



MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

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News from Manna Gum

After a quiet time in the middle of the year, we are finishing 2011 with a bang.

In October Manna Gum took an active part in the TEAR Victoria Gathering, themed 'Good News Stories'. Between them, Kim and Jonathan presented three workshops covering the state of the world and the church(!), household economy as a Christian discipline and urban food possibilities. This was a great weekend for us, with many significant conversations (but never enough time!). TEAR's work in fostering these networks and discussion is immensely valuable and an enormous gift to the broader Christian body in Australia.

Also in October, Manna Gum and Oxfam released our major new report, *Banking on Aid: An examination of the delivery of Australian aid through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank* (see pp.6-9 for more on this).



The report was launched at the Australian National University in Canberra in a forum with government, academics and others in the aid sector, and we will also hold a smaller launch event in Melbourne. The primary purpose of *Banking on Aid* is to stir up debate about some underdiscussed areas of Australia's aid program. It has been a major undertaking for us, involving a significant investment of time and energy, so it has been gratifying to see it finally out there.

And finally, in the beginning of December we will be running *A Different Way: a week-long exploration of Christ's call to a new way of living*. Once again, there has been a lot of interest in this week and a number of people have missed out - stay tuned for *A Different Way* in 2012!

Check out the back page for events coming up early in 2012.



Can we really make poverty history?

by Jonathan Cornford

In July this year the Government released the findings of an Independent Review of Australia's overseas aid program. The review made clear that one of the major challenges facing AusAID (the government department responsible for the aid program) in the coming years – and one perhaps unique to Australia - will be to simply spend its budget. Since 2005, both sides of politics have given support to a policy of increasing Australia's aid budget to 0.5% of Gross National Product by 2015. Many other donor countries have made similar commitments, however, Australia is one of the few that have not retreated from these commitments since the global economic crisis. As a result, by 2016 Australia will have an estimated aid budget of around \$8 billion and it will have moved up the rankings from a light-weight aid donor, well into the middle-weight rankings. This is a significant turn around from the days when Australia rated as one of the stingiest aid donors in the OECD.

Much of the credit for this turn around can be traced to the impact of the Make Poverty History campaign. Starting in the UK in 2005 and coming to Australia the following year, Make Poverty History has been fantastically successful at bringing together a large number of aid and justice organisations to campaign under a single, prominent brand. And it has been, by all measures, a very successful campaign. Perhaps most importantly, the campaign has put the issue of international poverty back on the public agenda, so much so, that governments have had to pay attention. In particular, it has introduced the issue of poverty to a new generation of young people. Many of the organisations campaigning under the Make Poverty History banner – and perhaps especially the Christian organisations campaigning under the parallel Micah Challenge campaign – have produced some excellent educational resources on poverty, and including sometimes excellent theological discussion of poverty. Overall, Make Poverty History has injected a new note of optimism into debates about global poverty.

So how could anyone have any misgivings about making poverty history?

I do have misgivings, although I am almost reticent to air them. I am highly conscious that many readers of *Manna Matters* will have identified with, or taken part in, the Make Poverty History campaign in some way. In sharing my misgivings, I do not want to dampen the enthusiasm for justice which the campaign has stirred up, and I especially do not want to contribute to disillusionment or cynicism. Nevertheless, while there is much that is laudable in both the intent and accomplishments of the Make Poverty History campaign, I do believe that there are a few important areas where there needs to be some critical reassessment, especially by those who come to these issues because of their faith in Jesus.

The first area that should be reconsidered is the name itself. This is hard to say because the name expresses such a compelling and heart-felt sentiment, and it has proved to be such an effective campaigning brand. Nevertheless, we must seriously pose the question to ourselves, can we really make poverty history? The question matters because it cuts to the heart of what we think poverty is and how it is caused, and therefore how it is addressed.

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Bono's famous statement that "For the first time in history we have the know how, we have the cash, we have the lifesaving drugs, but do we have the will?" reveals what I believe is the prevailing assumption about poverty: it assumes that poverty is essentially a lack of know how, money and drugs.

I have discussed the inadequacy of such conceptions of poverty previously (see *Manna Matters November 2009*) and do not want to revisit this subject at length, suffice to say that such conceptions do not reflect the self-understanding of those we call "the poor", they do not explain their complex realities, nor do they sufficiently capture their aspirations. Not only are such preconceptions inadequate, they are ultimately harmful.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus famously states that "You will always have the poor among you." (12:8). This one-liner (Jesus has no more to say about poverty in this passage) has been much misused over the years (including by Tony Abbott) to justify not doing anything about poverty. It is clear that this is not Jesus' intent – he is quoting from the seminal passage in Deuteronomy 15 where poverty is discussed as something that need never happen "if only you obey the Lord your God" (v.5), but which, recognising the human condition, is *nonetheless inevitable* (v.11). The whole point of the passage is to urge the people of God not to be "hardhearted or tightfisted" toward the poor (v.7).

The understanding of Deuteronomy and Jesus is that "poverty" (we shall put aside the problem of definition for the moment) is something that lies at the heart of the human condition. Once we move beyond sloganeering we discover that poverty is actually a very difficult subject. Dorothy Day, after decades of working at the coalface of poverty, wrote this:

Poverty is a strange and elusive thing. I have tried to write about it, its joys and its sorrows, for thirty years now; and I could probably write about it for another thirty without conveying what I feel about it as well as I would like. I condemn poverty and I advocate it; poverty is simple and complex at once; it is a social phenomenon and a personal matter. Poverty is an elusive thing, and a paradoxical one.

The mystery of poverty is so deep that Jesus taught in the first beatitude that some sort of experience of poverty is actually *necessary* to participate in the kingdom of God (Matt 5:3, Luke 6:20).

Thus, from a Biblical perspective, the statement 'make poverty history' is a bit quizzical. We might as well say 'make history history'. The challenge of poverty is not so much its existence, but our response to its existence. This is not merely an academic objection, a quibble about words and ideas – our willingness, or not, to grapple with the mystery and the complexity of poverty determines how we respond to it ... which brings me back to the Make Poverty History campaign.

The second aspect of the Make Poverty History campaign with which I am uncomfortable is its articulation of a 'solution'. From the outset the campaign has articulated three simple and forceful demands: trade justice; drop the debt; and more and better aid. On the face of it, these seem imminently reasonable and laudable demands, and they are. However, when you put three soundbite-sized demands together with a name like "Make Poverty History", conveyed through a swathe of hip and, at times, seriously dumbed-down social marketing and communication, then you are in danger of seriously misinforming the public about the nature of the problem. Unfortunately, even if we were 100% successful in achieving trade justice, dropping

of debt and more and better aid (ignoring the gargantuan complexities of what that even looks like), we would find we had hardly made an appreciable dent on the face of global poverty. The truth about poverty is far more messy, far deeper and far more uncomfortable than that.

The Make Poverty History solution is a neat and sellable package to a consumer society that likes neat and consumable packages. Make Poverty History is unlikely to say, for example, “stop buying the mobile phones and ipads and laptops and mp3 players at such ridiculous rates which are driving the global mining boom which tears-up the livelihoods of rural communities, forcing them into city slums at the mercy of low-wage labour or human trafficking”. (Actually, Make Poverty History says the opposite – this quote from a video on the MPH website: “I’m still a Westerner, and I still own an iphone, only now I can use it to help people”, referring to the “MPH app”). This side of the problem (it is only one of a thousand-sided problem) is not very popular. The reality is that wherever selfishness, greed and the desire for power operate - that is, in every place and at every level of the human system – poverty is being created and maintained.

The longer-term danger of the success of Make Poverty History, having won a generation over to a feel-good package solution to poverty, is that when it doesn’t work (it won’t) the fallout will be an even deeper and more destructive cynicism and selfishness than we have seen to date. How we understand poverty is critical to which part of the human spirit is activated in response. If we activate a consumer response to poverty, we will get a consumer response when the product encounters problems – switch product!

The question of how we understand and therefore seek to address poverty becomes particularly acute when we focus on the question of aid. Despite the three core demands of Make Poverty History, in Australia the campaign has really been about “more and better aid”; and, indeed, when push comes to shove, it has primarily been a campaign about “more aid”.¹ It is indicative of our understanding of poverty that the idea which has the strongest resonance as a solution to poverty is *send more aid*. It is a symptom of a culture which believes, in a deep way, that money is the answer. Unfortunately, aid is far from a neat solution to poverty.

Here I need to make myself clear. I am not against aid, not by a long shot. But in Australia debate about aid has tended to be forced into two polarised positions: those who question the efficacy of aid, want reduced aid spending and are essentially hostile to aid; and those who support aid, argue its efficacy and the need for increased aid spending. I am not satisfied with either of these positions. Like poverty itself, the realities about aid are far more messy and uncomfortable.

1. More recently the campaign has taken on some new areas, including the food crisis, climate change and the ‘Robin Hood Tax’, however aid campaigning is still clearly the main game.

While I support the idea of aid, I cannot escape the conclusion that the international aid industry is deeply flawed. The vast majority of aid (90%) comes from donor governments (such as Australia, the UK, US, Japan, Sweden etc) and international institutions (such as the World Bank and United Nations agencies). The correct term for this sort of aid is ‘official development assistance’ or ODA. And here is where things get problematic. At the heart of the international aid industry is a project called ‘development’. You could fill a very large library with all that has been written about development, however, at its core, development has always been a civilisational project exporting modern industrial capitalist society. In layman’s terms, that means the object of aid is to help everybody live like us. This objective is based on three massive, though rarely articulated, assumptions: (i) that everybody can live like us; (ii) that the way we live is good; and (iii) the planet can sustain the way that we live. These are deeply flawed assumptions.

It is virtually impossible to get your head around the size, complexity and variety of things going on in the aid world, which delivered around US \$123 billion globally in

2009. Even trying to get your head around Australia’s aid program (around \$4.8 billion this year) is a daunting task, so making generalisations about aid is fraught with danger. Nevertheless, there are some deep truths which need to be named about the international

aid system, as it currently functions.

Just as Christianity - with many admirable agents working from the best motives - was nevertheless used to add a humanitarian veneer to European colonialism, international aid – whatever good things have been done along the way - has also acted as a Trojan horse for the global economic order. For decades now, Australian aid policy has been centred around a fundamental belief that poverty cannot really be addressed without economic growth. That means poor countries should emulate the economic policies of wealthy countries – they should: liberalise trade; privatise utilities; convert to large-scale, commercialised, export agriculture; exploit natural resources; encourage the private sector, especially foreign investors; and give attractive tax incentives to the rich. The policies which, holding their hand on their hearts, aid economists will swear are best for the poor, *just happen* to be the policies which most suit our own economic interests. The Australian government is not alone in such beliefs; this is the *orthodoxy* in international aid – the high priest of this creed is the World Bank (see article on p. 7), and Australia is a devout acolyte.

As a result, Australian aid has supported infrastructure development in Laos and Cambodia that has ultimately contributed to a frenzy of resource exploitation - logging, land grabbing, hydropower and mining – that is undermining the very basis of rural communities and

The reality is that wherever selfishness, greed and the desire for power operate – that is, in every place and at every level of the human system – poverty is being created and maintained.

driving 'new' poverty.² In the Pacific Islands, particularly the Melanesian countries, Australian aid policy has contributed to the alienation of land that is leading to growing landlessness and land conflict, the selling-off of forests to foreign loggers, land grabbing and community breakdown, while also encouraging trade policies that would allow Australian goods to flood their tiny domestic markets.³ Through our support of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank – the largest single channel of Australian aid outside of AusAID – we have helped to export this creed to the whole developing world.

The actual result of this sort of development is that for many people – too many – life has gotten worse, not better, and that we are accelerating, not reducing, our unsustainable exploitation of the earth. But here is another problem – how do we actually measure whether things are getting better or worse? The World Bank and Asian Development Bank will tell you that development has been an unequivocal success story – that the proportion of people living in extreme poverty is less than ever before, and more people have a better quality of life than ever before. The numbers prove it. There is no space here to go into all the problems with these sorts of numbers (there are many), but as the saying goes, there are lies, damned lies, and then there are statistics.

While I am in the mood for heresy, let me say this: not even the exalted millennium development goals (MDGs) provide a reliable indicator of people's *actual experience* of development and change. In Laos, the numbers show that there has been a substantial increase over the last decade in the numbers of ethnic minority groups who have access to clean water, health care, child immunisation, basic education and rising incomes. What you don't read about

2. See J. Cornford, *Hidden Costs: the underside of economic transformation in the Greater Mekong Subregion*, Oxfam Australia, 2007. Also see Manna Matters, November 2009, p.4.

3. See T. Anderson and G. Lee, *In Defence of Melanesian Customary Land*, Aid/Watch, 2010.

is that this was achieved in large part by a program of coercive relocation of minority groups from the uplands to the lowlands resulting in what is effectively a slow burn humanitarian crisis and cultural disintegration. And this was largely funded by aid money.

Of course, not all aid is like this. Australian aid money has funded very many projects that really have helped to improve the conditions of life for people who have been suffering, whether it be in agricultural support, basic health care, clean water or such things. But even here we need to be careful – there can be a tendency to think that if aid money goes into the health or education sectors, then it must be good. The case from Laos above shows that this is not always the case. The reality is that the Australian public (development NGOs included) know very little about the real impact of aid money once it leaves these shores.

What then should we do? There is no quick fix solution, however the urgent task before us is to encourage *a much more rigorous debate* about what represents 'good aid'. This will require moving beyond rhetoric, dealing with complexity and being prepared to acknowledge uncomfortable truths.

(In case you are wondering, I certainly do believe it is worthwhile sending money to many of the aid charities that are out there - we do. While these groups are certainly not beyond critique, they are much closer to the human face of need. Where aid charities have been remiss is in their lack of courage in talking honestly about the flaws of the industry in which they participate.)

Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. When it is done well – and it is much harder to do well than is generally understood - aid has an important role in directly alleviating conditions of suffering in poorer countries. Done well, aid can even empower the voice of the poor. However, we must not assume that all aid is good aid. And we must not imagine that aid is an answer to poverty. It is not and cannot be. The 'answer' to poverty lies much deeper within the human soul, and we are all implicated.



DISCUSSION PAPER

BANKING ON AID

An examination of the delivery of Australian aid through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank

by Jonathan Cornford



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Australia

BANKING ON AID

An examination of the delivery of Australian aid through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank

The new report from Manna Gum and Oxfam Australia asks critical questions about the role of the banks in Australia's aid program.

Download from www.mannagum.org.au/whats_on/banking-on-aid or contact us for a hard copy.

Banking on Aid:

Reconsidering the delivery of aid through multilateral development banks

by Jonathan Cornford

It is not an overstatement to suggest that the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) hold a pre-eminent position within Australia's aid program. For the past decade, under both Coalition and Labor governments, they have been described as either the 'key' or 'central' partners of the Australian aid program. Other than AusAID itself, the banks are the largest channel for delivering Australian aid. In 2009, the World Bank was the single largest recipient of Australian aid at \$508 million. In that year we directed more money to the World Bank than we did to Indonesia.

Moreover the significance of the banks in the aid program is only likely to grow as the aid budget swells. Earlier in the year, the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness recommended a rapid trebling of funding to both the World Bank and ADB, and it furthermore recommended that Australia join the African Development Bank.

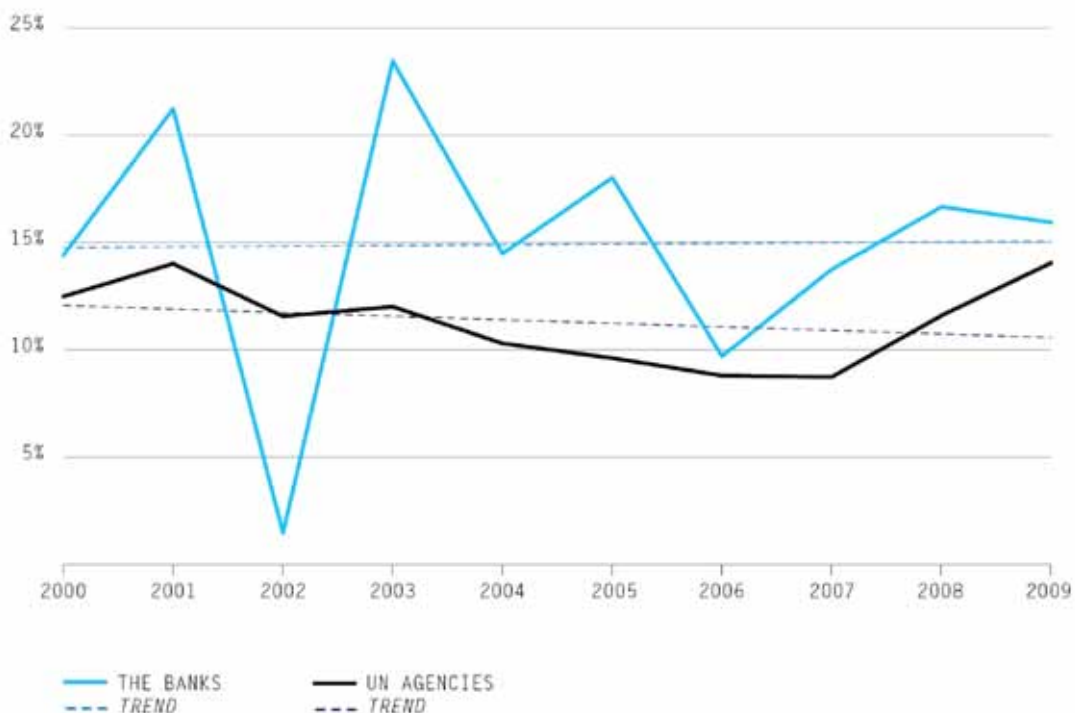
Despite this, there has been surprisingly little debate or discussion about the role of the banks in Australia's aid program, and indeed there is a lack of data that clearly describes this role. If you were to read the little that has been written over the past few years, you would get the impression that the money that Australia gives to the banks is 'below average', and declining. Neither of these is true. It is for these two reasons – the lack of clear data and the lack of debate – that Manna Gum and Oxfam Australia have produced a new report - *Banking on Aid: An examination of the delivery of Australian aid through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank*. The full report can be downloaded from

our website or you can contact us for a hard copy. What follows are some tidbits from the report.

The role of the banks in Australian aid

1. The World Bank and ADB have been regarded as the "key" or "central" partners of Australia's aid program by both Liberal and Labor governments. The reasons usually cited for this privileged role are: their ability to influence recipient government policy, their large scale (more bang for your buck), their extensive research and technical expertise, and their lower transaction costs (it is a cheaper way of delivering aid). However, perhaps central to the privileged place of the banks in Australian aid is their role as the premiere advocates of a global economic order to which Australian governments (of both major parties) have firmly staked Australia's economic interests. Economic self-interest and frameworks for aid cannot be disentangled here — the policies that the Australian Government believes will reduce poverty are one and the same as those that it believes will benefit Australian trade and commercial interests.
2. Over the previous decade, despite the overall rapid growth of the aid program, the banks claimed a steadily growing share of Australia's aid program. Following the Independent Review, this share is set to grow more rapidly. By comparison, contributions to UN agencies declined over the decade (largely during the Howard Government), however this is also set to rise over coming years.

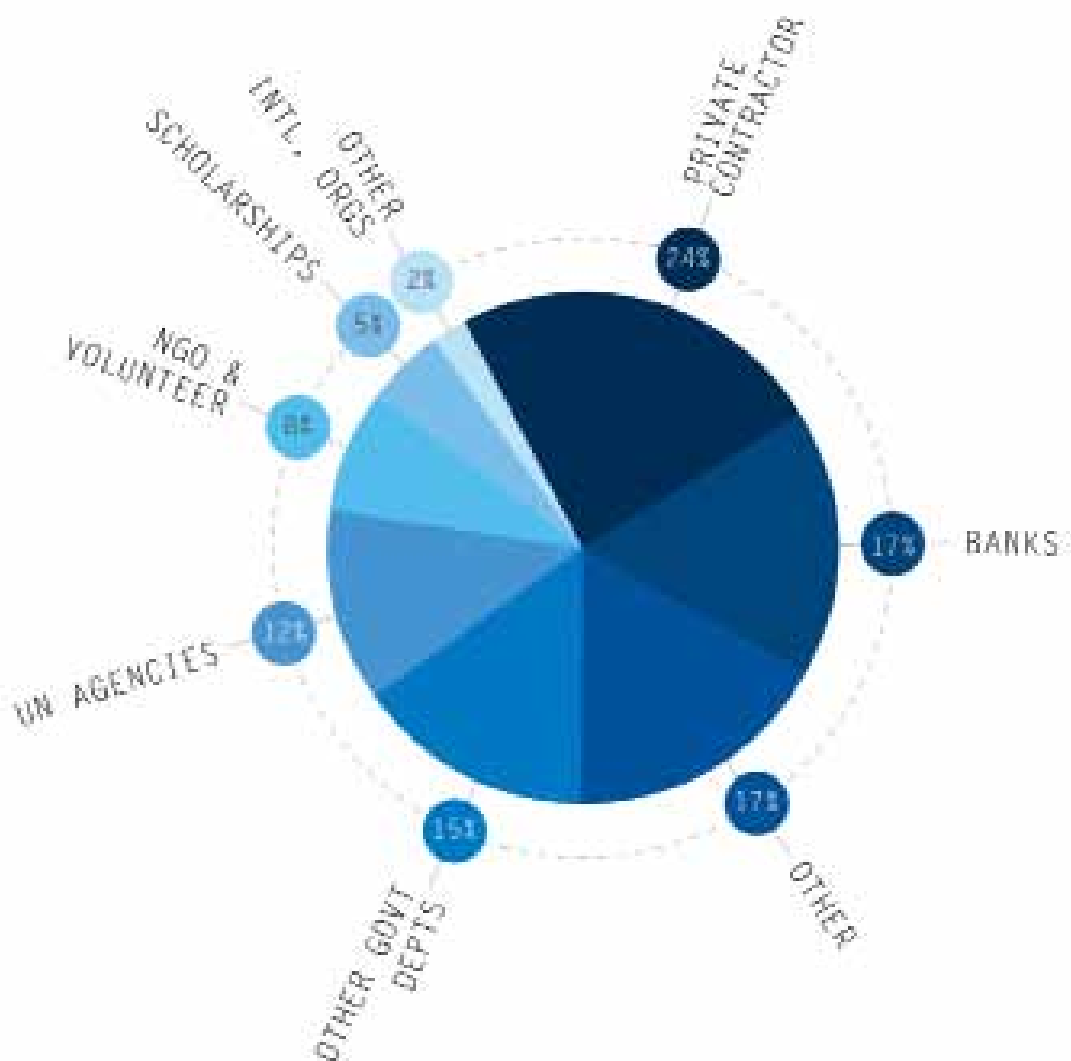
The banks vs UN agencies as a proportion of Australian aid



3. Other than AusAID itself, the multilateral development banks are the single largest channel for delivering Australian aid. In 2008, the most recent year for which there is full data, Australia delivered over half a billion (\$529 million) or around 17% of its aid program through the World Bank and ADB (see graph below). In that year, only AusAID's directly implemented programs, managed by commercial contractors, played

a larger role in delivering Australian aid. Although Australia directed money to around 30 UN agencies in 2008, the overall amount of aid delivered through the UN system (12%) was not as significant as that directed to the two banks. Aid contributions directed to NGOs and volunteers in 2008 had almost doubled over the preceding two years, yet constituted less than half of that directed to the banks.

Who delivers Australian aid? (2008)



Who cares?

All this is to say that Australian contributions to the banks form a major part of the Australian aid program and they are set to grow further.

So what? These two institutions have a broad international mandate to deliver development assistance, they have an over-arching purpose to reduce poverty, they espouse a commitment to achieving the millennium development goals, and they are widely considered to be 'effective' and 'efficient' deliverers of aid.

Unfortunately, delivering aid which really benefits the poor is not that straight forward. The process of development

through development assistance, is a process of intervening in complex systems of politics, economics, social structure, culture and ecology. Despite the obfuscating language of donors, development assistance is always political, always underpinned by economic assumptions, and always in danger of doing harm to the poor. In fact, it requires extreme care not to.

For well over two decades there has been a raging debate about the effect of the World Bank's lending on poor people, and a similar debate about the ADB has been going for the last decade and a half. Those who are supportive of the banks have the dominant voice in this

debate and tend to assume a *modus operandi* that ignores the existence of a debate at all. Nevertheless, the case against the banks is voluminous and the allegations grave.

Perhaps one way of summarising the debate over the banks is by saying that proponents tend to focus on the technical aspects of aid while critics tend to focus on the political economy of aid. Proponents, referring to the growing canon on 'aid effectiveness,' point to the important role the banks play in reducing the burden on poor countries of having to deal with an unwieldy number of donors. The banks are able to both coordinate and absorb a large portion of this aid, thereby streamlining the process for poor country governments. By the same token, the scale and influence of the banks, plus their use of 'results measurement systems', means that they are widely considered to be efficient and effective deliverers of aid. Finally, proponents point out that the banks, of all aid institutions, are the most well equipped to assist economic growth in the developing world.

For critics, it is precisely the banks' role in attempting to

catalyse growth which is a major concern. Although the banks have moved a long way from the disastrous policies of their structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, perhaps the most widespread complaint about the banks is still the extent to which their economic agenda has dominated their vision of development, and the ways in which this has shaped nearly all areas of the banks' work, from research through to lending. There are many dimensions to this critique – such as the ways in which they have influenced trade policy, the commercialisation of agriculture, land tenure, and privatisation of utilities – however the consistent essence of complaint is that they have supported forms of economic development which tend to benefit the rich and corporations more than they do the poor.

There is no doubt that the proponents hold the ascendancy, however the criticism has been sustained and widespread. At a time when the banks are receiving unprecedented levels of funding from the Australian aid program, perhaps we should be giving this debate a little more attention.



HIDDEN COSTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEKONG

Under the Asian Development Bank's ambitious multi-billion dollar program for regional development amongst Mekong countries (supported by Australian aid), fast-paced economic growth – underpinned by large-scale infrastructure development, economic integration and resource extraction – has been heavily promoted as the solution to entrenched poverty in the region.

However, the livelihoods, culture and environment of too many have been seriously compromised by economic change in the Mekong. Although the claimed mandate of development has been to help poor people and improve their livelihoods, studies of people's actual experience reveal that difficulties for many, most notably the multitudinous ethnic minorities of the Mekong, have been exacerbated.

Read the report: *Hidden Costs: the underside of economic transformation in the Mekong region*
www.mannagum.org.au/resources#aid_and_development

A Diary from Dili

by James and Clare Batten-Laidler

In July this year, James and Clare Batten-Laidler relocated from Warrnambool to East Timor. They have been documenting their sometimes confronting, often humorous, experiences of 'a developing country' on James' blog: "Confessions of a Malae" (www.jameslaidler.net). Below are some excerpts.

6 August 2011

We have been in our house now for a week. It's great to have our own space and to be able to cook (although we only have a wok and one saucepan). Our kids, Finn and Archie, are enjoying having their own rooms too. We are living right within the Timorese community, in a 'western' house, but surrounded by an extended Timorese family. Most foreigners, or 'Malae', live in compounds or within Malae areas, surrounded by high fences, razor wire and sometimes, security guards. We feel safe here (even if we are a novelty to the Timorese). The Timorese families are our security. Any crime that does occur in Dili usually involves break-ins, rather than any kind of violence.

The most confronting thing we have had to deal with is that the house we rent comes with a Timorese lady who comes for a couple of hours a day and washes our clothes and generally cleans. At first I couldn't deal with this at all and said no. But a friend challenged my thinking about it. She said that 'Malae' have something to contribute, so they should, and that this was one of the few opportunities for work for women in this country. She said it's different in Timor, more communal, less individualistic, and it's all about 'exchange' and 'relationship'. So, I relented, and even though I still find it extremely confronting, I think it is good. I really like Ana, and the reality of her situation in life is coming alive to me more and more as we build relationship. Ana is 29, but looks more like 40. She only went to school up to year 7. She has always done cleaning. She lives with her older sister who is a single mother of 2 children. Ana is the only income earner. Plus, she gives money to her elderly parents in Baucau. 'The Poor' take on a different meaning when they become your friend.

12 August 2011

Life in Timor Leste gets stranger by the day. It's a place of contradictions. A place where the various experiences you have can be very difficult to reconcile within yourself. The rich and the poor. The beautiful and the ugly. The simple and the excessive. They sit together inside you like fire and ice.

On Thursday night, for example, my son, Finn, got invited to the birthday party of one of his classmates from the School. This boy just happens to be the son of the country's Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao. See, told you it's a strange place. So, we rock up at the Prime Minister's house, steal past his machinegun toting guards, and arrive at this amazing pool party. We're encouraged to stay, so we do; the whole freeloading lot of us. Finn quickly joins in the fun, while my youngest boy, Archie, plonks himself in the pool. I drink red wine, eat finger food and spend my time talking to some of the guests; which include a couple of film makers who have worked on

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Clare with youngest son, Archie.

films such as *Balibo*. Meanwhile, there are about fifty kids in the background going absolutely berserk. The kids are having the time of their lives.

In all seriousness though, the important reality that I have glimpsed in this experience is just how normal the Gusmao family is. So what if he's a former imprisoned guerrilla fighter and national hero turned political leader. What I saw was a decent, humorous man who loves his children and was unbelievably entertaining around kids. And Kirsty, his wife, seems like a really approachable, humble and down to earth woman herself. It makes me wonder what it would be like to really get to know my own political leaders back in Australia.

At the party, Xanana came out amongst the kids wearing a plastic bag. The children went crazy, pelting him with water balloons – mind you, he gave back as good as he received. During the skirmish, both of my two boys tried to knock his block off with those little sacks of mischievousness. At one point even, my son, Archie, tried to push Xanana in to the pool! Archie had no idea who Xanana was; to him he was just this funny old bloke who was out to have a good time.

So, in the end, as I said, it was all a bit weird. And yet, having just said that, it was a normal, whilst big, birthday party. It was a contradiction. To get a glimpse of the man behind the name took away a bit of the whole aura thing. What a horrible burden it must be for people like him to carry; not to mention the burden of people always wanting something from you. I may have nothing to do with him again, but at least I've come away thinking that at least I liked the man I saw. I liked his humanity and I liked his wife too. I reckon Xanana would be a great guy to have a beer and a laugh with.

Now where did I put those car keys. It's about time I gave Jose Ramos Horta a little visit!

And Finally:

I want to leave you now with a reflection from my wife, Clare. It contrasts well with my own more flippant words. Her reflection really moved me and in some ways, her words are probably closer to how I truly feel. It's much easier to write something humorous rather than write something raw and true.

Help me, I'm drowning!

Overwhelming guilt... When I hear the sound of Ana washing our clothes. Guilt when I see children selling goods on the side of the road. Guilt when I think of what we pay for our children to go to school. Guilt for not having to worry about our next meal. Guilt for being able to buy a car. Guilt for being invited to Xanana's son's party simply because we send our children to such an expensive school. Guilt for knowing that we will simply leave this country if we get sick. Guilt for knowing that for the majority here, even seeing a doctor isn't an option. Guilt...for being born into an overwhelmingly privileged country. Guilt, for having the luxury of choosing to 'volunteer' here.

Layers and layers of suffocating and paralysing guilt. Guilt that I don't know what to do with or where to put. Please be transformed, guilt, into something constructive, something useful, as I may just lie down and give up under this weight...

Follow James & Clare's blog - *Confessions of a Malae* - at www.jameslaidler.net





Coming up in 2012:

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NEAR

A six week thematic exploration of the Gospel of Matthew

Monday nights, 6 February - 12 March

Week 1: House of Disciples

Week 2: The Scandalous Messiah

Week 3: The Beautiful Kingdom

Week 4: The Presence of Healing

Week 5: The Narrow Way

Week 6: The Community of Wholeness

THE ARTS OF HOME ECONOMY, weekend retreat

30 March - 1 April

A weekend of fun, sharing and learning, involving: breadmaking, preserving, caring for soil, soap making, cheese making, caring for fruit trees, and more!

GOOD NEWS AT HOME

Eight weeks of Biblical and practical reflection on the Household Covenant

April - May

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Work & leisure

Week 3: Consumption

Week 4: Environment

Week 5: Giving

Week 6: Savings & investment

Week 7: Debt

Week 8: The Poor

For more information, contact us or check the website in the new year.

Support the work of MANNA GUM



About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and

2. Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

www.mannagum.org.au

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a financial supporter.

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