

30 August 2019

**Submission
To the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Select Committee Inquiry into Aid in the Pacific**

“True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good.” – Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 178

Summary of main points

- We approach the New Zealand Aid Programme from the broader perspective of what is in the best long-term interests of the vulnerable communities we serve, and from more than 30 years’ experience working with and alongside the government’s overseas aid programme.
- Our experience with grassroots communities shows that aid programmes work best within long-term, trust-based relationships.
- We welcome the “Pacific reset” as an opportunity to rethink New Zealand’s engagement with our Pacific neighbourhood, based on respectful relationships.
- We wish to ensure that human rights are upheld within humanitarian and development programmes, and that this is a clear priority within all the New Zealand Aid Programme.
- Caritas works closely with Pacific communities in the creation of its annual State of the Environment for Oceania report which, among other concerns, tracks the impact of climate change on Pacific nations. One of the key findings is that climate finance needs to more effectively reach the grassroots level to help communities adapt and respond to climate change. We frequently encounter cases where this is still not happening.
- We take an integrated human development, “whole of community”, approach to humanitarian and development work – rather than a heavy emphasis on large infrastructure projects. These softer forms of relationship-based development often provide much better social and economic returns over the long term.

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' agency for justice, peace and development. We work on behalf of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference for a world free of poverty and injustice through community development, advocacy, education and emergency relief.
2. Our work is shaped by Catholic social teaching, which supports and uphold the dignity of each and every person, along with their responsibilities, regardless of culture, ethnicity, gender or religion. We promote, in particular, the principles of:
 - Human dignity – Te tapu o te tangata;
 - Solidarity – Kotahitanga;
 - Subsidiarity – Mana whakahaere;
 - Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable – He whakaaro nui mō te hunga rawakore;
 - Participation – Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou;
 - Stewardship – Kaitiakitanga; and
 - the Common Good – Hei painga mā te katoa.
3. In terms of international development, Catholic social teaching promotes integral human development, with a special focus on protecting and upholding the human rights of the poorest and most vulnerable people. Integral development promotes the good of every person and of the whole person. It requires a vision of the economy that, on the international level, guarantees an equitable distribution of resources; responsive to awareness of our economic, political and cultural interdependence; and which unites people globally and makes them feel linked by a common destiny. There is a need for models of development that seek not only economic development, but rather build a more decent life through united labour, enhancing every individual's dignity and creativity, and their capacity to respond to their personal vocation. A more human development brings benefit to rich and poor alike.

Caritas partnership with Government on overseas aid

4. Caritas, under various names, has existed for 50 years as a Catholic bishops' agency for overseas aid in a wider context of supporting justice, peace and integral human development for all peoples, both here and overseas. As a faith-based, non-government organisation (NGO) we have worked with and alongside the government's overseas aid programme for more than 30 years. We have valued the changing and evolving partnership through various funding schemes, such as the earlier VASS, KOHA/PICD, and SDF funds; and most recently Partnerships for International Development (PFID). Some of these schemes have been overly onerous and burdensome, with too much time and energy spent by both government and NGO staff on complex design documents and paperwork. We are encouraged by our early experience in developing a negotiated partnership with MFAT.

Community-focused values base

5. We approach New Zealand’s overseas aid programme from a perspective of what serves the best long-term interests of the vulnerable communities we work with. Principles of the common good, preferential option for the poor, and subsidiarity ensure that vulnerable communities are the focus of attention and engagement. Subsidiarity requires that Pacific communities have greater agency to help determine their own futures and to be actively involved in decisions that affect them. Their voices need to be amplified in discussions that affect them.
6. Our experience in working with grassroots communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas shows that regardless of the model of aid used, aid programmes work best within long-term, trust-based relationships that understand historical context, recognise the values and culture of a specific place and community, and where there is a shared common vision for constructive outcomes. Accountability goes both ways in a mutual give and take that recognises both parties have something to gain from the relationship.

Pacific reset – social transformation through strong trust-based relationships

7. We welcome the “Pacific reset” as an opportunity to rethink New Zealand’s engagement with our Pacific neighbourhood. Based on our own experience working in the Pacific, we endorse the emphasis on respectful engagement with our Pacific neighbours, valuing their traditions and cultures and acknowledging their many contributions to the unique character of our country and our region. New Zealand’s ODA expenditure receives substantial value for money whenever funds are used for community-led, long-term social transformation. In our experience, investment in building up the capability of people may not always be easy to measure, but it always helps to strengthen the fabric of society. We endorse this shift in focus under the “Pacific reset”.
8. Investment in large commercial infrastructure, while arguably easier to measure in the short term, may not receive the same return on investment in the long term. At the very least, the appropriateness of infrastructure and its overall impact on the lifestyle of local communities should be given serious consideration through meaningful consultation with those most likely to be affected by the intervention. There must be adequate consideration of who benefits from, and has a voice in, decisions regarding infrastructure – and who may lose out from such developments.
9. By working closely with local communities and listening carefully to their needs and aspirations the New Zealand Aid Programme can strengthen a “social licence to operate” in many Pacific communities.

Upholding human rights in the Pacific

10. The dignity of every human being is of paramount importance to Caritas and we believe that such an approach stands New Zealand in good stead in its relationships with Pacific neighbours. Caritas has a particular focus on the rights and dignity of women and girls, and of marginalised communities. We wish to ensure that human rights are upheld within all humanitarian and development programmes, and that this focus should be a clear priority within all of the New Zealand Aid Programme.

Climate finance needs to reach the grassroots

11. Caritas works closely with various Caritas Oceania partners in the creation of its annual State of the Environment for Oceania which among other environmental concerns, tracks the impact of climate change on Pacific nations. This work shows that climate finance needs to reach the grassroots level if it is to be most effective in helping communities adapt and respond to the challenges of climate change. We frequently encounter cases where this is still not happening. For example, the Carteret Islanders living offshore from Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (PNG) have long been recognised as among the first peoples to be forced to migrate due to sea level rise affecting the habitability of their atolls. But they have received no large-scale climate funds for their resettlement, being reliant on the support of the local Church in providing land and on non-government organisations such as Caritas. Neither the governments of PNG nor the Autonomous Region of Bougainville Government have provided adequate help and support.

12. In our environmental research this year, our Samoan and Tongan sources have both reported the difficulty of small communities and enterprises to access climate funding. In Samoa, the Vaisigano Catchment flood protection project is funded by the Green Climate Fund. The project includes a funding programme to support ecosystem-based adaptation enterprises. One of those who successfully applied sought funds for a plastic recycling and carbon free air-conditioning model for his café in the Catchment area. He said it was challenging for him to complete forms and gather all required paperwork, even with a computer and internet access. He could only imagine how hard it must be for people with little to no education, no computer access, and no knowledge of grant procedures or how to complete a proposal. On the due date there was a long line of people to deliver proposals, with bound and booklet style proposals in fancy folders. He is concerned about a lack of access to funds by the poorest and most vulnerable along the Vaisigano River. The New Zealand Aid Programme should aim to assist grassroots communities to access climate change funding.

Climate finance - additional to planned aid commitments

13. While it makes sense that climate related finance be provided within the ODA stream, given that climate impacts are a result primarily of development by richer nations and societies, climate finance needs to be treated as additional to what would otherwise be provided as

aid for development. We also note that aid levels overall need to increase dramatically to pay our fair share – New Zealand is still nowhere near the 0.7% of GNI that was committed to by developed nations in the 1970s.

Integral human development

14. We support a “whole of community” social development approach to humanitarian and development work – rather than a heavy emphasis on large infrastructure projects. These forms of integral human and community development often provide much better social and economic returns over the long term. We welcome the New Zealand Aid Programme’s growing ‘tailored approach’ to partnering with community-based organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand and throughout the Pacific. In our view, the new approach of partnering closely with the civil society sector is likely to result in more sustained positive impacts at the community level.
15. New Zealand cannot and should not compete with other players in terms of large budget, large scale infrastructure investments. Rather New Zealand has a tremendous opportunity to establish itself in providing high quality, authentic, trust-based and relational ODA with close connections to grassroots communities.

Conclusion

16. Change built on a foundation of respect for local cultures and language creates strong and abiding relationships of trust. These relationships add to the mana attached to New Zealand’s social and economic investment in the Pacific because the work, and how it is done, is appropriate to the local setting. We welcome the principles and thinking behind the Pacific reset and hope that it will be borne out in practice with close working relationships with authentic development practitioners based both in the Pacific and Aotearoa New Zealand. May it continue with the best of existing approaches and allow greater flexibility for a variety of approaches in the future.

Caritas would like to speak to the Select Committee regarding its submission at the appropriate time.