

Institution: London School of Economics and Political Science
Unit of Assessment: 24B: Anthropology and Development Studies: International Development
Title of case study: A new approach to the Australian Government's engagement with civil society organisations in developing countries
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Jude Howell served from 2009-2011 as lead researcher on a fundamental review of the Australian Government's approach to civil society in its developing country aid programmes. She and her collaborators produced a report with seven key recommendations. These led to a new Government policy statement on Effective Governance and a new Civil Society Engagement Framework. The initial impacts of rolling out this Framework in 2012-13 have been 1) significant changes in the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) operations in relation to engagement with civil society at both headquarter and country levels, and 2) a substantial increase in the amount of money and attention going to the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other organisations that form the backbone of civil society in the 37 developing countries in which AusAID works.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p><i>Research Insights and Outputs:</i> The body of research that underpins the impact described here has critically examined the attempts by development agencies through programmes, dialogues and projects to strengthen civil society. It has involved both theoretical and empirical research over more than a decade in various countries, notably China, Afghanistan, Kenya and India.</p> <p>The key findings that emerged in this body of research were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to uncover the implicit theoretical and normative assumptions that are made by policy-makers and practitioners in their engagements with civil society as a starting-point to critical reflection and action. These might include assumptions about the role of civil society in democratisation processes, in reducing poverty, and in promoting notions of accountability and transparency [1,2,3,4]. • Similarly, it is important to locate donor engagement with civil society within a broader political context and debate around the relative roles of civil society, the state and market in providing for the public good and for global security. This includes not only the debates within the donor country but also in the partner country, where the very idea of civil society could potentially be perceived as threatening as opposed to useful and welcome [1,2,5]. • Civil society is a rich term and has much potential in terms of opening up the field of actors and organisations to development institutions. However, in practice many development agencies tend to focus most of their energies on NGOs, at the expense of other civil society organisations such as faith groups, trades unions, virtual coalitions, and other ways of associating that may be more pivotal in terms of social change. In engaging with civil society, it is therefore important that development institutions also look beyond NGOs [2]. • Donor agencies often operate with blueprints of ideal state-society relations. However, LSE research has demonstrated the importance - when supporting civil society in aid programmes - of understanding the local context, including the history and nature of state-civil society relations, the power relations amongst civil society actors, and the competing visions and expectations of what civil society should and does do in any context, and so on. It is thus vital not to assume that all NGOs are necessarily agents of social change in a given context. It is equally important to remain alert to the power dynamics within civil society and to identify the key sources of change and continuity [1,2,4,5,6]. • The 9/11 attacks and the 'war on terror' have had a significant impact on the relationships amongst security institutions, development aid and civil society organisations. Civil society organisations have been drawn into security agendas, either as possible suspects in fronting terrorism or as adjutants in 'hearts and minds' work and anti-radicalisation

programmes at home and abroad. [1,2,5].

Key Researchers: The research was undertaken from 2003 - 2013 by Professor Jude Howell, former Director of the Centre of Civil Society at the LSE (2003-2010) and Director of the ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action Programme. Her collaborator and co-author on this research was Jeremy Lind (Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Howell, J. (2007). The backlash against civil society in the wake of the Long War on Terror, *Development in Practice*, 18(1), 82-93. (peer reviewed) DOI: 10.1080/09614520701778884
2. Howell, J. and Lind, J. (2009). *Counter-terrorism, aid and civil society: before and after the war on terror*. Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK. LSE Research Online ID: 26022
3. Howell, J.A. (2008). All-China Federation of Trades Unions: Beyond Reform?: The Slow March of Direct Elections. *The China Quarterly*, 196. 845-863. (peer reviewed) DOI: 10.1017/S030574100800115X
4. Howell, J. (2010). Social and political developments in China: challenges for democratization. In: Chu, Yin-wah and Wong, Siu-lun, (eds.) *East Asia's new democracies: deepening, reversal, non-liberal alternatives*. Routledge, London, UK, 25-42. LSE Research Online ID: 31122
5. Howell, J. and Lind, J. (eds.) (2009). *Civil society under strain: counter-terrorism policy, civil society and aid post-9/11*. Kumarian Press, Connecticut, USA. LSE Research Online ID: 26315
6. Howell, J. (2012). Civil society, corporatism and capitalism in China. *The journal of comparative Asian development*, 11 (2). 271-297. (peer reviewed) DOI: 10.1080/15339114.2012.711550

Evidence of Quality: Peer reviewed publications are noted above. Funding for research on civil society, security and development (2006-2010) was as follows (with Professor Howell as the named grantholder for each): ESRC (RES 155-25-0076) - £114,999 (peer reviewed). Ford Foundation in Kenya - US\$ 80,000. LSE HEIF4 support for dissemination- £45,379

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Between 2009 and 2011, Professor Howell was contracted by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to serve as lead researcher on a fundamental review of AusAID's approach to civil society in its aid programme to developing countries. The review was commissioned by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), an independent unit within AusAID, with the purpose of highlighting the importance of civil society to senior management, feeding evidence into AusAID's process for developing a framework for civil society engagement and, ultimately, improving AusAID's impact in terms of poverty reduction on the ground. The underpinning research was pivotal in bringing Professor Howell to the attention of AusAID, in defining the substantive approach used in the review, and in generating the findings and recommendations [A,E].

The findings of the review were presented in a report titled 'Working Beyond Government: Evaluation of AusAID's Engagement with Civil Society in Developing Countries' (Howell and Hall, 2012) [B] and related reports focused on fieldwork in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines [C,D]. The main report made seven key recommendations grounded firmly in the underpinning research. These included:

- develop a civil society framework that recognizes civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process
- incorporate analysis of civil society in country situation analyses and integrate country-specific civil society strategies in country aid strategies
- invest in civil society advisors in headquarters and major country programs, and activate networks for sharing lessons related to engaging with civil society
- develop a rationale for choosing aid program intermediaries not just on a results basis but also for their ability to contribute to developing a sustainable local civil society
- include civil society in policy dialogue and implementation when designing sector wide

- approaches with partner governments
- support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society as part of strengthening civil society where appropriate

AusAID management agreed to take forward all seven of the report's recommendations [E,F]. According to Russell Miles, AusAID's Director of NGO Policy, in his 2012 presentation at the Crawford School of Public Policy [G], the response to the evaluation was not just the normal management response but instead came directly from the AusAID Executive. He emphasised that the Executive took the evaluation very seriously and that it had focused their attention on the issue of civil society in a new way. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak organisation for development NGOs, also indicated strong support for the report and spoke in public forums about their intention to use it to lobby AusAID for an increased focus on civil society engagement.

Subsequently, as a direct result of the report, AusAID issued a new policy statement of Effective Governance and developed a new Civil Society Engagement Framework in consultation with ACFID [F]. This framework, formally released in 2012, "recognises the emergence of an informed and engaged civil society as an important development outcome in its own right...and provides the overarching direction by which all seven of the recommendations are implemented" [H]. In publishing the Framework, AusAID described the new approach as "...a significant shift in the Australian government's engagement with civil society organisations with a sharper focus on: effectiveness, results, sustainability, risk reduction, efficiency and value for money, diversity and innovation." [I]

Implementation of the report's recommendations has produced a number of significant actions and impacts [F,J], including:

- a) an increase in money going to NGOs in the context of AusAID's changing approach to civil society, from \$500 million in 2011-2012 to \$700-800 million by 2015-16 (a 40-60% increase),
- b) a doubling of funding to the Australian NGO Cooperation Project, from \$ 69 million in 2010-2011 to \$150 million by 2014-15,
- c) establishment of the Civil Society Network, a cross-agency working group,
- d) establishment of the Civil Society Portal, a web portal for NGOs and other civil society organisations that serves as a central hub for information on accreditation, funding and other issues relevant to working with AusAID
- e) all country programmes conducting civil society analyses, and
- f) governance and social development advisors taking responsibility for engaging with civil society through dialogue, networking, projects and strategic analysis.

Since 2012 the Civil Society Engagement Framework has been in the process of being progressively rolled out in all 37 developing countries in which AusAID works [I]. Jo Hall, ODE Director, provides examples of the different ways in which this is being done from three country programmes [H]:

- The Philippines programme has replaced its longstanding community assistance programme involving small grants with a new programme called 'Coalitions for Change', a much more strategic approach for working with civil society organisations as recommended by the Framework
- In line with the new requirement to analyse 'the role of civil society in both policy development and service delivery' as part of country situation analysis, the Indonesia programme has completed an NGO sector review designed to maximize NGO involvement in poverty reduction, identifying specific ways to engage directly with NGOs and to improve the policy and funding environment in which they operate
- The Papua New Guinea programme has worked with a range of civil society organisations to help them map out their capacity-building needs and to develop a concrete strategy for

addressing those needs.

Full implementation of the Civil Society Engagement Framework is expected to be completed by 31 December 2013, following alignment with agency-wide reforms and close consultations with ACFID and NGO members on key projects [J]. Despite this formal end-date, the ODE Director predicts that the report's "concrete and positive impact on the way that AusAID works with civil society through its aid program...is likely to continue to have influence" into the future [H].

Wider Implications: LSE work is contributing to better aid delivery and monitoring mechanisms by an increasingly important donor nation. *Ceteris paribus*, stronger civil societies should enable more effective governance in aid-recipient countries.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All sources listed below can also be seen at: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/case-study/view/106>

- A. Hall, J & Howell, J 2010, *Good practice donor engagement with civil society*. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/591>
- B. Howell, J and Hall, J 2012, *Working Beyond Government. Evaluation of AusAID's Engagement with Civil Society in Developing Countries*. Australian Government. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/592>
- C. Howell, J 2011, *Analysis of five cases of engagement with civil society in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines*. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/593>
- D. Howell, J & Hall, J 2010, *Evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society in Vanuatu: country case study*. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/594>
- E. ODE Talks Podcast: Transcript of Interview with Jo Hall and Julia Newton-Howes. March 2012. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/595>
- F. AusAID Civil Society Engagement Framework. *Working with civil society organisations to help people overcome poverty*, June 2012.. Source file: <https://apps.lse.ac.uk/impact/download/file/596>
- G. Video of presentations about the evaluation and its impact at the Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, 30 August, 2012. Session 3: Jo Hall, Russell Miles, Stephen Howes.: <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/events/content/video/?year=2012&id=2532>.
- H. Statement from: Director, AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness. This source is confidential.
- I. Statement from: Member, Civil Society Effectiveness Review Panel and Australian expert on NGOs and development. This source is confidential.
- J. AusAid presentation to member information forums <http://www.acfid.asn.au/learning-development/files/ausaid-presentation-to-members-acnp-acnc-csef-updates>