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Contextualising Aid Effectiveness: Australia's Scholarship Program in Africa

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Abstract

While Australia has enlarged its scholarship program in Africa from 100 scholarships in 2007/08 to 1000 scholarships in 2012/13, it has not established a suitable mechanism for measuring its effectiveness. In this article, we explain that the growth of Australia's scholarship program in Africa has been driven by Australia's national interests and argue that, without a clear method of evaluating the program, it will be difficult to establish its value. We suggest that an appropriate assessment of such a program would place a strong focus on the aid recipients themselves—both their personal transformations and the application of their knowledge to alleviate poverty.

Introduction

While Australia has been providing aid and scholarships to developing countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, since the 1950s, its assistance to Africa was always relatively modest until the 2008/2009 financial year. Compared with other developed countries, Australia's aid to Africa remains small, but in relation to its own record since the mid-1980s its provision of scholarships to Africa has increased astronomically.¹ This development raises a number of questions, for example, why has Australia expanded its scholarship program in Africa?; and is the current design and delivery of scholarships effective?

The aim of this article is to explain why Australia has enlarged its scholarship program in Africa—the *Australia Awards in Africa*

¹ For a detailed analysis of the Australia Awards in Africa, see Tanya Lyons, "The role of education in Australia's relationship with Africa," in *New Engagement: Contemporary Australian Foreign Policy Towards Africa*, eds. David Mickler and Tanya Lyons (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013 forthcoming).

(AAA)—beginning from the 2008/2009 financial year. It also investigates the effectiveness of the Australia Awards in Africa. We consider this topic important for several reasons. First, the scholarship program increased from 100 scholarships in nine countries in 2007/2008 to 1000 scholarship in 2012/2013 to over 35 countries, which represents growth of 900 per cent. Second, the scholarship program constitutes the largest component of Australian total aid to Africa. As Australia's engagement with African countries appears to be increasing, it is important that the pillar of its activities in Africa be subjected to analysis. Third, while there have been a growing number of publications on Australia's foreign relations with African countries, there has been no major analysis of its scholarship program. Finally, at the time of writing, it appeared that the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) had not established a mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of its scholarship program in Africa.

This article is based on an analysis of Australian government documents relating to aid in general, and scholarships to Africa in particular. It also examines secondary sources on Australian-African relations. While it is not based on structured interviews with Australian or African government officials, one of the authors has participated in quasi-governmental forums through which he has exchanged views with African and Australian government representatives on scholarships.

Our conceptual framework is derived from a 2011 report for the Australian government entitled, *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (hereafter Hollway Review, after the lead author, Sandy Hollway). In what looks like a modified version of the aid eligibility scheme used by the 1984 Jackson Report on overseas aid,² the Hollway Review suggested an interesting approach to resource allocation. The three criteria against which countries or regions are measured in the Hollway Review are “poverty, national interest, and Australia's capacity to make a significant difference.”³ Countries such as Indonesia, which score highly against all three criteria, receive the greatest proportion of aid. Sub-Saharan Africa, as a region, only scores highly on one of the criteria: poverty. National interest is rated as ‘medium,’ most likely

² R. Gordon Jackson, *Report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1984).

³ Sandy Hollway et al. *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (2011), 124, <http://www.aidreview.gov.au/publications/aidreview.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2012).

derived from Australia's campaign for a two-year seat on the UN Security Council, which was secured in late 2012 in part due to overwhelming support from African states.

Finally, Australia's capacity to make a significant difference in Africa is rated as 'low'. Influential factors in the last rating include the strength of partner governments, the degree of 'donor-crowding,' Australia's relationship with—and diplomatic reach in—the region, donor accountability for the funding received, whether or not Australia has the capacity and expertise to offer what is needed, and what the Hollway Panel has described as Australia's desire to "stay the course."⁴ The framework divides countries and regions into five 'focus' categories, with the countries in the top two categories allocated the lion's share of the aid program. Sub-Saharan Africa, as a region, is deemed to be in category three. By 2011, only 7 per cent of Australian bilateral aid was going to Africa and the Hollway Review recommended an increase in the aid being allocated to it. However, it also recommended that most of this aid should be delivered through partnerships with multilateral institutions and NGOs with wide representation on the ground, owing to the perception that Australia has a limited ability to effect change on its own. The Hollway Review also argued that aid has to meet at least two criteria. It claimed that "an effective Australian aid program must be sustainable over the long term, and this means that it must be firmly based on a public consensus."⁵ It also argued that "aid is not just about efficient delivery of services to clients. It is an expression of human values. It is about helping people living in deplorable conditions to overcome poverty."⁶

We agree with some of the recommendations of the Hollway Review, but we are also sceptical about others. For example, we accept that for the Australian scholarship program in Africa to be sustainable, it ought to reflect the values and norms of the Australian people. The second criterion basically means that the scholarship program must achieve value for money. While the Hollway Review would appear to view the effectiveness of the scholarship program mainly in terms of the alleviation of poverty, we argue that the effectiveness of a scholarship program ought to be evaluated at two levels: the transformation of the

⁴ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 107.

⁵ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 3.

⁶ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 3.

individual scholarship recipients, on the one hand, and the application of the knowledge acquired to alleviate poverty on the other. In this case, if the scholarship recipients have acquired the education expected of them, the program would have been effective regardless of whether they directly participate in poverty alleviation. Therefore, we argue that while aid in general may be evaluated in terms of its capacity to alleviate poverty, a scholarship program should not be assessed as an instrument that is primarily designed to the same end.

The remainder of this article is divided into four parts. The first part provides a brief historical context that illustrates the persistence of considerations of the national interest in the formulation of Australia's aid policy. The second examines the evolution of Australia's engagement with Africa. The third part discusses AusAID's design and delivery of its scholarship program and assesses the program's effectiveness. Our conclusions are set out in the final section.

Historical context: the persisting national interest

The Australian scholarship program in Africa may be new, but it is partly a product of Australian foreign policy thinking that goes back more than 60 years. Therefore, it needs to be placed in the context of Australia's historical provision of aid to developing countries, which has been driven by assessments of Australia's strategic, political and economic interests. The first major Australian aid initiative was the Colombo Plan for Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia (hereafter the Colombo Plan), which was an outcome of the Commonwealth Foreign Minister's meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1950.⁷ In the course of the 1950s, the Colombo Plan expanded to include non-Commonwealth donors, such as the United States, and non-Commonwealth recipients, such as Indonesia, Thailand and South Vietnam.⁸ This particular aid program had two components. There was the economic development part, involving "financial support for development projects" such as dams and roads, and the technical assistance part, involving "the promotion of technical expertise, education and training."⁹ As a result, Australia provided more than

⁷ David Lowe, and Daniel Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

⁸ Lowe and Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*.

⁹ Lowe and Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*, xxv

20,000 scholarships to Asian students between 1951 and 1980. The Colombo Plan continues and has about 26 member countries, including Australia, but its program has been extensively revised throughout the past three decades.

An important dimension of the early Colombo Plan was that Australia and its fellow donors used the aid program to try to shape the post-World War II regional order in South and Southeast Asia. As a former Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has acknowledged, Australia's participation in the Colombo Plan was underpinned by "economic, political and cultural motivations."¹⁰ The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has observed that Australia hoped to use "the aid program to involve the United States in regional affairs, cultivate diplomatic and commercial relations, assist the rehabilitation of Japan and play a part in the Cold War."¹¹ Thus, through its first international aid program, Australia ensured that aid served the national interest. There is no single definition of the national interest, but DFAT defined it in a 2003 White Paper as "the security and prosperity of Australia and Australians."¹² DFAT further broadened the meaning of the national interest to include humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation and the promotion of "good governance, human rights and development."¹³ Thus, the Australian government believes that the "improvement of governance around the world can help create an environment that contributes to the security and prosperity of Australia."¹⁴

Between the early 1980s and 2010, Australian federal governments set up various committees to advise them on the effectiveness of Australian overseas aid, and some of their findings bear relevance to our analysis of the effectiveness of the scholarship program in Africa. For example, the 1984 *Report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program* (hereafter the Jackson Report, after R. Gordon Jackson, the committee chair) proposed an eligibility framework for foreign aid,

¹⁰ Lowe and Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*, v

¹¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*, 23 May 2005, http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/colombo_plan/ (accessed 6 July 2012).

¹² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Advancing the National Interest*, (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), vii.

¹³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Advancing the National Interest*, xviii.

¹⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Advancing the National Interest*, xviii.

which eventually disadvantaged African states. At the top was the Asia-Pacific region, followed by Papua New Guinea and the Pacific and Indian Ocean islands. China and India came in the third category, while African states were placed in the fourth. As one critic argued at the time, “the stated reasons for the consigning of Africa to category four were essentially that Australian bilateral aid was unlikely to be cost-effective in Africa, or sufficient in scale to make any worthwhile contribution.”¹⁵ Gordon Jackson maintained that “an aid program can serve three ends: the humanitarian one of bettering the lot of people less fortunate than ourselves; and the two more self-interested of strategic and economic benefit to Australia.”¹⁶ Jackson suggested three other principles to go with his recommendations. The first was that if a conflict emerged between the needs of the aid recipients and Australia’s national interests, “the interests of the aided should prevail.” The second principle was that “forms of aid which assist real development are to be preferred to those which give only transitory relief.” The third principle was that “whatever other considerations are taken into account, Australian aid should always be given effectively and efficiently.”¹⁷

More than 12 years after the Jackson Report, the Australian government set up another committee to review Australia’s overseas assistance in 1997, which published a report entitled *One Clear Objective: Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Development* (hereafter the Simons Report, after H. Paul Simons, the committee chair). The Simons Report declared that “the objective of the Australian aid program should be to assist developing countries to reduce poverty through sustained economic and social development.”¹⁸ In this report, as in previous ones, it was Australia’s national interest that determined where aid was to go. It was partly for this reason that AusAID, in its response to the Simons Report, suggested that the aim of the aid was “to advance Australia’s national interest by assisting developing countries reduce poverty and

¹⁵ David Goldsworthy, “The Hawke Government and Africa: Hands across the Indian Ocean,” *Australian Outlook* 39:3 (1985): 139-146.

¹⁶ R. Gordon Jackson, “Australia’s Foreign Aid,” *Australian Outlook* 39:1 (1985): 13-18.

¹⁷ Jackson, “Australia’s Foreign Aid,” 13.

¹⁸ H. Paul Simons, Gaye Hart, and Cliff Walsh, *One Clear Objective: Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Development: Report of the Committee to Review Australia’s Foreign Aid* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997), 12.

achieve sustainable development.”¹⁹ Like the Jackson Report, the Simons Report insisted that aid should be effective.

Thus, from the mid-1980s until 2008/2009, various Australian government committees on overseas aid recommended a focus on the Asia-Pacific region and a move away from the African continent. The reports also argued that aid should be effective, but the word ‘effective’ appeared to convey shifting meanings. Sometimes it meant a policy that was capable of advancing Australia’s national interest, while at other times it referred to a policy that could lead directly to the alleviation of poverty in the recipient country. The latest report on this theme is the Hollway Review, which emphasised many of the sentiments contained in the 1984 Jackson Report. Like the Jackson Report, the Hollway Review provided an eligibility framework for Australian overseas aid, but it placed the Sub-Saharan African region in the third category. Like the Jackson Report, this report expressed the belief that aid would be more effective if it were geographically focused. Again, like the Jackson Report, the Hollway Review suggested that Australia should provide aid to African states through multilateral agencies and successful NGOs, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. If its recommendations were implemented as they stand, this report would alter Australia’s current engagement with African countries, including through its scholarship program.

The Evolution of Australian Engagement with Africa

The scholarship program needs to be understood within the context of Australia’s total engagement with Africa. This engagement has, in turn, been influenced by various factors in Africa, in Australia and in the global system. For instance, the needs of particular African states, changes in Australian domestic politics, the Cold War, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have all had an effect on Australia’s approach to Africa. Apart from Australia’s failed attempt to mediate in the Suez crisis of 1956 between the United Kingdom, Egypt and Israel, its involvement in Africa may be traced back to the 1960s. Most of this engagement has been limited to southern African states and

¹⁹ AusAID, *Better Aid for a Better Future*. Report to Parliament on Australia’s Development Cooperation Program and the Government’s Response to the Committee of Review of Australia’s Overseas Aid Program (Simons Report) (Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development, 1997), 16.

the former British colonies in East and West Africa. However, Australia's policies have not always been consistent. Changes in the perception of Australia's national interest have particularly affected the level of Australian support to Africa. For example, while approximately 6 per cent of Australian aid went to Africa in the mid-1980s, by the early 2000s Africa was receiving only about 2 per cent of Australia's official development assistance (ODA).²⁰ Furthermore, this generalisation glosses over the fact that most of Australia's development assistance, including scholarships, was going to just a few African states.

In southern Africa, for example, Australia moved from being a supporter of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Ian Smith rebel government in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to a strident opponent of apartheid and supporter of Black nationalists in Zimbabwe. Following the end of apartheid in the mid-1990s, South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth and subsequently became Australia's largest recipient of aid and scholarships in Africa. According to AusAID sources, "Australia began providing development assistance to the newly independent states of southern, eastern and western Africa in the 1960s and 1970s."²¹ This aid, which comprised a few scholarships and modest project aid, was provided under a scheme called the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Program. By the early 1980s, Australia's diplomatic presence in Africa had increased, and its scholarships as well as other forms of development assistance had increased to about 6 per cent of total aid.

However, as mentioned earlier, the 1984 Jackson Report drastically altered Australia's aid policy towards Africa. Australia not only discontinued project aid, but it concentrated its remaining bilateral aid programs on fewer countries. Two years before the transition to a non-racial government in South Africa, Australia had to make another policy shift because the anti-apartheid rationale that underpinned its approach to southern Africa was becoming outdated. Accordingly, in 1992, Australia expanded its bilateral aid beyond southern Africa, to eastern

²⁰ Joel Negin and Glenn Denning, *Study of Australia's approach to aid in Africa: Commissioned study as part of the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (2011). <http://www.aidreview.gov.au/publications/study-africa.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2012).

²¹ AusAID, *Australian Aid to Africa: A New Framework* (Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development, 1995), 11.

Africa and the Horn of Africa. Australia decided to concentrate on “specific sectors where Africa had a need and where Australia could best deploy its expertise” such as agriculture and food production, health and human resource development.²² The main elements of the new program included support for South Africa, an expanded role for Australian NGOs, support for democracy-building efforts, and assistance through international agencies.

By the mid-1990s, Australia had clearly established that its interest in Africa was three-fold: humanitarian; strategic and political; and trade and commercial.²³ AusAID repeatedly claims that its primary motivation for involvement in Africa is humanitarian, and this includes issues such as poverty, malnutrition, poor health conditions, illiteracy and maternal as well as child mortality rates. The other two considerations, namely, strategic/political and trade/commercial, may not be deemed to be primary but they often override the primary consideration. As AusAID argued in the mid-1990s:

In place of a narrow focus on ending apartheid and easing suffering, there is now a more complex objective of promoting economic and social reform with the dual aim of improving the material conditions of Africans as well as encouraging the development of viable export and investment markets for Australia. Intertwined with these efforts will be an Australian interest in promoting global security through peace building and preventive diplomacy.²⁴

It is these goals that continue to underpin Australia’s engagement with African countries. Australia’s scholarship program in Africa at present appears to have been designed within the context of these goals.

The Post-2007 Engagement

Kevin Rudd, as Prime Minister (2007-2010), Foreign Minister (2010-2012) and later backbencher, played an important role in re-constructing Australian-African relations from the time the Australian Labor Party (ALP) achieved electoral victory in November 2007. Addressing the

²² AusAID, *Australian Aid to Africa*, 13.

²³ AusAID, *Australian Aid to Africa*, 27-30.

²⁴ AusAID, *Australian Aid to Africa*, 27.

African Union's Executive Council, comprising African foreign ministers, on 27 January 2011, Rudd sought to distinguish Australia from other Western countries when he stated: "We are not from North America. We are not from Europe. We are simply Australian."²⁵ Rudd's predecessor as foreign minister, Stephen Smith, and his successor Bob Carr, were equally committed to stronger African-Australian relations.

However, Australia's engagement with African states at the start of the ALP's rule in 2007 appeared a bit puzzling. The Rudd government was initially concerned with cutting costs across the board, including the little that Australia was spending in Africa. For example, the Australian High Commission in Nairobi, Kenya, which was accredited to eight other countries in the region, had only two political officers besides the High Commissioner, yet the Rudd government recalled one political officer in early 2008 as part of its initial cost-cutting measures. However, within a few months, the Australian government started to increase its diplomatic presence and to widen its engagement with African states. What was behind this sudden policy reversal? The only plausible explanation is that by this time the Rudd government had decided to campaign for the two-year UN Security Council seat for 2013-14 and calculated that if it gained a large number of votes in Africa it would succeed.

Thus, its bid for the UN Security Council seat was crucial to Australia's initial commitment to Africa in the 2008/2009 financial year.²⁶ Australia, which had lost its bid for a seat on the Security Council in 1996, had not served on the Council since 1984-85.²⁷ If it relied on its old UN network, the West European and Other States group, it would lose the seat to European competitors, Luxembourg and Finland. (When the votes were cast on 19 October 2012, Australia obtained 140 votes, while Luxembourg received 128 and Finland 108. This is the reason it sought to re-engage African states, especially from late-2008). The then

²⁵ The Hon Kevin Rudd, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs "Executive Council Speech, African Union," Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 27 January 2011. http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2011/kr_sp_110127.html (accessed 8 January 2013).

²⁶ See Tanya Lyons, "Australian Foreign Policy Towards Africa," in *Middle Power Dreaming: Australia in World Affairs 2006-2010*, ed. James Cotton and John Ravenhill (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Samuel M. Makinda, "Why 'Good Citizen' Australia Lost the Global Power Play," *Current Affairs Bulletin* 73:4 (December 1996/January 1997): 22-26.

Australian Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, visited the African Union and addressed African foreign ministers and invited about half of them to visit Australia at different times. Other senior Australian government officials who visited Africa included the Governor-General Quentin Bryce and former Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon, both in 2009. As senior Australian government officials travelled to Africa and African ministers visited Australia, the new Australian engagement with African states started to take a new shape. Australia sought to increase its support for African states in areas where it has expertise, including mining, agriculture and food security, as well as in child and maternal health. Moreover, African states expressed a desire for scholarships and the Australian government replied with an increase in the number and type of Australia Awards in Africa, including short-term awards. These developments demonstrated that the traditional framework of Australian foreign policy, in which aid and scholarships were utilised to promote the national interest, had not changed. The only minor change was in the tools of diplomacy.

Indeed, the dual objectives of the provision of AusAID scholarships are: (1) to achieve “country and regional program development outcomes through strengthened individual and institutional skills and knowledge, and by supporting leadership” and (2) to support “Australia’s broader foreign policy agenda through long-term linkages and partnerships.”²⁸ Nevertheless, the Hollway Review highlighted a need for careful analysis if humanitarian objectives were to take precedence over the national interest. It argued that, if clarity is not prioritised, there is a risk of oversimplification and confusion about the role of the national interest. In the Hollway Review, the national interest was conceptualised as covering “economic, security and foreign policy interests; from the commercial interests of individual companies, to the safety of Australian citizens and Australia’s international image and reputation.”²⁹

The Hollway Review maintained that the national interest should never take the place of the alleviation of poverty, but that the two will sometimes be complementary. It asserted that the national interest should be principally apparent in the geographical allocation of aid: “foreign policy, security and economic interests should figure mainly in

²⁸ AusAID, Annual scholarships update 2010, p. 1. <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/pdf/update-2010.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2011).

²⁹ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 105.

focusing Australia's geographical effort."³⁰ This aspect of the national interest has been reflected in Australia's emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and also in the recent increase in aid to Afghanistan. The Hollway Review claimed that "choosing aid activities because of specific national interests is, and should remain, the exception."³¹ However, using the 2003 DFAT definition of the national interest, one could argue that poverty alleviation in developing countries falls within the ambit of Australia's national interest.³²

The above developments and debates suggest that the parameters within which Australia provides development assistance to African countries have remained virtually unchanged since the mid-1990s. These developments illustrate the policy context within which the Australia Awards in Africa were designed.

The Effectiveness of the Australian Scholarship Program

Conceptualising effectiveness in the scholarship program

At the time of writing, it appeared that AusAID had not established a formula for assessing the effectiveness of the Australia Awards in Africa. However, AusAID does have a formula for assessing the effectiveness of its aid to Africa. This situation prompts two important questions. First, what constitutes effectiveness in a scholarship program? Second, would it be reasonable to use the methods applied to project aid to assess the effectiveness of scholarships? The 2005 Paris Declaration laid down five principles of aid effectiveness, namely: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results and mutual accountability. While these principles are useful, as they provide a means for achieving effectiveness, they fall short of suggesting a suitable framework for assessing the effectiveness of scholarships. The Hollway Review, on the other hand, defines aid effectiveness in terms of two criteria: public consensus and poverty alleviation. This approach is also suitable for assessing other forms of aid, but it is only partly equipped to assess the effectiveness of a scholarship program. Negin and Denning have defined aid effectiveness in terms of poverty alleviation, national visibility, relationship building and foreign policy.³³ This would be

³⁰ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 8.

³¹ Hollway et al., *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, 106.

³² DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, xviii.

³³ Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia's approach to aid in Africa*.

appropriate for assessing the effectiveness of a scholarship program if there were less emphasis on poverty alleviation. While it is reasonable to assess the building of dams, bridges, roads or hospitals on the basis of the criteria suggested above, it would be misleading to subject a scholarship program to the same assessment method. This is largely because a major purpose of scholarships is to inculcate certain values, ideas and culture into the individuals who receive them. For this reason, scholarships are intended to result in the transformation of individuals as well as, indirectly, in the transformation of their societies.

Therefore, it would be inappropriate if methods designed to assess physical assets were also employed to gauge the value of trained specialists whose capabilities may continue to appreciate through the accumulation of wisdom and knowledge. Just as Negin and Denning have drawn a distinction between aid effectiveness and development effectiveness, we distinguish 'scholarship program effectiveness' from 'aid effectiveness.'³⁴ While taking into account the issue of public consensus, a reasonable assessment of the effectiveness of a scholarship program should be underpinned by two fundamental questions. First, what is required for the objectives of the aid policy to be realised? Second, how does the scholarship program work towards achieving these objectives? On the basis of these questions, this article suggests that a scholarship program should primarily be assessed on the fit between the aid recipients and the design, delivery and course content of the scholarships. This fit needs to take into account the impact factor on the recipient and their society. We will now explain the design, delivery and course content of the Australian scholarship program in Africa and go on to examine how its effectiveness may be assessed.

Design and delivery of scholarship programs

The Australian scholarship program in Africa is an integral part of Australia's ODA to African countries and the largest part in terms of funding. The ODA's overriding objective is to help African countries meet some of their MDGs and tackle other problems in sectors in which "Australia has expertise and experience, and is best able to make a difference," such as agriculture and food security (MDG 1), water and sanitation (MDG 7), maternal and child health (MDGs 4 and 5), public policy, and mining services. It is with a view to training African specialists in these areas that the Australia Awards in Africa program

³⁴ Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia's approach to aid in Africa*, 6.

has been designed. We use the term ‘design’ to refer to the architecture of the scholarship program, which may comprise at least three sets of entities: the type of scholarships; the status of recipients; and the main participants in the delivery of the courses. We use the term ‘delivery’ to refer to the site or mode of teaching the course, whether it is onshore or offshore.

Although the Australia Awards in Africa program still provides traditional scholarships that lead to masters’ and doctoral degrees, it also offers short-term scholarships, which have been designed at the urging of African governments. The short-term scholarship program is based on an onshore-offshore model. Short courses are now to be delivered mainly in Africa with only a short stay in Australia. The short course category of scholarship, known as the AusAID Short Course Awards, is the main category and also an aspect of the Australia Awards that AusAID is hoping to expand.³⁵ The recipients of these awards are middle-level and upper-level legislative, administrative and diplomatic personnel.

Another class of scholarship is the Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAF). The ALAF are very short programs hosted by Australian organisations and delivered entirely onshore.³⁶ In 2012, 75 ALAF were scheduled to be offered to African participants. The aim of this program is to target “senior officials and mid-career professionals who will be in a position to advance key regional development policies and increase the institutional capacity of developing countries.”³⁷ The lack of focus on content in the ALAF allows AusAID to learn from specific Australian organisations about African capacity building needs. The ‘ground-up’ approach allows AusAID both to capitalise on and to help enrich budding or existing networks between organisations. AusAID takes a similar approach in its Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility, which has been set up to support “short-term training and

³⁵ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa (AAA) – Short course awards provider workshop (May 2011) summary.” <http://www.grminternational.com/hiBand/employment/businessstenders.cfm> (accessed 22 June 2011).

³⁶ AusAID, “Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) Fellowships factsheet June 2011.” <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/pdf/alaf-factsheet.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2011).

³⁷ AusAID, “Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) Fellowships factsheet June 2011.”

exchange programs, workshops and research” between Australian and African organisations.³⁸

An emphasis on knowledge about Africa is reflected in the stipulations AusAID makes to potential contractors in the new Australia-Africa short course program. The offshore delivery is viewed as a way to highlight the importance of different African contexts. Education providers are expected to embed an understanding of context in their courses and “it is essential that courses capitalise on participant’s experiences.”³⁹ AusAID also encourages the active inclusion of African partners in all aspects of course design, delivery and evaluation.

Course content

Similarly to the design and delivery of AusAID’s new Australia Awards in Africa program, the course content reflects Australian national interest while endeavouring to maintain relevance to aid recipients’ priorities. Priority areas have been identified both by African partner countries and by Australia in terms of what expertise Australia has to offer.⁴⁰ Australia’s dual focus on market-based and ‘good governance’ imperatives indicates coverage of both the public and private sectors, and AusAID indeed states its intention to connect with both these sectors.⁴¹ The three content areas subsequently targeted are: public policy, mining and agriculture. In the two other categories of the Australia Awards in Africa, content areas are devised by different Australian organisations, which apply on a competitive basis to deliver the programs.

In 2012, the greatest number of places in the short course category of the Australia Awards in Africa was reserved for public policy—135

³⁸ AusAID, “Looking West: Australia’s strategic approach to aid in Africa 2011-2015.” <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/101224%20%20Australias%20approach%20to%20aid%20in%20Africa%20-%20Dec%202010.pdf> (accessed 5 September 2011), 13.

³⁹ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa,” 3.

⁴⁰ The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Inquiry into Australia’s relationship with the countries of Africa* (Canberra: Parliament of Australia, 2011).

⁴¹ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa,” 1.

places out of a total of 350.⁴² AusAID stipulates that the short courses should take less than three months to deliver, and modules within courses are desirable—African partner countries have expressed a strong preference for four to six week courses, given the limited time mid-level to upper-level management scholarship recipients have to attend the courses. Next, the mining and agriculture courses were awarded 115 and 100 places respectively in 2012.⁴³ The mining focus is consistent with African recipients' identification of management of their considerable mineral resources as a priority. Australian mining interests are clear in the choice of topics to be studied, particularly in the strategic positioning of Australian expertise, and the possible joint role of Australian higher education institutions and mining companies in advising African countries how to manage their mining sectors. The focus is also consistent with a recommendation that the Australian Government promote corporate social responsibility in the mining sector and also promote the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative principles.⁴⁴ Agriculture is a further theme covered in the short courses program and the content highlights what Australia and Africa often have in common: a scarcity of water. The courses focus on such topics as dry land farming and water harvesting.

Assessing effectiveness in the Australia Awards in Africa program

On the basis of the scholarship design and delivery, as well as course content, there is evidence that the Australian scholarship program is consistent with Australia's national interest. However, for the program to have a greater impact in African countries, a crucial reason for the implementation of a scholarships program needs to be taken into account. If we take impact and effectiveness to include the transformation of the individual scholarship recipients and their ability and, just as importantly, *willingness* to apply knowledge gained to the alleviation of poverty, then the effectiveness of the transmission of certain ideas and cultural values needs to be assessed. For example, if

⁴² GRM International, "Australia Awards for Africa: Short course awards 2012-2013," <http://www.grminternational.com/hiBand/employment/businessstenders.cfm> (accessed 22 June 2011).

⁴³ GRM International, "Australia Awards for Africa: Short course awards 2012-2013."

⁴⁴ The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Inquiry into Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa*, 167

corruption continues, training mid-level and upper-level management executives in the field of mining is not likely to alleviate poverty.

A significant finding of a 2004 USAID report, *Generations of Quiet Progress*, which examined the development impact of US long-term training of Africans from 1963 to 2003, was that changed attitudes were very important in any subsequent implementation of changes in the workplace. The report also stated that attitudes were far more likely to change in long-term degree training rather than through short-term non-accredited courses.⁴⁵ We are not suggesting that impact and effectiveness are synonymous, but we believe that when a scholarship program is effective over the longer term its recipients are likely to have a strong impact or influence in their societies.

As discussed, a large amount of AusAID funding in the Australia Awards in Africa program is directed towards short courses. Although the length and flexibility of the courses is very convenient for the recipients and indeed has been requested by them, a disadvantage may be that significant changes in attitudes are unlikely to occur. This highlights the need for AusAID to focus on strengthening bonds and networks with the recipients, which would potentially lead to the desired changes over time. Although AusAID shows an awareness of this by focusing on the importance of ongoing relationships and alumni networks,⁴⁶ Negin and Denning point out that “a weakness of the scholarship program is the lack of ongoing mentoring, support and the development of alumni networks of practice.”⁴⁷ Also, the fact that AusAID is extending the Australia Awards in Africa program to more than 50 African countries diffuses the individual impact factor—an issue pointed out by Negin and Denning and subsequently by the Hollway Review.

However, AusAID does address the issue of changing recipients’ attitudes in a more structured way by insisting on the embedding of

⁴⁵ USAID, *Generations of Quiet Progress: The Development Impact of US Long-Term University Training on Africa from 1963 to 2003*, p. ix http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADB130.pdf (accessed 17 July 2012).

⁴⁶ AusAID, “Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) Fellowships factsheet June 2011”; AusAID, “Looking West: Australia’s strategic approach to aid in Africa 2011-2015.”

⁴⁷ Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia’s approach to aid in Africa*, 26.

language, ongoing monitoring and a focus on cultural values in the short courses. They stipulate that knowledge of the language of delivery is not to be assumed by the course provider. The provision of supplementary English language training where necessary is a requirement of delivering the courses.⁴⁸ Producing materials in French, Portuguese and Arabic is encouraged. AusAID also asks how the providers plan to “cater for the diverse range of linguistic backgrounds” and requires that providers offer ongoing support once the recipients return to their places of work. Modules should include the design of a workplace project, which highlights “an identified work based issue [the recipients] would like to address on their return to their workplace.”⁴⁹

The promotion of good governance and a respect for human rights are embedded in courses through specific modules; for example, modules include ‘Organisational Culture and Change’ and ‘Ethics and Values of Organisational Development’.⁵⁰ There is also an emphasis on gender issues and disability for all content areas. At least half of the scholarship recipients are to be women, and people living with a disability are encouraged to participate. It is further stipulated that “Australian case studies should be used where relevant, to showcase Australian expertise.”⁵¹ The latter point is indicative of the role of education aid in Australia’s broad foreign policy objectives. However, the requirement is qualified with the exhortation that the job of the providers is not to ‘sell’ Australian models as best practice, but that “best practice is a spectrum” and a particular Australian approach is an example of one type of functioning model.⁵²

The strategy of embedding ideas and cultural values shows that AusAID has a clear understanding that the knowledge transmitted through the course is not the only factor which will transform recipients’ attitudes. However, if length of exposure to new ideas and ways of being is not taken into account, and the brevity of the courses not offset by the facilitation of more enduring links, we believe that funding for the

⁴⁸ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa: Short course awards 2012-2013.”

⁴⁹ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa: Short course awards 2012-2013,” 25.

⁵⁰ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa: Short course awards 2012-2013,” 25.

⁵¹ GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa,” 6.

⁵² GRM International, “Australia Awards for Africa,” 3.

Australia Awards in Africa program may be better spent on more traditional Masters and PhD scholarships. As stated in the Hollway Review, Australia's capacity to effect change in Africa is low. The impact of Australian money spent on bilateral aid consequently needs to be rationalised against the impact of money spent on multilateral aid in Africa.

Conclusion

While the Australian scholarship program in Africa, like all Australian overseas aid programs, reflects the Australian national interest, it has the potential to train the African people who may in future play important roles in helping their countries realise some MDGs. The alignment of this program with the Australian national interest gives it normative legitimacy, which could, in turn, ensure that it is sustained over several years. However, the value and effectiveness of the scholarship program should not be assessed solely on the basis of poverty alleviation or the realisation of other MDGs. Scholarships contribute to development and aid effectiveness in complicated ways, and any assessment method that treats them in the same manner as other types of aid is likely to distort their value. Due to the fact that the end-products of scholarships, namely graduates, are mobile, AusAID needs to develop an evaluation method that has a significant focus on the recipients themselves. Evaluation of the appropriateness of courses—their design and delivery alongside their content—to ensure that they are suited to addressing the needs identified in the recipient country is very important. It is also logical to aim at selecting prospective students who are likely to play important roles in the transformation of their countries. Moreover, their exposure to new practices for prolonged periods would have a greater impact on their attitudes. Given the current prioritisation of short courses, we suggest a systemic focus on the nurturing of strong bonds and goodwill between scholarship recipients and people in host institutions in Australia, and that priority be placed on gathering evidence of changed attitudes in any evaluation of the effectiveness of the Australia Awards in Africa program.

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