR is clear, the UNDP estimates that for every dollar invested in DRR it can save up to seven dollars in economic losses.

How?

4.1 Publicly acknowledge the link between climate change and increased disaster prevalence and vulnerability in our region as host of the upcoming Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Brisbane in June 2020.

4.2 Consistent with the principle of localisation, increase investment in local civil society in DRR to make communities more resilient to natural disasters.
How?

5.1 The Australian Government should commit to rebuilding the Australian aid budget from its current low point to the top half of OECD donors (at least 0.29% of GNI).

5.2 Ensure that increases in funding for the Pacific do not come at the cost of Australia’s contribution to global challenges and humanitarian obligations elsewhere in the world.

RECOMMENDATION 5.

Ensure the Pacific Step Up is not at the cost of ‘stepping down’ elsewhere in the world.

Australia’s shifting aid focus to the Pacific, should not be funded by cuts from an already diminished aid budget, which means life-saving projects in other parts of the world like Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, are forced to come to an end. As a wealthy nation we must recognise these vulnerable people are our neighbours too.

Neglecting our humanitarian responsibilities elsewhere in the world, is neither the right thing, nor the smart thing, for a middle power like Australia that relies on the maintenance of global peace, stability and prosperity.

Huge gains have been made in bringing down levels of extreme poverty in our world, particularly in Asia. However, the challenges we face now - like the global refugee crisis and the threat of climate change - in undoing gains across all areas of human development is very real. This is particularly the case in the critical areas of health, agriculture and food security alongside the increased humanitarian burden from increased natural disasters and conflict over scare resources.

For that reason, funding the Pacific Step Up should be done in addition to our existing aid commitments elsewhere in the world and should not be a burden carried squarely on the shoulders of an already diminished aid budget.

The FY 18-19 Federal Budget saw a halving of assistance to Pakistan and Nepal, two of the poorest countries in Asia. Further, increased economic growth in middle income countries is not translating to universal human development. Investments continue to be required to ensure government services reach the most vulnerable. And the citizens of these countries need to be able to hold their governments to account, which is a unique role for civil society, something Australia’s aid could continue to target in these nations.

Outside of Asia, there are global challenges which require collective effort. Pervasive poverty in parts of Africa along with growing fragility and humanitarian need, means Australia needs to contribute its fair share to these efforts.

Total aid spending was $4.16 billion in FY2018-19 – just 0.22% of national income and dropping down to 0.19% by FY2021-22. This entrenches Australia as one of the world’s lowest aid contributors in terms of Gross National Income – ranking 19th out of the 29 nations that give aid.

Micah believes Australia should work to return to the top half of rich country aid donors as a mark of our commitment to the world’s poor, vulnerable and oppressed. This would be moving up to a ranking of 14th position, and an aid budget that is at least 0.29% of GNI. This would put Australia just below the OECD average and around the levels of Canada and Italy.
For more information see, Australian Aid as a Soft Power Asset: Submission to the Australian Government’s Soft Power Review, World Vision Australia, September 2018.

For more information see, Design Principles for the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, World Vision Australia, March 2019.

DFAT Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development report (points 1-3), Unseen and Unsafe: Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste’ (point 4).

The report urges the Australia Government to urgently support the following four key recommendations:

1. The Australian government significantly increases its EVAC-specific ODA allocation to $55 million over three years in the Pacific and Timor-Leste (which is 1.5% of regional ODA).

2. Establish a clear policy platform that puts children at the centre of development, the development of child-centred policies and establishing dedicated resources to oversee the mainstreaming of child protection and child rights across all thematic areas.

3. Develop an ‘ending violence against children’ policy marker (similar to the gender equality marker) to enable the tracking and reporting of expenditure on EVAC initiatives.

4. Strengthen the intersectionality between violence against women and child programming in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

For more information see, Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid, DFAT.


The CPP is comprised of seven mainline PNG Churches, their Australian Church partners, the PNG Government and is funded by Australian Aid. These Churches are: United Church in PNG and Unitig Church in Australia through UnitingWorld; Anglican Church in PNG and the Anglican Church in Australia through Anglican Board of Mission, the Baptist Church in PNG and the Baptist Churches in Australia through Transform Aid International; the Catholic Church in PNG and the Catholic Church in Australia through Caritas; the Lutheran Church in PNG and The Lutheran Church in Australia through Lutheran World Services Australia; the Seventh Day Adventist Church in PNG and ADRA Australia; and the Salvation Army in PNG and Australia.
Official Development Assistance is the flow of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective. It is defined by the OECD Development Assistance Committee and it has been regularly reviewed and refined over time.

Australia’s Aid Program is currently guided by the policy Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability and the performance framework Making performance count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian Aid. It is subject to an annual performance report, the most recent of which is Performance of Australian Aid 2017-18. It is also subject to peer review through the OECD Development Assistance Committee. The most recent of which was in 2018.

**Fast Facts**

Australia’s Aid Program is $4 billion in 2019-20. This is only 0.21% of national income and only 0.83% of the federal budget.

**Geographic Focus**
- Global 29%
- Pacific 34%
- Southeast & East Asia 25%
- South & West Asia 7%
- The Middle East & Africa 5%

**Thematic Focus**
- Building resilience 20%
- Infrastructure & trade 18%
- Agriculture, fisheries & water 10%
- Effective governance 20%
- Education 18%
- Health 13%
Don’t we need to focus on putting Australians, like our farmers battling drought, first?

We do. 99% of our budget is about putting Australians first, and well it should be. Like yourself, Micah’s advocates are people who look to get out and serve in their local communities, who know the very real needs of local residents that must be met. But we can do both. We can serve those who need it most both here and in our region. Australia does not have to choose between assisting drought-hit farmers and a strong overseas aid program. We must do both. National Party members including the Hon David Littleproud MP and the Hon Damien Drum MP have expressed support for the overseas aid program amid the debate about local drought relief. Former Nationals leader John Anderson made similar arguments in an article co-written with the former Labor trade minister Bob McMullan in 2018. We’re a nation of 25 million people. We produce enough food for 75 million people. We need open, prosperous and accessible trading markets in our region.

How can we afford to give more aid and what would you cut from elsewhere to fund this?

Australian aid is a small amount of our national budget and has already made a disproportionate contribution to budget savings (e.g. one fifth of the savings in 2014 budget). Governments have to make hard choices in deciding on revenue and spending measures however, as the budget comes back into surplus it is important to begin rebuilding the aid program.
Thank you for your time today. We appreciate your service to your local community and our nation and want you to know that we are praying for you – for wisdom and guidance as you continue to serve.

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