



# The new aid paradigm:

the impact of architectural  
humanitarian projects on  
communities in developing  
countries

Byera Hadley  
Travelling Scholarships  
Journal Series  
2015

Truong Khanh Duy Le

NSW  
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Truong Khanh Duy Le was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2014  
**Cover image:** Laying foundations for a school toilet block in the remote Nepali village of Dungai. Photo by Truong Le

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# The new aid paradigm: the Impact of architectural humanitarian projects on communities in developing countries

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1. Introduction	1
2. Australia, foreign aid and the role of humanitarian architecture	2
3. The potential of education in fostering foreign relations	14
4. Project and progra: impact and ownership	16
5. Long-term challenges and opportunities	21
6. Journal notes	26
7. Exemplar: Archipelago	34
8. What lessons are there?	38
9. Acknowledgements	39
10. About the author	40
11. References	41

The goal of this research was to discover the role of humanitarian architects in developing a more complete project, particularly those that involve the construction of community facilities in developing communities.

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## 1

## Introduction

In early 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Julie Bishop addressed the National Press Club, Canberra outlining “The new aid paradigm” [1]. In the speech, Ms Bishop launched the Government’s new aid policy and performance framework; reasoning that “despite the best will in the world we [the Australian Government] have not achieved the results we should be entitled to expect given the billions and billions spent over the decades”. The speech brought to public attention the need for change in how aid is administered and what criteria should apply when assessing the effectiveness of programs.

More recently, the Australian Government announced reforms to foreign aid. *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian Aid* [2] is the government’s new policy for directing taxpayer’s money spent on aid programs in a more responsible, affordable and sustainable way.

This research is a state-of-play on the current delivery of humanitarian aid and then, more specifically, explores how architectural aid/humanitarian work is best undertaken and how it could evolve to better assist those in developing countries.

The overall aim of this Paper is to critically assess the state, impact and sustainability of architectural humanitarian aid, with a focus on aid in developing countries. It proposes ways for architectural humanitarian aid to more directly address Government priorities and to partner with other non-government institutions to extend the impact and scope of existing and future projects.

It includes a review of the policies set out by the 14 largest NGO’s, as well as recommendations contained in the new framework set out by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade *Benchmarks for an Effective and Accountable Australian Aid Program* [3]. All this forms the basis of an exploration for how we can raise awareness of the significant opportunities that lie in the reforms proposed to aid programs.

We explore a series of projects completed by Aussie Action Abroad (AAA) from December 2013 to January 2014 in order to illustrate a more integrated approach to the construction of community facilities. The research focused on participant and organiser responsibilities; project impact, effectiveness, sustainability, longevity; and to compare the relative impact of architectural humanitarian projects against other forms of aid.

Finally we identify a number of potential new projects and programs to better address the new challenges facing developing communities and more directly fulfil Government priorities. To conclude, the Paper profiles a new organisation, *Archipelago*, established by the author in part to address a number of issues discussed in this Paper and to engage the built environment sector more broadly.

There is a significant need for humanitarian architecture as part of Australia’s aid program, but the built environment sector must restructure if it wants to leverage its capabilities to deliver integrated programs with impact in our region.

## Australia, Foreign Aid and the role of humanitarian architecture

This research proposes a more effective, integrated model that delivers humanitarian aid by lifting the quality of life for people through a better built environment. To highlight the need and impact of architectural humanitarian projects, we must first understand the role, limitations, challenges and potential within the general set of humanitarian aid programs. Especially considering the current Government's Foreign Policy priority, it has become increasingly important to answer the question facing charities around the world: "How much of my dollar goes towards the cause?" [4]

The Australian Government has signalled it plans to ensure that its overseas aid program is responsible, affordable and sustainable, so the Government can account to taxpayers for an annual spend of \$5 billion [2]. The new performance framework aims to directly link performance with funding; ensuring that organisations focus on delivering results while providing value for money. In developing a performance framework, the Government has provided a series of targets and benchmarks by which to assess the impact and overall progress in delivering Government priorities.

Benchmarks and targets matter. Together, they allow others to review, assess and measure progress and impact. *America's Worst Charities* [5] lists the 50 worst performing charities in the US, based on the proportion of donations raised to cash paid out to solicitors. Poor performance can be a very public problem for NGOs. But it is also important to understand and recognise the limitations and challenges associated with the implementation and assessment of benchmarks. The Australian Council For International Development (ACFID) points out that if benchmarks are not appropriately targeted, they can

actually reduce innovative approaches, stifle debate and lead to over-compliance and red tape [3].

Governments are right to establish benchmarks and targets. But the wrong regulation and poor policy can force agencies to invest in activities that may be easily measured rather than programs that drive more transformative change [4, 6], like architectural and infrastructure projects.

Within the current financial and political context, there is an understandable need to assess the quality, value and impact of aid. But as a result of the focus on measuring the impact of aid programs, will we see a greater strategic focus placed on architectural humanitarian aid by the larger NGOs? The current strategy of those delivering architectural humanitarian aid could be better connected with larger aid agencies, through long-term integration of the architectural profession in large-scale aid programs or governmental involvement with architecture-based humanitarian aid agencies. It seems that while Australia may boast some of the world's largest and most successful firms in design, architecture, engineering and infrastructure [15] there remains a distinct lack of practices engaged in long-term aid programs. This may explain the lack of significant or sustained involvement by the sector in humanitarian aid in our region overall.

Underscored in the government's new framework is a proposed unification of the aid strategy. Operating across all levels of aid programs, the Government has introduced ten high-level principles by which to assess the aid programs, overall performance benchmarks as a means to measure effectiveness in investments and, finally, an annual quality assessment of organisations [2].



*Why should architects be involved in humanitarian work and projects that deal with post-disaster emergencies and recovery? How can they contribute effectively to the long-term reconstruction processes needed to ensure the rebuilding of vulnerable communities?*

**- Esther Charlesworth -**



These ten principles for assessment include:

### **1. Promoting Prosperity**

*Promote economic development by increasing Australia's aid-for-trade investment to 20% of the aid budget by 2020.*

As part of the new framework for Australian aid programs, the Australian Government is explicitly focusing on economic development in aid recipient countries, a shift away from the traditional donor-recipient relationship. The “new paradigm” focuses on developing international economic growth to reduce poverty. Critical to the new policy is the establishment of bilateral aid programs through local agencies to catalyse increased trade and investments [2].

For architects engaging in aid, it is paramount that we ask: “How can an *architect* help stimulate economic growth and build local capacity of the communities receiving architectural humanitarian aid?” Or as Esther Charlesworth, founding director of *Architects Without Frontiers* and Associate Professor at RMIT University, asks in her book *Humanitarian Architecture* [7] “*Why should architects be involved in humanitarian work and the projects that needed to deal with post-disaster emergencies and recovery? How can they contribute effectively to the long-term reconstruction processes needed to ensure the rebuilding of vulnerable communities?*”

In truth, there is little difference between these questions, but answering them may help integrate the humanitarian architects into the greater humanitarian effort. For the sector to ensure its efforts are effective and deliver lasting impact to a community, we must recognise that

aid is a multidimensional arena that requires a multi dimensional approach. And that humanitarian aid agencies must reform their own approach if they are to help deliver Australia's new aid paradigm.

### **2. Engaging the Private Sector**

*All new investments will explore innovative ways to promote private sector growth or engage the private sector in achieving development outcomes.*

In aspiring to promote prosperity, the Government is now signalling its intention to more directly engage the private sector, which not only plays a critical role in stimulating economic growth and trade-related aid investment but also in service delivery areas like health and education. More specifically, the Government is looking to engage the private sector in: the design or delivery of investments; innovative approaches to project financing; public-private partnerships (PPPs); improving the regulatory environment for private sector participants; or, addressing other constraints to economic growth [2].

Sustained investment by the private sector has, at times, been lacking. This is especially true in architectural humanitarian programs where the challenge has been two-fold; firstly, the scope and scale of current architectural humanitarian aid is generally small, individual projects with minimal private investment, and secondly, because there is limited contact between humanitarian architects, donors and contractors.

Charlesworth discusses this issue in relation to disaster relief missions. Within the typical disaster response, there is often a shelter “project” that builds “houses” which is

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*Within the typical disaster response, there is often a shelter “project” that builds “houses” which is subsequently “turned over” to residents and are ultimately left behind when the agency exits the scene. The folly of such an approach is that while the initial effort provides a ‘roof overhead’, the approach rarely uses local construction techniques, materials or contractors to facilitate ongoing community resilience and economy.*

subsequently “turned over” to residents who are ultimately left behind when the agency exits the scene. The folly of such an approach is that while the initial effort provides a ‘roof overhead’, the approach rarely uses local construction techniques, materials or contractors to facilitate ongoing community resilience and economy [7].

There is huge potential to engage the private sector in architectural humanitarian efforts, and to facilitate community resilience and economic growth. More than this, it is essential if we are to advance humanitarian architecture into mainstream thinking. But to achieve this, the sector must accept responsibility for developing solutions that allow for the engagement of the private sector. It is through this engagement that a solution is more likely to: a) be accepted by the community; b) be appreciated by the community; c) be owned by the community; and, ultimately, d) allow the community to prosper from the intervention.

### 3. Reducing Poverty

*By July 2015, all country and regional aid programs will have Aid Investment Plans that describe how Australia’s aid will promote economic growth in ways that provide pathways out of poverty.*

The Government’s proprieties view economic growth as the most effective way of reducing poverty. Within the Government’s new framework, all country and regional aid programs will need to identify the key constraints to growth and private sector development, based on an economic, political and social analysis. The fundamental benchmark by which the Government will assess the value of proposed aid investments will be how the program promotes private sector-led growth and enables the poor to participate

and share in the benefits of greater economic prosperity. In particular, the Government is looking for ways to enable disadvantaged members of society, such as people with disabilities, to access the same opportunities as others and improve their quality of life.

We know the origins of poverty are complex. It is within this context that architecture is especially relevant. Humanitarian architecture has demonstrated the greatest potential in developing strategic solutions to a wide range of issues such as the resolution of land tenure disputes, community relation issues, installation of power, water and sewerage systems and masterplanning for entire cities [7]. These are cultural, technical, political and environmental issues all at once. Existing humanitarian organisations must add depth, and diversify to include practising professionals if they want to meet the challenge of reducing poverty.

But to engage professions and the private sector in reducing poverty through humanitarian architectural projects, we may need to re-examine our understanding of what it means to be a ‘humanitarian architect’ and our expectation on what is a ‘humanitarian worker’. There’s nothing preventing a cohort of professionals, unified in their goal to improve the welfare of people in need, from thinking of themselves, or acting as humanitarian workers. Raising the profile and status of this title in professional networks may be necessary. This may be a role for the New Colombo Plan, discussed later.

### 4. Empowering Women and Girls

*With further programs, more than 80 per cent of investments, regardless of their objectives, will effectively address gender issues in their implementation.*



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Whether the program is designed to explicitly address issues surrounding gender equality or not, the Australian Government has placed a very high target for NGOs to meet this objective within their programs. Whether through empowerment or facilitation of economic or social access for women and girls, gender equality has the potential to promote economic growth by better utilising the skills and talents of women and girls in the community. To address the issue of gender equality, the Government has benchmarked programs to include, but is not limited to, the inclusion of women in decision-making through implementation, identifying and pursuing opportunities for women to be employed through an investment, and addressing particular challenges to implementation such as violence or social norms that exclude women [2].

Advancing gender equality can be challenging, and requires a coherent strategy and multidisciplinary participation of different organisations. For humanitarian architecture, one of the most inclusive phases of work will be the designing and planning of facilities. Architectural humanitarian organisations should integrate women — especially those already in established community institutions — to engage their wider community in a way that allows the voices of those often unheard to come forward and play a part in the design and planning of their future community spaces, as well as perform an active role in the construction process.

## 5. Focusing on the Indo-Pacific Region

*Increase the proportion of country program aid that is spent in the Indo-Pacific region to at least 90 per cent from 2014-2015.*

The government's biggest reform is the sharp change in focus towards the Indo-Pacific region, particularly South

East Asia and the Pacific [9]. The government argues that over recent years, aid programs have become more geographically spread out, increasing administration costs and reducing their overall impact. A sharper geographic focus better reflects the reality that the vast majority of our nearest neighbours are developing countries. Ten of Australia's 15 top partner country aid recipients are considered to be fragile or conflict-affected. Their fragility has a direct impact on our national and security interests [9].

The Government believes that a shift in focus is in our national interest, because stronger growth, prosperity and stability in the region is of direct benefit to Australia, Australians and citizens of our neighbouring countries [9]. The policy states that while the focus of aid programs will be on the Indo-Pacific, the Government recognises Australia also has a responsibility to contribute to addressing global development challenges. This will include continuing to be a generous humanitarian donor and partnering with effective multilateral organisations to extend the Government's reach. Ultimately however, the Indo-Pacific is where the Government understands Australia's aid can make the biggest difference. [2]

## 6. Delivering on Commitments

*From July 2015, progress against mutual obligations agreed between Australia and its key partner governments and organisations will be part of program performance assessments.*

The Australian Government has lifted benchmarks and moved towards closer inspection of a program's success and impact. In *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability* the Australian Government has stated that the aid program is not charity; it represents

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an investment in the future of the Indo-Pacific region. The understanding is that since the negotiation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2000, world aid has fundamentally changed. In 2015 and with the replacement of the previous MDGs, the international community is expected to reform its aid models. Reflecting back to the involvement of the private sector, aid flows into developing countries are now insubstantial when compared to foreign direct investment, equity flow and remittance [9].

As the world continues to become increasingly interconnected and co-dependent, aid, by itself, is no longer seen to be capable of delivering development. The Australian Government is moving aid programs towards more mature partnerships. In transitioning from the previous model, the Government is now placing greater responsibilities onto partner governments and organisations to contribute to *shared* development goals.

Annual evaluations will be conducted according to the new framework to assess progress made by Australia and its partners in meeting mutual obligations [2]. Critical to meeting this new benchmark is understanding an NGO's mission statement, standards, policies, programs and goals.

The diversity and range of scope between the 14 largest NGOs, as presented in documents such as *Humanitarian action for results* [10], demonstrates how Australia's non-government aid sector is committed to working with developing countries to bring about change and reducing poverty.

The Government aims to generate change within the current sector by restructuring their performance framework and by establishing new benchmarks. Ultimately, it

is through closely monitoring progress and impact that the Government is looking at directing where and how Australia's NGO programs operate.

Again, as highlighted in *Humanitarian architecture* [7], while many architects have worked in the field of humanitarian architecture, their roles in aid and development fields have been more recognised as logistical and technical rather than part of the larger process of program design, strategic design or as a source of design thinking capacity to connect disparate programs or projects for greater impact and return.

The need for architects in the reconstruction and development of socially successful projects will be most obvious if, and as, design is recognised for the long-term, transdisciplinary and collaborative approach it makes possible — a process that is responsive to local culture, environment and economy and one that is more likely to address causes than continue to react to symptoms.

## **7. Working With the Most Effective Partners**

*By July 2015, design and apply new systems to assess the performance of the aid program's key delivery partners and ensure stronger links between performance and funding.*

By reforming the framework for model aid programs, the Government aims to streamline and focus how partner performance is assessed, including progress towards mutually agreed obligations [9]. This strengthens the existing system used to assess the performance of key delivery agents including contractors, non-government organisations and multilateral organisations. This performance target is seen as an attempt to more explicitly link partner performance with funding allocations, which should allow funding to increasingly flow to the most effective organisations.







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*The greatest potential and relevance to the field of humanitarian architecture is that innovations will be selected through open competitions, and that innovators be supported to pilot and field test development ideas.*



The success of this performance target will lie in how “progress” is defined. The Government has specified that in reviewing programs they are examining a program’s ability to work effectively to achieve Australia’s strategic objectives for our region, and deliver results strongly aligned with our national interest. As mentioned previously, while benchmarks are fundamentally an indication of best practice or industry standards against which one can review, assess and measure their own practice for improvement, the utility of such benchmarks must be understood to be of finite value. There are significant complexities associated with enforcing numerical or simplistic benchmarks, so while they may be easy to measure, quantify and tabulate, they can also undermine the effectiveness of aid, depending on what they are focused on, and how they are measured [3].

That is not to say that there is not real usefulness to applying benchmarks to humanitarian aid programs, but sensitivity is needed for how these benchmarks will influence the decisions and course of aid being administered.

The Australian Government is also rolling out new funding opportunities for innovative development solutions. The scheme aims to identify, evaluate and help scale up innovations with high potential to generate significant development results. The Government hopes to position Australia as a leader in innovation by partnering with the *Global Development Innovation Ventures* (GDIV) program. GDIV supports a portfolio of innovations across multiple sectors including health, education, sustainable energy, food production, small business and accountable governments [9].

The greatest potential and relevance to the field of humanitarian architecture is that innovations will be se-

lected through open competitions, and that innovators will be supported to pilot and field test development ideas, with the Government rigorously assessing their impact and cost effectiveness.

Help will then be given to transition the most promising to implementation at scale [9]. Humanitarian architecture is positioned at prime maturity to develop and incorporate innovative solutions to the challenges of reducing poverty and, especially, lifting living standards, whether through sustainable economic growth or contributing to the design of a long-term community orientated program.

## **8. Ensuring Value-for-Money**

*Deliver high standards of value-for-money in at least 85 per cent of aid investments. Where standards are not met and improvements are not achieved within a year, investments will be cancelled.*

The Government is taking a significantly stronger stance to ensure they are achieving maximum value-for-money investment when it comes to humanitarian aid partnerships. Their target being that from 2014-2015, at least 85% of investments will be implemented satisfactorily. That is, programs supported by Government funding will meet effectiveness and efficiency benchmarks, reflecting the new value-for-money principles [2]. The Government is further aiming to promote: cost consciousness, competition, evidence-based decision making, proportionality, performance and risk management, a results focus, experimentation and innovation and accountability and transparency [9].



*To increase participation of “humanitarian architects” in the sector, it is important to recognise architecture as much more than just drawing conceptual designs, resolving technical issues and building complex structures; architecture - especially humanitarian architecture - is the consideration and development of a holistic and all-encompassing solution that gives rise to the growth and development of the recipient community.*

To a degree, the Government is beginning to monitor the progress of their investments, demanding that all partners work effectively in achieving Australia’s strategic objectives for our region and delivering results. Humanitarian architecture can play a pivotal role within humanitarian aid by working with NGOs and multilateral organisations to plan out strategic solutions for these complex challenges.

The skillset and talents of an architect can be seen outside the traditional model of the profession. To some, the architecture profession faces perceptions of irrelevance and marginalisation as a result of the discipline’s often apolitical and pragmatic discourse [7]. Within commercial architectural practice, the current professional model focuses on securing profits, profile in design media, architectural awards and aesthetics — the benefits of which are only experienced by the very few, the elite, the highest income bracket served by market forces [11].

In increasing participation of “humanitarian architects” in the sector, it is important to recognise architecture as much more than just drawing conceptual designs, resolving technical issues and building complex structures. Architecture — especially humanitarian architecture — is the consideration and development of a holistic and all-encompassing solution that gives rise to the growth and development of the recipient community.

Esther Charlesworth raises an excellent example by paralleling the rise of humanitarian architecture with the emergence of “public-interest architecture” [7]. Bryan Bell defines this sector as design that seeks to address issues of social justice, allow individuals and communities to plan and celebrate their own lives, and serve a

much larger percentage of the population than it has in the past. By expanding the definition of what constitutes “design”, the profession has the opportunity to expand the range of its audience; this subsequently extends the role of an architect from that of a design guru or artistic hero to also include the social reformer, community educator/facilitator and peace-maker [7, 11].

## 9. Increasing Consolidation

*Reduce the number of individual investments by 20 per cent by 2016-17 to focus efforts and reduce transaction costs.*

The Government currently understands the diversity and structure of the current aid program to be one of its biggest weaknesses; particularly that its program ends up spreading itself too thinly. In focusing on the Indo-Pacific region, the Government is looking to sharpen the geographic focus of funded aid programs by Australian NGOs to more deeply engage with those countries that matter to us most. The Government explains that investment portfolio consolidation is leveraging Australia’s comparative strengths and focuses our efforts.

With a smaller set of investments, the Government hopes to increase the impact and effectiveness of aid programs as well as reduce the administrative overheads required to manage the programs. It will be hard to get the balance right — with government seeking to both promote those with a proven track record, and to slim down on risky investment ventures, while encouraging innovation and risk-taking.

The best humanitarian architecture integrates social and physical infrastructure in to place by engaging local communities to build capacity and initiate measurable social

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..... 11

impact. Designing evaluation programs into aid is essential to gathering the evidence needed to measure risk taking, innovation and impact.

## 10. Combatting Corruption

*Develop and implement new anti-corruption and fraud control strategies for all major programs by July 2015.*

In developing countries, the risk of fraud and corruption is often high [9]. Aid programs often operate in some of the world's most dangerous and corrupt environments. That's why the Australian Government will be developing and implementing new fraud and anti-corruption strategies to ensure that Australian taxpayer dollars reach intended beneficiaries. One of the most challenging aspects of working in developing countries can be the nature of bureaucracy, when that lends itself to corruption and fraud. The Australian Government has a zero tolerance for fraud in aid programs, so it may be challenging for aid organisations to manoeuvre through the logistical aspect of planning and implementing change.

Fraud Control and Anti-Corruption Strategies will be developed by mid 2015 for all major country and regional programs as part of Aid Investment Plans. Within this strategy, measures will be adopted to protect Australian Government aid funds from corruption and additionally support a partnering country's anti-corruption efforts. This support, which is still undefined, may include public financial management reform programs, funding of civil society organisations that champion anti-corruption and funding other anti-corruption bodies [9]. But is the humanitarian architecture sector actively engaged with government and NGOs in charting this new territory, or is it retreating as Government looks to slim down on risky investment ventures?

## Risk and Innovation

As the new performance framework, innovation takes precedence in Australia's aid efforts. The Government states that experience from our region has also shown us that many development challenges, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, are highly complex and seemingly intractable.

We need to tap into ideas from a wider range of sources, experimenting with new approaches and partnerships to find breakthrough solutions to entrenched development problems. We need greater innovation, which demands a different approach to managing risk. This directly preceding the comment on how the Government is partnering with the GDIV program. The challenge of delivering aid has involved a delicate balance between minimising risks whilst maximising return from investment. Humanitarian aid however has been paradoxically crippled by the idea of innovation, whether through “bad” interventions or “poor” investments, negative or even neutral results are far too easily classified as “failures”.

This is exemplified in Dan Pallotta's hypothetical situation: “[Another] area of discrimination is the taking of risk in pursuit of new ideas for generating revenue. So Disney can make a new \$200 million movie that flops, and nobody calls the attorney general. But you do a little \$1 million community fundraiser for the poor, and it doesn't produce a 75% profit to the cause in the first 12 months, and your character is called into question. So not-for-profits are reluctant to attempt daring, giant-scale new fundraising endeavours for fear that if the thing fails, their reputations will be dragged through the mud. Well, you and I know when you prohibit failure, you kill

*“Well, you and I know when you prohibit failure, you kill innovation. If you kill innovation in fundraising, you can’t raise more revenue. If you can’t raise more revenue, you can’t grow. And if you can’t grow, you can’t possibly solve large social problems”.*

**- Dan Pallotta -**

innovation. If you kill innovation in fundraising, you can’t raise more revenue. If you can’t raise more revenue, you can’t grow. And if you can’t grow, you can’t possibly solve large social problems [4].” This quote is placed in its entirety to emphasise the almost illogical dogma that has long plagued humanitarian aid.

But this is not an attempt to defend bad investments or suggest that humanitarian aid is immune from poor decision-making, it is just to highlight the disparity in attitudes towards “success” and “failure” between the private and humanitarian sector. The Government has attempted to address this very issue by stating that in order to foster greater innovation and better outcomes we [the Government] are prepared to actively engage with risk [9]. It is also refreshing to see the Government accepting greater probability of failure as a consequence of pursuing higher risk approaches that may lead to systematic development pay-offs [9].

It is within this single word — *innovation* — that humanitarian architecture has the greatest potential for success, but equally, failure. Esther Charlesworth again raises an excellent question that everyone in the humanitarian sector often asks themselves: “Am I creating more harm than good?” This is a theme explored in the article *What Impact?* by Ebrahim, Alnoor and Rangan, V. Kasturi [12]. The article critically analyses the definition of impact and distinguishes the various levels of humanitarian aid. It also discusses the difference in roles between organisations, government agencies and philanthropy funds.





# 3

## The potential of education in fostering foreign relations

14

To further investigate the notion of innovation, let's reflect on two of the Federal Government's key interests: private sector support and international relationships. With the mindset of innovation driving the way [the Australian Government] delivers aid, the challenge has been set for the innovators in our community to "think differently and be more entrepreneurial in our approach" [1].

In establishing a new Development Innovation Hub, the Government is looking to drive increased innovation throughout Australia's aid programs as a means to engrain the notions of creativity, ingenuity and originality into thinking and policy development. With the Innovation Hub being seen as a mandate to reach out to be best and brightest, inside and outside the Department in Australia and internationally [1], there is great potential for innovators to design programs that better address the Government's interests.

### The New Colombo Plan

The greatest potential in shaping international relationships and engaging private sector support lies in the Government's new signature policy in foreign affairs, the recently reformed *New Colombo Plan* (NCP). With the explicit aim to be transformational and to deepen relationships with [Indo-Pacific region], both at an individual level and through expanding university, business and other stakeholder links, the NCP offers Australian students a unique opportunity to live, study, understand another culture and foster liaisons between individuals and organisations.

It is additionally insightful that the Government has recognised the necessity and importance of Australian students studying in the Indo-Pacific region as a means to

foster foreign relations. More specifically, the Government has outlined its ambition to see programs such as the NCP become a rite of passage for Australian undergraduate students and as an endeavor that is highly valued across the Australian community.

The argument has thus far been constructed to highlight the parallel, cross-over and potential in and between the Innovation Hub and New Colombo Plan. The Federal Government is taking a long-term view in its commitment to economic growth, poverty reduction and increased living standards. The point is made that there is great potential in drawing innovators and creative thinkers from the very talented pool of students undertaking the NCP to address key policies, engage the private sector and further build international relationships. As per NCP aims, the program has provided increased opportunities for Australian students to study in our region — particularly through new linkages supporting students who otherwise may have not have accessed such opportunities.

The author of this Paper has been fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in two such programs recently. The first was as a recipient of the NCP mobility grant to participate in a social entrepreneurship program in Hanoi, Vietnam. This was a part of a partnership between the University of Sydney, Remote and Rural Enterprise (RARE) and Thrive Vietnam. The second, as a supervisor on the program, required a significantly different skill set, as it focused on vulnerable road users and infrastructure in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The key lesson learnt from both of these programs is that there is obvious potential for the NCP to provide even more than what it currently aims to accomplish. The in-



*the [New Colombo Plan] has the potential to be further integrated into the education sector; opportunities should be stressed to academics and students to aid in the construction and maintenance of foreign relations.*

ter-disciplinary nature of the projects was appreciated by students in both programs. Students in the Jakarta program worked closely with local students and recommended this aspect of their project in future endeavours. In addition, students highlighted the importance of understanding the aims and mission of the NCP in shaping bilateral relations and its potential in working towards stronger relationships between partnering countries.

Having been provided the field of research, the NCP students had the opportunity to build key relationships with organisation and people in the development sector; namely the Australian Embassy in Jakarta; Ministry of Transportation in Jakarta; Asian Development Bank; the Indonesian Infrastructure Initiative (IndII); the Engineering School; University of Indonesia; the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and the United Nations Children's Fund. The information gathered in their meetings has provided a strong basis for future NCP programs. In particular, IndII has highlighted potential opportunities for further collaboration in the field of research and publication. Strong relationships with the University of Indonesia have also been identified, specifically on the topic of partnering research into infrastructure projects and student collaboration.

It is this author's opinion that the NCP has the potential to be further integrated into the education sector; opportunities to aid in the construction and maintenance of foreign relations should be stressed to academics and students.

# 4

## Projects and programs: impact and ownership

16

Where Chapter 2 was a discussion of humanitarian architecture and foreign policy, this section more generally explores the role of humanitarian architects in holistically developing a project; particularly the roles of both the participants and organisers in generating change, project impact, effectiveness, sustainability, longevity and, finally, relative impact of architectural humanitarian projects as compared to other humanitarian projects.

### Responsibility

Charlesworth's question: "Am I creating more harm than good?" [7] is a fundamental one that all humanitarians and organisers should ask themselves. It is by raising awareness and critically analysing a program's sustainability, impact and success that there will be any possibility for the project to grow. The question raised also demands a level of objectivity and separation in order to fully realise the implications of the answer.

It is particularly interesting to note how many writers and architects have questioned the role, motives and effectiveness of architects in rebuilding after disasters. [7] It cannot be automatically assumed that architects working on the traditional model of client and project engagement will be able to handle the complex challenges that many post-disaster scenarios present.

David Sanderson highlights how architects are very rarely taught the skills needed to work in the aftermath of an emergency. [13] There is however room for greater discussion about Sanderson's argument relating to how — unlike other humanitarian practitioners who focus on the people — architects are conditioned into making personal marks through their own design.

To summarise this section of the discussion, Charlesworth notes that to blame architects entirely for short-term and inappropriate shelter solutions is far too easy. More likely, the architect is only part of the reconstruction dilemma, a dilemma that is even more heavily influenced by the scale of the disaster, the political relationship of the afflicted region, donor motivation and aiding organisations. [7]

Outside the field of emergency disaster relief, there is the field of sustained architectural humanitarian organisations such as Architects Without Frontiers, Architecture for Humanity, Article-25 and Habitat for Humanity — just to name a few. For anyone looking to sign up for a project and/or volunteering opportunity, the question initially raised needs to be critically answered. The conundrum, however, is whose responsibility is it that the project results in a successful and impactful outcome?

In an interview with Graeme Kent, Director of Aussie Action Abroad, we explored what determines the success or failure of a project. The obvious answer to "whose responsibility is it that a project results in a successful and impactful outcome" would be the organiser's. This however is quite limiting in that it doesn't place the onus on the participants of the program. It would be more accurate to acknowledge that both the organisers and participants have equal share in the outcome of the project.

The goals and tasks for both the organisers and participants are simply just different. Where the organisers have the responsibility to both the participants and community for the delivery, resourcing and financial support for the project, it is ultimately up to the participants themselves to realise the opportunity given to them by the program.

*...the architect is only part of the reconstruction dilemma. A dilemma that is even more heavily influenced by the scale of the disaster, the political relationship of the afflicted region, donor motivation and aiding organisations.*

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Crucial to any measure of success is an organisation's vision and long term aspiration. It was in this part of the discussion that values and commitment of Graeme Kent became abundantly clear. Having worked in Nepal for over 12 years and being involved with development programs his entire professional life, Kent demonstrated an amazing commitment to the people of Nepal. In partnering with organisations from mother's groups, religious entities, schools to other aid organisations, Kent continuously shapes AAA towards building capacity and cooperation. It's clear the direction of the organisation relies on the leadership of an organisation but the organisation's impact solely lies in the hands of the participants.

The last critical relationship to a project's success is that between the project and community. The discussion at length revolved around the responsibility of the community to sustain the project. According to Aussie Action Abroad for any project to be successful in the long-run, the community had to genuinely need the project. As such, each new project required that the community approach AAA with a plan, financial budget (as seen in §11.3) and a financial investment. The role of Aussie Action Abroad, as Kent sees it, is to facilitate the initiation of such projects and to financially provide a small portion of the funding (approximately 10-15%) and to provide brief periods of labour.

The responsibility of funding the project is then shifted towards the community themselves — hence the need for local communities to take ownership of the project. In brief, it is not the responsibility of the participants, nor is it the responsibility of the organisers to fund a project, but rather it is up to the organisers to partner with the community to develop and plan a sustainable and effective project.

## Impact and Community Response

In the same interview with AAA's Graeme Kent, metrics for success and failure were also discussed. The dominating conclusion from the discussion was: successful projects inevitably rely on community ownership and commitment. As noted in the previous section, AAA require that projects be initiated, maintained and endorsed by the community. The role of AAA is to catalyse the project with an initial investment and to provide or resource technical skills.

Kent notes that beyond the actual completion of the project, the implication of such endeavours extends to the people of Nepal. As Kent is actively involved with Nepali aid organisations and education programs, he believes that AAA has extended its impact to include that of the students of the schools, the women of the shelter, Nepali staff whom are employed during the course of the program and ultimately the participants themselves.

For there to be any notion of long-term success in aid organisations, there must be committed individuals who understand and can respond to the ever changing needs of the communities. There is no singular solution. It takes great patience and knowledge to truly understand the environment and challenges associated with any project. The impact of a project is therefore seen as a complex network of factors and determinants, all of which should reflect the needs of the community.

At an even grander scale is AAA's ambition to influence community development at a national level. With investments in teacher training and larger scale school relationships, AAA continues to strengthen its relationship



with the Nepali people and community. Successful architectural humanitarian projects are not an individual, isolated solution to a community's challenges. It serves as a mechanism for a greater conversation, a tool for ever greater change in a community, and that finally, it provides facilities that a community needs.

## Effectiveness

Why build a Ferrari when all you need is a moped? [7]

To ask how effective a project was, is a bit like asking whether a project was worthy in the first place. In Charlesworth's *Humanitarian architecture: 15 stories of architects working after disaster*, [7] is a great discussion on how humanitarian architects are involved in delivering innovative emergency housing. is within this single word, innovation, that humanitarian architecture has the greatest potential for success, but equally, failure. Nathaniel Corum comments that disaster relief projects need to work, and that too often, architects working in the relief sector have hidden behind "prototyping" to build impractically designed shelters.

Arguably, a smart humanitarian design response would be less experimental since they are typically working in more challenging environments with community members that cannot afford failure. [7]

An example provided by Charlesworth highlights this gap in architectural training quite well. To summarise the situation, the construction manager working with a large international development organisation based in Port-au-Prince complained that after having worked with six architects for six months, he "could have come up

with a better design on the plane..." The main failure, as seen by the construction manager, was that none of the architects have bothered to observe local methods of construction or spoken to local builders or communities while developing their "unusable theoretical designs".

Charlesworth however offers a defence for the architects, noting that it may (again) be too easy to simply criticise the architects alone for poorly designed shelters, when it may in fact be a result of an underlying gap in knowledge and practical experience. To be a post-disaster architect is far different from what was taught in undergraduate or even graduate college. This will be further explored in § 5.1.

Outside the scope of humanitarian architecture there is the more general field of volunteering tourism, commonly referred to as voluntourism. As raised by Rose Dykins in the article *Gap years: Voluntourism — who are you helping?*, [14] there is a danger that participants may end up doing more harm than good.

By the simple definition that voluntourism is a form of tourism in which travellers participate in voluntary work, typically for a charity, the Professionals in Nepal program would be classified as a voluntourism project. There is currently widespread debate as to whether voluntourism projects are worthwhile and whom the projects are actually benefiting. Critics often call into question the intention of the participants, both the participants' and organisers' commitment to the cause; the vision and project outcome; the impact of the project; and the unseen and/or remote benefactors. The greatest criticism is most often directed at projects which contain minimal time frames and large fees.



19

There may be some validity to the argument that voluntourism poses some harm to the communities it serves, but it doesn't follow that all short-term aid projects cause harm. There is considerable benefit for both the participant, organiser and community from short-term aid programs. Despite obvious criticism that voluntourism projects are self-serving, not significant and have limited impact, they present the participant with an opportunity to learn about a foreign culture, experience a life outside the comfort of a first-world country and, most importantly, gain the opportunity to think beyond one's self.

The challenge is to recognise when a project is harming the community, and to respond by reducing the negative impact and change future projects to reflect the lessons. This responsibility lies very heavily on the organisers. It is their vision and mission that will ultimately dictate how successful projects, as a collective effort, will be.

The success of an organisation should not be based on one standalone project, nor by one value, but rather, the success of an organisation should be based on its long-term goals and its ability to motivate the participants to work toward this goal.

## Sustainability

The word sustainability is often overused in the context of aid, environment and policy. That is not to say that every use is inappropriate, rather the word sustainability should be used more rationally, with specific intent and having been clearly defined for its context. For this Paper, the word sustainability is used exclusively to represent the maintenance or endurance of a system. More specifically, this section of the Paper will discuss how hu-

manitarian aid is sustained and where society is hindering the advance of humanitarian organisations.

By reflecting on the argument in §2.12, the case can be made that there are significant challenges facing NGOs as they aim for new techniques to serve their target market. It is ironic that while the public understands and accepts the challenges facing humanity, there is a current stigma that aid organisations must produce significant results for every dollar invested.

That despite the efforts, vision and commitment of the organisers, staff or volunteers, the public expects simple metric results. The point is made again that benchmarks can reduce innovative approaches, stifle debate, and lead to over compliance and red tape. Further, benchmarks can also result in agencies only seeking to invest in those activities that can easily be measured, as opposed to programs that drive more transformational change. [3] "How much of my dollar goes to the cause?" [4] The sustainability of humanitarian aid is therefore a question of an organisation's ability to grow with market demands and opportunities.

The vision and model of operation for AAA has been heavily reliant on the efforts of the two primary Directors, Graeme Kent and David Anderson.

There is significant parallel to be drawn between the argument presented by Dan Pallotta [4] and the situation in which many small-scale NGOs find themselves. In the interview with Kent, AAA was understood to be reliant on a continuous turnover of participants to fund the program expeditions and annual mid-year discussion. There is a generally accepted forfeit of any monetary aspiration in undertaking a career in humanitarian aid.

*...perhaps the chief factor behind the relative lack of architects involved in humanitarian architecture is the lack of training for post-disaster design problems-solving in design and architecture schools.*

Extending beyond AAA, there is cause for concern when an aspiring professional is given mutually exclusive choice of a) humanitarian aid with a sacrifice in significant portion of salary and extended hours or b) a comfortable and secure career in any technical profession. Serious questions need to be asked and answered relating to maintenance and retention of skilled professionals in the non-profit sector.

### **Relative impact: humanitarian architecture vs. other social programs**

Of course there is no perfect humanitarian aid organisation. There is also no one avenue of aid that is superior. There are however, aid programs that are better suited to an individual depending on their experience, skillset and motivations.

The question that individuals should ask themselves before signing up to volunteer for an aid organisation is: “How will my skills be used in advancing the cause the organisation has envisioned?” Alternatively, organisers should also consider: “How could this volunteer help us advance the cause?” It is important to never forget that as a humanitarian or volunteer you have a duty of care, a responsibility to serve humanity — the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found. [10]

The advantage of humanitarian architecture projects is that they often have the capacity to dramatically increase the welfare of the community they aid. Architecture in general has the ability to transcend the superficial relationship and integrate itself into the community and provide services, refuge and sanitation.



# 5

## Long-term challenges and opportunities

21

As highlighted by Esther Charlesworth, perhaps the chief factor behind the relative lack of architects involved in humanitarian architecture is the lack of training for post-disaster design problem-solving in architecture and design schools. [7]

Charlesworth's interviews with current professional humanitarian architects have revealed that architectural education and work experience in Western society has by and large failed to prepare these architects to consult with communities, consider a non-corporate architectural career or to work in a developing nation. [7]

To an extent, the curriculum of architectural schools is too limited in equipping graduates with knowledge of their skills and their potential applications. Ms. Charlesworth draws on her own experience with architectural education to exemplify how this education generally failed to equip students for even the next stage of their careers working in a traditional architectural practice as a junior designer. It is also interesting to note how this model of education is not specific to Australia, it is seen universally in all developed nations. As discussed by Sandra D'Urzo: Universities are not equipping us well enough to be able to say, 'Yes, I want to go into development. Architecture is needed even more by the needy than the rich.' It's still very conventional the way we're taught architecture for rich and wealthy clients and socialised into wanting to be one of the 'top ten' star architects. [7]

There is strong opportunity for architecture schools to update their curricula to incorporate design for developing countries. There is also an opportunity for university courses to include design challenges that more closely re-

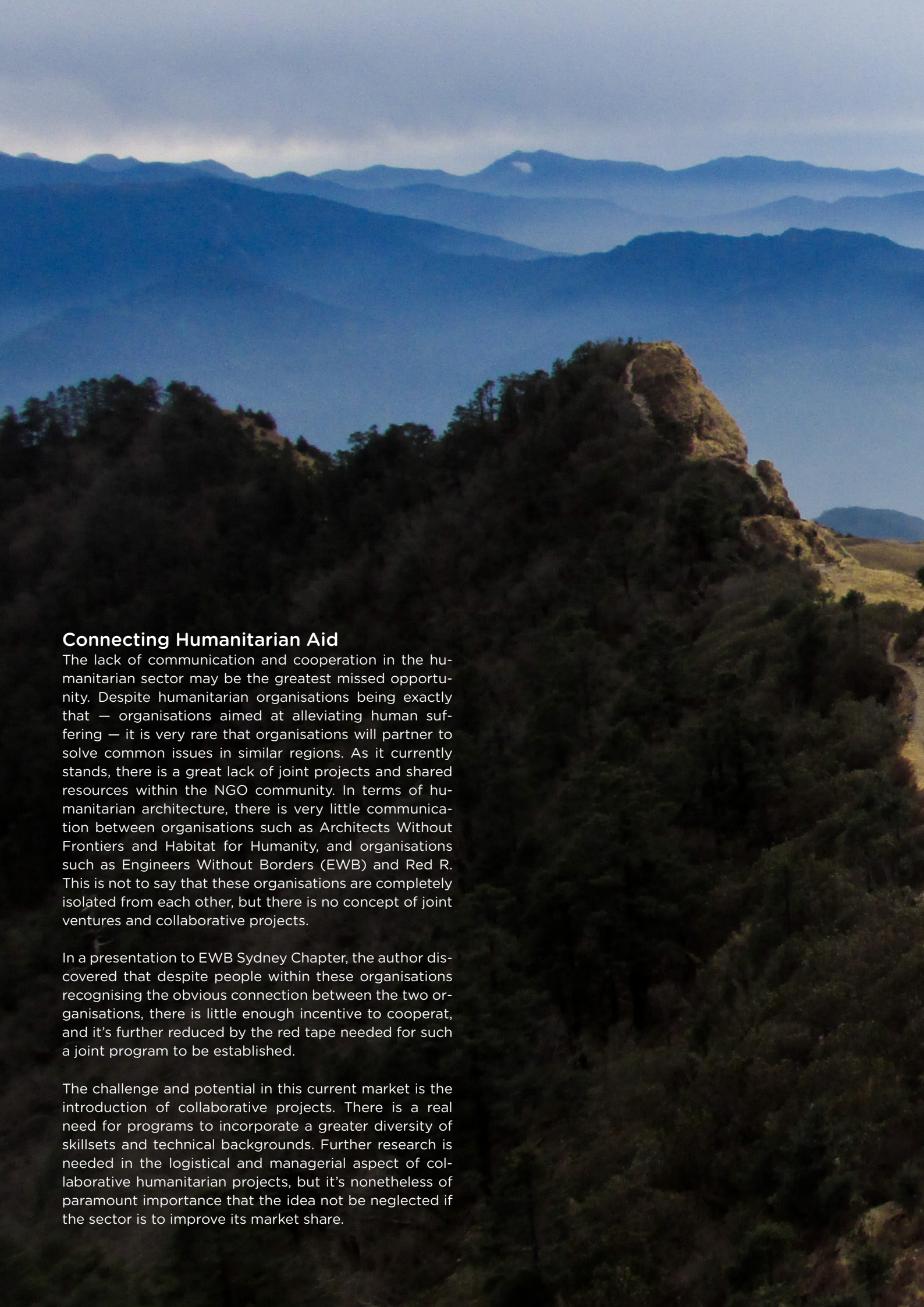
flect situations outside the developed nations. To fully realise this shift in teaching curriculum, it is important to more thoroughly explore community-orientated design and develop an appreciation for humanitarian architecture.

### Professional Networks

Humanitarian architecture projects have much to benefit from integrating cross-disciplinary professionals into programs, specifically, from the proximate fields of engineering and construction. Whilst architects have the capacity to design and manage projects, the potential benefits of incorporating engineering and construction skillsets into these projects are many.

In the discussion with Kent, it was highlighted that AAA has a very strong opinion on cross-disciplinary team members. Kent drew attention to teams that had included architects, architecture students, medical personnel, retirees and business professionals. The role of AAA is not to cater only for architects and architecture students but to promote architectural humanitarian aid to all those wishing to participate.

The potential is greater still in AAA undertaking new programs that revolve around the training and integration of medical and teaching professionals into the Nepali community. By giving people the opportunity to help in the training and learning of different systems and methods, AAA aims to more holistically impact the communities of Nepal.



## Connecting Humanitarian Aid

The lack of communication and cooperation in the humanitarian sector may be the greatest missed opportunity. Despite humanitarian organisations being exactly that — organisations aimed at alleviating human suffering — it is very rare that organisations will partner to solve common issues in similar regions. As it currently stands, there is a great lack of joint projects and shared resources within the NGO community. In terms of humanitarian architecture, there is very little communication between organisations such as Architects Without Frontiers and Habitat for Humanity, and organisations such as Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and Red R. This is not to say that these organisations are completely isolated from each other, but there is no concept of joint ventures and collaborative projects.

In a presentation to EWB Sydney Chapter, the author discovered that despite people within these organisations recognising the obvious connection between the two organisations, there is little enough incentive to cooperate, and it's further reduced by the red tape needed for such a joint program to be established.

The challenge and potential in this current market is the introduction of collaborative projects. There is a real need for programs to incorporate a greater diversity of skillsets and technical backgrounds. Further research is needed in the logistical and managerial aspect of collaborative humanitarian projects, but it's nonetheless of paramount importance that the idea not be neglected if the sector is to improve its market share.













# 6

## Journal note: Aussie Action Abroad

[www.aussieactionabroad.com](http://www.aussieactionabroad.com)

26

The following is a journal of first-hand experiences with Australian NGO *Aussie Action Abroad*. This lived experience of the individuals, communities and organisations involved in aid programs on the ground is intended to balance the detailed analysis of Australia government policy to ask; how does the intent match the real world experience of working locally in our region?

### *Mission*

To provide realistic support to Nepali communities so that they will develop, own and sustain the outcomes, meeting the needs of their people.

### *Value*

Leadership, achievement, benefit, learning, development

- Encourage initiative, leadership, teamwork, trust and respect
- To offer a balance between fun and hard work
- Encourage involvement by all recognising achievements
- To act responsibly to benefit communities
- Affordability and accessibility
- To benefit the individual and communities in which they live
- To act safely
- To learn from each other

### *Vision*

To be recognised as the leading community development provider based in real communities undertaking real projects and having real outcomes.

## People Behind the Organisation

As the director of Aussie Action Abroad (AAA) (formerly Oz Quest), Graeme Kent has been intimately involved with aiding the Nepali people help themselves through a variety of projects. Over the past 12 years, Graeme has established a close relationship with a variety of partners in Nepal and is continuously working with teams of volunteers in realising the mission of AAA.

From the inception of Oz Quest, David Anderson, now a director of AAA, has been working tirelessly with Graeme in establishing, maintaining and strengthening relationships with Nepali partners. David's main role is to develop programs that ensure communities with whom they work with are both practical and sustainable.

The overall result of their efforts is a collection of projects that have been completed in Nepal. AAA continues to discuss potential projects with communities, revising and iterating designs to ensure the real need for the project and enable community ownership.

In the 2014/2015 season of projects, AAA endeavours to deliver projects in the field of construction, education and health. Finally, Graeme and David have been working closely with partnering NGOs based in Nepal to increase the impact of education programs. Their ambition is to promote education in the country to help raise the society out of poverty. Find out more about Aussie Action Abroad at: [www.aussieactionabroad.com](http://www.aussieactionabroad.com). Find out more about Architects Without Frontiers at: [www.architectswithoutfrontiers.com.au](http://www.architectswithoutfrontiers.com.au)



## Personal experience in Nepal and with Aussie Action Abroad

*Upon arriving in Kathmandu, Nepal, I was greeted by the smell, sound, climate and culture of a developing country. It was a stark contrast to the culture and experience of the technologically advanced Osaka, Japan, which I had just left the day before. So confronting was the experience that I had a mild case of culture shock for a few days. In hindsight, I was just incredibly unprepared to see the conditions that people were living in, having just visited the most advanced country I had ever travelled to.*

*With nothing more than a backpack, a map, a compass and a written address, I was left to find my way alone through the labyrinth of streets and roads in Kathmandu. It was absolutely gobsmacking how convoluted the streets were. Arriving mid-afternoon, it took me over 3 hours to locate the hostel where I would stay one night before commencing the program. The fact that I had an address and map of the city proved to be absolutely useless. In navigating the streets of Kathmandu I would strongly suggest that one first map out the exact route to the destination and have the ability to contact someone.*

*In wandering the streets surrounding the city I happened to run into a German couple on a religious pilgrimage. It was wonderful to have them accompany me, or really I them, in finding a place to rest for the evening — at this point in time I had given up hope of finding my actual booked accommodation. It was an adventure in itself. The “streets” of Kathmandu proved even more complex further into the outskirts. The maze of turns and confused logic behind mapping of streets lead this traveller to think the streets had been designed by a planner in a hurry to go home. It was amazing however to witness that even the locals had trouble understanding where certain things were. Taxi and rickshaw drivers rarely know individual streets or exact locations. They appear to agree to whatever destination you would specify and proceed to ask for directions themselves once they get to the general vicinity. All too often this ended poorly.*

*On 28 December the program begins. Upon meeting the team of people with whom I will spend the next month working, we share a formal dinner and then have the opportunity to discuss the project with its chief engineer/designer. Discussions were brief and light on the details as the proceedings advanced, and guests grew weary. We were given some souvenirs and returned back to our hotel to rest for the following day.*

*Before continuing, let me expand on my experience of Kathmandu thus far. I had been at Kathmandu for 2 days now and I don't believe I had quite settled in yet. The most astounding fact I had learnt was that the people of Kathmandu share their electricity; by that I mean they roster electricity to move from region to region within the city! Never had this concept ever occurred to me. Not having electricity because it wasn't my hour? Not having 24-hour access to hot water and a working electrical system. The concept of what a developing country is was being reformed in front of me. Up until now, I had never given it much thought. Maybe it just meant their average social economic situations were below that of Western society's? But now I realised it was definitely a much more significant shift in thinking, working and lifestyle.*

*Over the next day of the program, the team was introduced to Kathmandu city with site visits and discussions*

*about projects and expectations. We were allowed to venture around town and make any last minute purchases. (I would recommend any participant stock up on chocolate or sweets before heading outside the city. You are very unlikely to find a Snickers bar out of the major cities, and those cravings can hit you hard when trekking through the Himalayas.)*

*After shopping we said our goodbyes and made our separate ways to our various project sites. For our team, it was a 5-hour bus trip through the precariously narrow roads to the very remote town of Khsamawati.*

*Upon arrival we were greeted by the headmaster, teachers and several students. It was quite a festive and heartfelt welcome. Before long though, we had to say our goodbyes and to go and set up basecamp (see page 20-21) and get a good night's rest before working the following day. The scarcity of electricity was made even more obvious outside Kathmandu. In the rural villages of Nepal, electricity could be seen as a luxury; a commodity that had an ability to decide when it chose to operate.*

*Each morning, as the school assembled at 8 am, the students were to file into their respective classes and go through the morning procedures. This included morning greetings, prayer, school song and exercise. It was always funny to see the same student scurry in 10-15 minutes late with their hair a mess and their uniform stained with yesterday's activities. Nevertheless, class proceeded as usual as we proceeded to start our construction.*

*In addition to our team of volunteers were three Nepali staff that would prepare our meals, guide our treks and help us work. Their help was invaluable during the whole course of the program. Their experience, enthusiasm and energy often aided the team as we slumped our shoulders and complained about the strain of working. The morning, afternoons and evenings of chai lattes, teas and water were a pleasant addition to the day. It was ultimately their help and motivation that got us through the weeks in Khsamawati. I would just like to add how impressive it was to see the Nepali staff constantly producing different style food every day with essentially the same ingredients. Never have I had the same five ingredients for three weeks and not felt like I have had the same food every day.*

*It was on this project that I was enlightened to the kindness and giving nature of the Nepalese people. During the course of our stay in Khsamawati, many of the local Nepali alumni and some casual Nepali workers were hired to aid in the construction. It was especially encouraging to see how engaged the community was in aiding us complete the construction of the hostel.*

*During the course of the construction we were also fortunate enough to be invited to the headmaster's house for a drink of tea. On our way we were warmly greeted by passers-by and had the opportunity to explore our surrounding environment. The whole experience of being welcomed into a local Nepali household and treated as a guest was humbling. It is through experiences like this and others, that I feel so fortunate to be living in a country such as Australia and to be given the opportunity to make an impact on the lives of those whom are only hoping to make their lives more prosperous.*

*As the construction phase came to a close, we were given the chance to do a 4-day trek through the Himalayas. It was on this trek that we experienced the greatest joys and most humbling defeats. It was gruelling: the elevation, the weight of the backpack, the time length of the days and the endless trail. I have never felt as physically exhausted as I was on this trek. To summarise the trek in a word: Mountainous.*

*As the month ended, the program came to its final days. We said our thanks and goodbyes, and wished each other luck in our future endeavours.*

*To conclude this section, I would like to discuss an initiative that was just being trialled as we were preparing to leave. It was a food program aimed at providing kids the opportunity to have some lunch during their hour-long break. The reason being that most, if not all students, don't have any food during the course of a school day. They would simply have a decent sized breakfast, make their way to school and wait until they made their way home to have afternoon tea. It wasn't really surprising. During lunch, you would often see students playing sport, kicking a deflated soccer ball, sitting in circles talking, and the occasional rugged kid with a reo bar — having the time of his life pushing that stick around. I digress.*

28

*The lunch program aims to enable kids to receive a light lunch before continuing afternoon classes. The program was established by the alumni of the school and requires that the students either bring in some food supplies from their household, or to pay a small fee to the school.*



*During our second last day at the site we saw the program launch its week-long trial. The main financial resources went to paying the cooks; the actual ingredients are expected to come from the students and their families.*

*I would like to point out that this initiative was developed by the school itself. There was no influence from Western society and most definitely no aid from us. The headmaster had simply brought this to our attention to raise awareness that beyond the hostel the school is funding, the teachers and alumni are very actively looking for ways to help their students get the most out of their education.*

*At this very moment I saw the fundamental truth about humanity. We as volunteers are not there to solve the problems of this society — they are well aware of their own issues. We as humanitarians are here to partner with them and aid them in their mission. It is critical to never forget that we are foreigners to their land.*

*Truong Khanh Duy Le*



# 6.1

## Journal note: Khsamawati Higher Secondary School

### Project

*As a student in a small village of Khsamawati, simply getting to school at 8 am for morning pray is a surprisingly arduous task.*

*Situated east of Kathmandu, towards the Everest region, is the small hilly village of Khsamawati. Here, the Khsamawati Higher Secondary School has approximately 400 students, ranging from Kindergarten to Year 12.*

*Watching the classrooms filling up each morning, was an eye-opening experience to see how much effort it took to simply make it to school on time. Perched aside a hill, the trek to and from school is more difficult than simply catching a bus, and some children travel up to three hours by foot just to get to and from school.*

*The idea of the Khsamawati Hostel was to construct a hostel facility for senior students to study for their university entrance exam. The project is designed to work in collaboration with the school's alumni to finance and construct the school.*

*Aiming to get more students entering the country's national university, the school's alumni worked with AAA to develop a building design to house 108 senior students during their final years at the school. The facility will include separate housing for male and female students, a commonunal kitchen/dining area, dormitories, study space and bathrooms. Appendix §11.3 contains plans, sections, elevations and construction details for the Khsamawati Higher Secondary School.*



*Top: The hillside Khsamawati Higher Secondary School in a remote village east of Kathmandu.*

*Centre: With a very unreliable stream of electricity to the school, the main source of lighting and heating is from sunlight. As the walls are constructed principally of stone and mud, and being half a metre thick, there is a large amount of thermal mass in the walls. This results in the rooms being overly cool during the day and uncomfortably warm in the afternoon.*

*Above: Morning exercise is considerably more fun with the beating of a drum and your student president shouting orders at the front.*

*Top: Morning exercise is considerably more fun with the beating of a drum and your student president shouting orders at the front.*

*Below right: At the end of the program, the team had completed excavation and construction of the foundations for the girls building. Setting up camp for the month turned out to be quite redundant. The winter nights and thin shelters they provided resulted in half the team actually taking refuge in the kindergarten room. The local staff are true mountaineers, and often slept outside with only a sleeping bag. Too delicate are the Australian volunteers.*

*Second from bottom: The chief engineer instructs our team about the excavation procedure. We were assigned to excavate the footing plan as set out in the design. The engineer was briefing our team on the dimensions and depths of the excavation. This however was at the best of times challenging as it was subsequently difficult to contact him after this meeting.*

30 *Bottom: Nevertheless, excavation for the girl's side of the hostel was completed. For the last four days of our trip, the team aided in the actual construction of the foundation. This was made entirely of stone and mud. The dirt that we had dug out was simply being reused as cement.*





## 6.2

### Journal note: Pashupatinath Hospice

31

#### Project

*In the centre of Kathmandu at the World Heritage site of Pashupatinath, there is the Pashupatinath Hospice, a stone's throw from the holy river where people are cremated and given to the gods. The hospice functions as a house and a clinic for the volunteer doctor serving those who need help but are unable to afford medical treatment. The aim of the project is to continue to improve the facility by repairing the roof terrace, sealing leaks and fixing the interior. So far, the project has resulted in the completion of a clear roof, installation of downpipes and the rendering of walls.*



## 6.3

### Journal note: Dungai/Bhulbhule

32

#### Project

*In the remote village of Dungai there are approximately 300 families living a relatively isolated life. Situated 800 vertical metres above the town of Bhulbhule, the village is a 4-hour trek at a steep incline. For some of these students, attending school in the village of Dungai is more than a 2-hour adventure each day.*

*While the village and school hosts a number of students, there are only two plumbed toilet blocks in Dungai; one in the village centre, the other near the classrooms for older students. For kindergarten students, their option for a public bathroom stall is not currently available.*

*The aim of the project was to construct a toilet block with four stalls with plumbing leading to a 2 x 2 x 3 metre septic tank. The project also looked at installing hand-washing facilities in the new bathroom, missing from the two existing toilets. This project aims to allow teachers to keep a closer eye on students as they leave to use the bathroom, as well as providing a safe facility, as opposed to using the terraced fields uphill from their current classroom.*

*One of the biggest advantages of an humanitarian architecture project is that participants get the opportunity to work with their hands to physically build what is designed. The main limitation with designing on the computer and rendering is the lack of realism and physical connection to the project.*

*The biggest surprise when constructing buildings in Nepal is how much stone work they involve — a stark contrast to the buildings style of Western culture. This is predominately due to the abundance of stone, and the expense of constructing with concrete and steel.*





A principal challenge of working in the developing country for architects and construction professionals is construction technique. It is necessary for the designer/architect to recognise the difference in resources and capability, and design accordingly. Equally important is the need for architects to recognise conditions and climate of the site. For example, there is little need to design drainage for rainfall with Sydney conditions in mind. In countries located around South East Asia, monsoon rains will overflow any drainage system. Thus Nepali people opt for simple roofing systems with no designed drainage.

Working in Nepal also gives participants the opportunity to work with materials that they may not necessarily have been exposed to previously. Working in an environment that is highly flexible and fluid, with little evidence of strict standards and building codes, poses both potential and challenges to a project. There is a great opportunity to demonstrate that buildings actually don't necessarily need the Building Code of Australia to stand, but they also present an opportunity for craftsman and construction workers to fail to meet the basic needs of a structure. It is then increasingly important for engineers and architects to involve themselves in the construction process.

With the overall completion of the project, the team has gained valuable experience in a wide variety of aspects. There are great opportunities to incorporate other dimensions of construction and engineering to humanitarian architecture projects to widen their appeal to engineering students and professionals and construction apprentices.

The project overall has resulted in the children attending class to have the sanitation facilities closer to the classroom. The children now have access to a more environmentally sustainable toilet facility. It also alleviates the pressures of contamination and disease proration.



33



## Exemplar: Archipelago

### Mission Statement

Archipelago was founded to better enable people to serve humanity. It takes the lead in the integration of disciplines within the built environment sector and envisages a workforce primed by innovation, sustainable development and social conscience. It strives for a sector defined by enhanced inter-disciplinary interaction across educational, humanitarian and professional spheres. Archipelago advocates the importance of effective collaborative operation in facilitating global growth.

### Background

It was on the Professionals in Nepal program that the idea for Archipelago was born. By engaging in construction projects within the developing world, it became clear that projects demand an entirely new approach to the construction endeavours in the developed nations. Additionally, while the humanitarian field promotes innovation, the diffusion of responsibility simultaneously creates an environment in which projects inherently carry a higher risk of failure. Furthermore, in building local capacity and sharing technical expertise, inconsistencies in project requirements are often overlooked.

These concepts were highlighted on the hostel project as detailed in this Paper. The building was designed as an architecture project and, as is common practice in the humanitarian context, simple rules of thumb were often applied, with the cooperation of engineers and architects not strictly being required. Naturally, it is not enough to provide only an architectural solution. The obviously missing skillsets, for example in building analysed foundations on a man-made slope, compromise the overall success the project could achieve.

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The school itself on the other hand was designed by an engineer. The plan embodied an engineering solution, in that it was very much limited to the structural essentials; standard walls, roof and floor. The opportunity for improving student engagement with learning by creating a conducive environment through spatial consideration was consequently lost.

Engineering and architecture, as central pillars of society, have the opportunity to initiate positive change. Through integration of inter-disciplinary thinking and communication, multilateral collaboration fosters the innovation, holistic design and critical thinking necessary to create this change.

### Overarching Aims

#### *Humanitarian Aid*

H.1 Advocating for NGOs of Architectural and Engineering background to consider collaborative work. In this way, operations will inherently garner solutions of a more holistic and socially considered type.

H.2 Involving tertiary institutions with short and long-term humanitarian projects. We are researching current humanitarian educational operations worldwide, in combination with university engagement in order to eventuate systemic change.

H.3 Integration of humanitarian based operations between broad scale sectors. Through published academic papers, we wish to explore the current absolute separation of sectors in the field of humanitarian work. Henceforth, we aim to reconcile such separations in ensuring greater developments for humanity itself.

## Education

E.1 Advocating inter-disciplinary education at universities Australia wide in incorporating collaborative teaching & communication skills. In doing this, we are undertaking involved research operations in investigating the application of inter-faculty and inter-disciplinary education models. Tertiary trialling of aforesaid research findings will follow.

E.2 Advancing humanitarian concerns within education. Through involved research, we have come to understand the demonstrated benefits of humanitarian education both to graduates and institutions on the world scale. Involving ourselves in the development of university units of study, actuating key humanitarian tenets into the operation of society, we aim to revolutionise the manner by which institutions develop students into leaders.

## Professional Networks

P.1 Increased general application of socially conscious design. Both engineering and architecture exist to improve the world we live in, but to a certain extent have lost the focus of people in everyday work. Through persistent engagement with education and humanitarian sectors, professionals will gain a wide range of experiences in different contexts. Active involvement with both the new generation of professionals and developing world will promote self-awareness and in turn develop professionals with a strong design focus on people.

P.2 Efficient professional collaboration, through more thorough integration of building information modelling,

will promote more holistic projects. To support this both disciplines must establish a relationship based on appreciation of what the other has to offer. This will come as a result of demonstrative successful projects in educational and humanitarian endeavours surrounding inter-disciplinary collaboration.

## Current

Founded in August 2014 by the author, Archipelago has grown to encompass a team of six people with diverse skillsets, histories and outlooks on life, but united by a shared passion for humanitarian aid and advancing the built environment sector.

The following link: <http://issuu.com/archipelagoaustralia/docs/pamphlet/O> is a digital copy of Archipelago's latest pamphlet. It aims to provide an overview to the organisation's mission, goals and people.











# 8

## What lessons are there?

38

**Humanitarian architecture projects represent a huge opportunity to fundamentally impact a community in crisis. It is by realising the skills and enthusiasm of humanitarians that a sustainable project will be achieved.**

Through organisations such as Aussie Action Abroad, Architects Without Frontiers and Habitat for Humanity, architects have a number of avenues to generate lasting impact in the developing world.

Built environment professionals such as architects seeking to make an impact through humanitarian architecture can:

1. Learn and understand what developmental aid encapsulates. There is an exhaustive list of interventions and projects that have failed at every NGO, development organisation and government agency. If anyone is looking to participate in volunteering projects in the long run, taking the time and speaking to organisers of these projects is an invaluable opportunity to gain insight into how they are approaching the problem and how they plan to engage the community.

2. Realise that architects don't belong only in architecture. In the humanitarian space. There are many opportunities for architects to involve themselves in the planning, organisation and promotion of projects by working with organisations such as World Vision, Oxfam, Save the Children, to name a few, where there is a great need for the architects' skillset.

3. Work with a smaller local humanitarian organisation such as local NGOs, church groups and development agencies. Organisations such as Architects Without Frontiers have a need for such input.

4. Work in partnership with state and local government where impact can be greatest. Locally, understanding the goals and mission of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is critical in moving with the momentum of Australian policy. Internationally, NGOs should especially seek to work with local government in the planning and construction of projects.

5. Work on development projects professionally. There are many opportunities for Australian architecture practices to partner with engineering firms to bid for developmental infrastructure tenders. Although this task may be prove to be the most challenging, there are opportunities, especially in developing countries.

With the shift in Australian Government policy, there is new incentive to reform the architectural humanitarian model to better align with the benchmarks presented in Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian Aid. The challenge for organisations is to adjust their models and missions to more appropriately present themselves as humanitarian organisations of the contemporary age.

Finally, there is significant opportunity for humanitarian organisations to more holistically engage with the education, professional and the wider humanitarian sector in general. Opportunities such as joint ventures and collaborative projects are urgently needed to provide projects with a more diverse team makeup.

This multi-disciplinary approach to solving the global issues is necessary as organisations are aiming to consolidate and are aiming for more efficient and effective aid.

# 9

## Acknowledgements

.....39

### Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly thank the NSW Architects Registration Board for giving me the opportunity to take part in Professionals in Nepal, an opportunity that would have otherwise been impossible. Specifically, I would like to thank Kate Doyle, Peter Salhani, and Mae Cruz for their time and consideration.

I would also like to extend a big thankyou to the organisers of Aussie Action Abroad for bringing together such a program, specifically, Graeme Kent and David Anderson. In addition, I would also like to thank Peter Robertson, Anna Marshall and Dipak Prasad Oli for their help throughout the process of this program.

Finally, I would like to thank Lara Low, Tim Elliot and Poppy Bell for their input and help during the program and afterwards. A particular thank you to Lara for the photos in the Dungai-Bhulbuhule section of this Paper.

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# 10

## About the author Truong Le

40

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I am currently completing a Doctorate of Philosophy in the School of Civil Engineering (Geotechnical) at the University of Sydney. Upon completing my undergraduate studies in Design of Architecture and Civil Engineering in 2013, I took part in a number of programs aimed at expanding my horizons and skillset; each one helping to develop my vision and outlook on life.

The most influential was Professionals in Nepal, Building a Social Enterprise in Bangalore and participating on the Young Endeavour. They have all aided in some way in shaping my passion and desire to actively seek out ways to engage with and aid communities around the world.

As this Paper has highlighted, I am deeply interested in international policies and how they shape the way in which aid is distributed. In moving on into the future, I will be actively advocating for the integration and cooperation of various NGOs and Government Agencies. My vision for the future of humanitarian aid is the efficient and effective administration of aid to those in need.

I understand that I may not change the world, but I am going to try my hardest in working with and for organisations that strive to do so. Where there is an apparent gap or benefit in further engagement between organisations or disciplines, I will endeavour to create and build on these links; this is the goal of Archipelago.



# 11

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A publication of the NSW Architects Registration Board 2015  
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