

08 August 2025  
Policy Brief.

# Two Years On: Australia's development policy in a disrupted world.

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Two years on, Australia's International Development Policy (IDP) is largely being delivered as promised. Government has produced strategies, tracked performance and is publishing its progress.

Much has advanced since the Lab published its International Development Policy: One Year On brief in 2024. However, in a few domains, there is still work to be done.

But since the IDP's release, the world has changed faster than any of its authors could have anticipated. The economic, geopolitical, and humanitarian terrain has shifted so dramatically that it's fair to ask: can a policy written for the world in 2023 withstand the shocks of 2025 and beyond?

A policy rewrite is unlikely. So, the better question becomes: what choices do Australia's development leaders have to grapple with—through budgets, programs, Cabinet coherency, and public debate—to deliver on the policy's aspirations in a more turbulent region?

This brief does two things:

- It tracks progress against the IDP's original commitments, and
- it identifies five dynamics that will test how Australia adapts its development approach to remain practical, relevant and high impact in the Indo-Pacific.

Happy anniversary and happy reading.



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# One | What's progressed?

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## Significant progress against commitments in the last 12 months

Two years ago, the Australian Government's [International Development Policy](#) (IDP) was launched. It set the direction of travel for Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend and established a range of implementation mechanisms essential for delivery. The commitments were extensive.

In contrast to progress observed in the Lab's [One Year On](#) brief in 2024, this year progress has been made against almost every commitment. [Table 1](#), below, maps this in detail.

## Country planning, strategies and transparency initiatives show most progress

The publishing of 16 Development Partnership Plans (DPPs) is significant given the expiry of guiding country documents prior to the IDP launch. A list of DPPs published to date is in the following section.

By establishing [AusDevPortal](#), Government has delivered on a necessary and good practice commitment to transparency in development spending and performance.

Government also produced a new [International Gender Equality Strategy](#), [Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#), and [Humanitarian Policy](#).

## Work remains on civil society fund, perceptions survey and national research agenda

In the IDP, Government committed to establishing a Civil Society Partnership Fund and a Biannual Perceptions Survey. For the Civil Society Partnership Fund, an [initial funding announcement](#) was made last year. Just two days ago, Government [announced](#) the next stage in its consultation process.

The Biannual Perceptions Survey—intended to assess how partners view Australia as a development partner—has not yet been conducted. Government advises that work will be undertaken soon.

Issuing a national development research agenda would be a practical next focus, ensuring interests of lower- and middle-income countries are represented within a domestic agenda which is increasingly national security-dominated.

## The next 12 months will be telling

Of course, whether IDP commitments are delivered is only part of the story. A tougher question is whether its implementation is delivering development impact. Assessing real-world impact is a perennial challenge, particularly while global shocks are playing out. These are the key moments we are watching for:

First, in early 2026, a wave of new impact, performance and perceptions data will be released (according to the IDP and associated [Performance and Delivery Framework](#) (PADF) timelines). This will include: OECD Development Assistance Committee's Peer Review, the inaugural Biannual Perceptions Survey, multiple [evaluation](#) and impact assessments, refreshed [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) data, an update to the [Publish What You Fund](#) Index, and the 2024-25 Performance of Australian Development Cooperation (PADC) report.

Second, given a policy rewrite is unlikely, pivots to account for global shocks and shifting needs will be made evident through budget changes, major ministerial speeches, new strategy releases and procurement decisions. The Prime Minister is expected to address the UN General Assembly in September. The Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook due in October and a new Federal Budget in early 2026 will be key points to monitor Australia's budget response to its shifting global environment.

**Table 1: Progress against International Development Policy commitments, August 2025**

All judgments made in this table are those of the authors. Advice was sought from Government to verify underpinning facts. Details of commitment statuses can be found below.

Item	Commitment in the International Development Policy	Status
<b>Policy, strategy and implementation</b>		
<b>Development Partnership Plans</b>	Enhance country and regional planning through new Development Partnership Plans.	SP
<b>International Gender Equality Strategy</b>	Develop an international gender equality strategy.	SP
<b>Humanitarian Strategy</b>	Develop a humanitarian strategy.	SP
<b>Disability Equity and Rights Strategy</b>	Develop a disability equity and rights strategy.	SP
<b>Locally led development approaches</b>	The IDP commits to locally led development in its approach and performance.	SP
<b>First Nations approaches</b>	Embed First Nations Australians perspectives in development efforts.	PP
<b>Senior Responsible Officers</b>	Appoint Senior Responsible Officers for bilateral and regional programs.	SP
<b>Integration with other elements of statecraft</b>	The IDP governs both ODA and non-ODA development related activity, including through WoG governance and engagement.	PP
<b>Programs</b>		
<b>Civil Society Partnerships Fund</b>	Establish a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund.	PP
<b>Development financing</b>	Establish Australian Development Investments (ADI) and expand the use of innovative development finance.	SP
<b>National development research agenda</b>	Establish a national development research agenda to maximise the value of Australian expertise.	N/A
<b>Performance and transparency</b>		
<b>Climate change target</b>	From 2024-25, at least 50 per cent of all new bilateral and regional investments valued at more than A\$3m must have a climate change objective, rising to at least 80 per cent in 2028-29.	PP
<b>Gender target</b>	80 per cent of investments will address gender equality effectively, and all new investments over A\$3m will include gender equality objectives.	SP
<b>Impact assessments</b>	Publish post-completion impact assessments.	SP
<b>Performance and Delivery framework</b>	Establish a Performance and Delivery Framework and publish an annual PADC report.	FD
<b>Transparency portal</b>	Create a new online portal to provide access to key data and information about programs and resume reporting to the IATI.	FD
<b>Biannual Perceptions Survey</b>	Conduct a biannual perceptions survey seeking feedback on the implementation of the IDP by Australia's in-country partners.	SP
<b>Aggregation of multilateral performance</b>	Regularly assess Australia's work with multilateral organisations to ensure partnerships are performing effectively and delivering results.	SP

**Green (FD) = Fully delivered** – commitment completed, with demonstrable outcomes.

**Yellow (SP) = Substantial progress** – commitment completed (or significant action taken), implementation in progress.

**Orange (PP) = Partial progress** – some activity or announcement, implementation not significantly underway.

**Red (N/A) = N/A** – little progress, or progress information is not publicly available.

## Development Partnership Plans

16 DPPs have been published to date. These consist of three regional DPPs: [Pacific](#), [Southeast Asia](#), [South Asia](#); seven bilateral DPPs for Southeast Asia: [Cambodia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Laos](#), [Myanmar](#), [Philippines](#), [Timor-Leste](#), [Vietnam](#), (excludes Malaysia and Thailand, who receive only regional ODA); and six bilateral DPPs for the Pacific: [Fiji](#), [Papua New Guinea](#), [Samoa](#), [Solomon Islands](#), [Tonga](#), and [Tuvalu](#). Mid-cycle reviews of the DPPs are scheduled from 2026 onwards.

## Locally led and First Nations approaches

A [Guidance Note on Locally Led Development](#) was released in June 2024, and a [First Nations Guidance Note](#) in April 2025. First Nations programming is embedded in published DPPs for Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. While neither document has prescriptive requirements or mandatory compliance mechanisms, both intend to enable Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) staff to embed these approaches across Australia's development program.

## Integration with other elements of statecraft

DFAT's Development Program Committee meets monthly and includes whole-of-government (WoG) representation. DFAT also collects data from other departments on their contribution to Tier 2 indicators under the PADF. It is difficult to ascertain how the IDP 'governs non-ODA development related activity' for its contribution to development outcomes.

## Civil Society Partnerships Fund

The fund was announced in August 2023. In August 2024, (then) Minister for International Development Pat Conroy committed Australia to invest A\$35m over four years to this fund. In August 2025, Government [announced](#) the next stage in its consultation process.

## National development research agenda

There is no public update on a national development research agenda, intended to maximise the value of Australian expertise on development by expanding funding and outlining research priorities.

## Development financing

Since 2020, [ADI](#) has mobilised over A\$182m in private finance (as of July 2025).

## Climate change target

Reporting against this target commenced in 2024-25 and is expected to be available in the next PADC report, due for publication in 2026.

## Gender target

According to the 2023-24 PADC, 79% of investments addressed gender equality effectively, 1% shy of the 80% target.

## Impact assessments

One [impact evaluation](#) (from 2021) has been made public, with three more underway.

## Biannual Perceptions Survey

The data collection phase of the inaugural Biannual Perceptions Survey is expected to be undertaken in 2025, and results are expected to be published in the 2024-25 PADC next year.

## LGBTQIA+ strategy and Inclusion and Equality Fund

While not explicitly committed within in the IDP, in March 2023, Foreign Minister Penny Wong [committed](#) DFAT to developing a LGBTQIA+ human rights engagement strategy and an [Inclusion and Equality Fund](#). The latter is now funding the [Equality Collaboration](#). There is no publicly available information on the progress of the LGBTQIA+ human rights engagement strategy.

## Two | What dynamics are testing the program?

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### **The ink is barely dry on Australia's IDP and already the ground is shifting beneath it.**

Since the launch of the IDP two years ago, the global and regional economic, geopolitical and security situation has shifted drastically. Whilst Government is delivering the policy it wrote in 2023, its implementation is now happening in a fundamentally changed world.

Below, we look at five dynamics that will test the agility and relevance of Australia's development program unless significant re-prioritisation or new resources are mobilised.

### **Global aid cuts test Australia's resolve on multilateralism**

Shortly after entering office, the Trump Administration reviewed its foreign assistance commitments, aiming to cut US Agency for International Development's programs by 83%,<sup>i</sup> and foreign assistance distributed by the State Department by 40 per cent.<sup>ii</sup> The US' budget cuts, combined with cuts by other major donors—including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, the Netherlands, and others—will amount to an estimated contraction of up to 25 per cent of global ODA by 2027, by conservative estimates.<sup>iii</sup> US trade tariffs are also compounding the effects of its aid cuts for exposed countries worldwide,<sup>iv</sup> and UN agencies face acute funding pressures, forcing their restructure.<sup>v</sup> For some agencies, the cuts may be existential.

So far, Australia has taken a different path to like-minded partners. While its ODA budget remains small by international standards (0.19 per cent of GNI),<sup>vi</sup> Government held this steady amid global cuts. It also made a minor reallocation in response to the impact of US aid cuts, shifting resources from Australia's multilateral contributions towards bilateral and regional programs,<sup>vii</sup> increasing the allocation to Asia and the Pacific from 73.5 per cent in 2024-25 to 74.4 per cent in 2025-26.<sup>viii</sup>

At the next budget, Australia will need to decide whether it continues to shift more funding and focus to bilateral and regional channels, which secures support to the immediate region but may compound the fragility of the multilateral system. As DPPs and investment pipelines evolve, a clear-headed judgment about what aid cut impacts Australia wants to address will also need to be made. All this will be hard without additional resources.

But global aid cuts and fragile multilateralism represents more than a global funding crisis. For decades, multilateral institutions have been sustained not just by money, but by legitimacy granted through the active engagement of global leaders like the US. The foundations of that compact are shattering.

This begs a bigger strategic question: how does Australia want to show up in the system as it now stands? Government will need to make imminent judgments about which multilateral architecture best serves global, regional and national interests—not just diplomatically, but developmentally.

### **Escalating conflict and fragility risks demand a more holistic strategy for prevention**

Australia is increasingly responding to global humanitarian crises and preparing for the possibility of responding global conflict. At the same time, it is grappling with putting greater effort toward long-term, sustained prevention work in contexts closer to home which are at risk of—but not yet experiencing—'hot' conflict.

In the past year, border tensions have flared up between India and Pakistan,<sup>ix</sup> and Cambodia and Thailand.<sup>x</sup> Meanwhile, Myanmar's civil war and refugee crisis continue to deteriorate, the latter worsened by global aid cuts.<sup>xixii</sup>

But beyond hot conflict, the World Bank reports that 43% of Pacific states, and 18% of Southeast Asian states are fragile.<sup>xiii</sup> Political settlements in places like Bougainville,<sup>xiv</sup> Mindanao,<sup>xv</sup> New Caledonia<sup>xvi</sup> and West Papua remain contested.<sup>xvii</sup> Neighbouring states have conflict legacies<sup>xviiiix</sup> or feature limited political rights,<sup>xx</sup> and high risks of debt distress,<sup>xxi</sup> all of which can be contributing factors to state fragility.<sup>xxii</sup> Maintaining high-quality assessments of issues with potential to foment grievances is critical to addressing potential conflict triggers.

Pursuing the IDP's overarching goal of a 'peaceful, stable and prosperous region'<sup>xxiii</sup> requires tackling the interconnected geopolitical and fragility risks through dealing with root causes of conflict. For the Australian Government, the question is not whether conflict risks are rising, but how to respond. So far, Australia's conflict prevention efforts primarily focus on deterrence and diplomacy in view of geostrategic and inter-state conflict risks. Is now the time to re-orient the role of Australia's development program to more robustly address conflict and fragility risks?

### **Budget pressures force hard choices about Australia's international ambition**

In the past year, pressure on Australia's international affairs budget has intensified. Rising global conflicts, demands from allies to increase defence spending, and the broader fiscal impact of cost-of-living relief at home have all contributed to a tougher budget environment. Meanwhile, the contraction of global aid flows and expanded targets of the IDP is placing additional expectations on Australia's development program to do more without commensurate increases in resources.

Australia's total international spending on development, intelligence, policing, home affairs, diplomacy and defence remains stuck at around 9 per cent of Commonwealth expenditure, roughly where it was a quarter of a century ago.<sup>xxiv</sup> Within that, development and diplomacy have seen inconsistent and comparatively low investment over the long term.

With the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook in October and a new Federal Budget in 2026, Government may need to reassess its international affairs investment in light of global conditions.

The question for Government is whether the scale of global disruption—and ODA cuts in particular—requires a lifting of international spending through either a broad increase across development, diplomacy and defence, or via a more targeted injection of ODA to safeguard national interests in a volatile environment? Can Australia credibly assert leadership in the region while allowing its development and diplomatic capabilities to stagnate?

### **New ministerial portfolios create opportunities and risks for coherence**

Following Labor's re-election in May 2025, the Albanese Government returned with a reshuffled but largely familiar international policy team. Penny Wong remains Minister for Foreign Affairs, Pat Conroy retains Defence Industry and the Pacific Affairs portfolio, while Dr Anne Aly enters Cabinet as the new Minister for International Development.

The inclusion of an additional international policy-focused minister in Cabinet is notable. It may signal room for more political attention on development, or simply reflect a redistribution of workload across a very crowded foreign policy agenda. Either way, the development program now sits across three ministers with overlapping mandates and distinct Cabinet voices. Departmental staff will need to



service all three, and the agenda will need to be more coherent, not less, if Australia is to deliver on the ambitions of the IDP. Clear coordination mechanisms, strong data and compelling public narratives for development as squarely within national interest will be essential—especially as ministers navigate rising budget pressures, domestic interests, and demand for visible results.

The key choice ahead for the Australian Government is how to govern the development agenda in this new configuration. Can departments and ministers coordinate effectively across diplomacy, development, and Pacific partnerships? And will these three ministers use their platforms to lead boldly on development within a complex Cabinet?

### **Integration is Australia's unwritten Pacific policy—optimising for development is key**

Over the past year, Australia has continued to move decisively towards integrating with the Pacific. The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union treaty has entered into force,<sup>xxv</sup> as has the Australia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) Bilateral Security Agreement.<sup>xxvi</sup> PNG will establish a team to enter Australia's National Rugby League.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Nauru-Australia Treaty has been signed, backed by agreements to maintain financial services after commercial banks withdrew.<sup>xxviii</sup> Labour mobility continues to advance,<sup>xxix</sup> and ABC Radio Australia has completed its roll-out of services across the Pacific.<sup>xxx</sup> Lastly—in progress at the time of writing—a Pacific Banking Guarantee Bill is before Parliament. If passed, it would see Government back Australian banks' operations in the Pacific to ensure countries facing de-banking retain reliable access to finance.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Each of these agreements has two common features: first, they connect Australia to Pacific countries through activities, institutions, and reliance. Second, they have the potential to provide a developmental dividend or outcome for the partner country, while advancing a geopolitical outcome for Australia (namely, denying China the same access to partnerships in these spheres).

These initiatives fall largely outside the ODA budget, and their drivers are geostrategic. But their potential to deliver developmental outcomes can be significant: safeguarding access to finance, increasing labour market participation, expanding pathways for mobility, capitalising on remittances, and improving public infrastructure and governance.

As momentum behind this integrationist approach builds, it is natural to ask whether these activities fulfil their developmental potential, and what comes next? If Australia is integrating with the Pacific through banking, sport, labour and security, will other areas like health, (more) visas and education follow? And can Government more proactively shape these deals and activities to both deliver lasting development impact, and continue to uphold the agency and sovereignty of partners?

## **Three | Conclusion**

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In the past two years, Government delivered on the bulk of its International Development Policy commitments. The architecture is in place and momentum is visible.

But while implementation is tracking to plan, the world around it is not. A shifting global and domestic landscape—marked by aid system collapse, rising conflict risk, political realignment, fiscal constraint, and deeper Pacific integration—will test the limits of the policy. In the year ahead, adaptations will need to be made to implementation arrangements to account for these shocks. And maybe, just maybe, the disruptions experienced globally warrant a revision of some long-held views about the size and focus of Australia's international spend closer to home.



## About this brief

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This analysis has been prepared independently by the Development Intelligence Lab, drawing on publicly available information and guided by rigorous desk research and expert consultation. In developing this work, the Lab also engaged with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to verify key facts. The views expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of any funders or consulted stakeholders.

The Development Intelligence Lab is a Canberra-based think tank. It administers funding from a range of sources, including DFAT.

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