

Can we end poverty:

Do you really want to know?



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It works too. Child sponsorship programs bring in hundreds of millions of dollars every year to 'tackle poverty', just in Australia. But beyond the emotional pull of such images, carefully targeted to elicit guilt and a monetary response, the question remains; do they really work?

Well the answer, like most things, is complicated.

Reading the fine print of many of these child sponsorship sales pitches informs you that the money doesn't actually go to the person, usually a child, depicted on the photo they send you when you sign up. Funds are now most often distributed to the entire community.

This is a recent development and has come about in clear recognition that it is only through assisting an entire community that our aid money can ever really make a sustained difference.

These sales pitches, where the donor is asked to virtually purchase a child for upwards of \$30 per month, propose difficult ethical questions for aid organisations. Yet they deliver such huge benefits in terms of earnings for the agencies, that sometimes the ethical issues don't get much consideration.

Caritas Australia, the international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church, very clearly chooses not to promote child sponsorship.

We believe it is far better to help whole communities through our partner organisations than to sponsor individuals. A village well, a community school, a trained primary health worker – these can all help to improve life for everyone, rather than just an individual child.

Some sponsorship schemes do support projects

that benefit the community, but even then, the mechanics of sponsoring, recording the progress of each child, translating letters, taking photos, costs a lot of money. This is money which is being spent on the needs of the donor, not of the child.

At Caritas our development philosophy is rooted in the principle that we, in the rich world, cannot alone resolve the issues that perpetuate poverty. In fact dehumanising poverty can only ever be overcome when a community is empowered to own the process of its development. In this way, we work with entire communities, often with the poorest of the poor in already very poor communities to bring dignity to their lives and to build a path by which they themselves can be the architects of their own development.

Many organisations that promote child sponsorship mention their community focus in the fine print because the power of the emotional pull of the young child, full of potential, is a much stronger trigger to give than the community based method. Child sponsorship creates a strong personal connection between the well meaning giver and the 'poor' child. The added bonus is you can see the picture of that child on your fridge and it proves a valuable educational tool for your own, relatively well off children, that life is not so good for everyone.

There are many hundreds of organisations involved in international development in Australia. Internationally there are many thousands of organisations who aim to assist those living in dire poverty.

It is often difficult for the person who wants to make a difference, to choose between the many groups who do this. The competition in the aid and development sector, in large part due to the growing awareness of international poverty issues, is exceedingly diverse.

Where is the greatest need?

Many groups who are engaged with tackling poverty have a religious connection, like Caritas Australia. Yet Caritas Australia does not ever proselytise, or attempt to convert people to Catholicism or any other religion. Similarly we do not discriminate on any measure except need.

Regardless of the religion, ethnicity, culture or gender Caritas Australia works with those who are most vulnerable. Their faith, or lack of it, is of no interest to us. Some of our partners are Catholic, others Christian, some are Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish or Hindu and some are of no religious persuasion at all. As long as they are building communities to take control of their futures, we do not discriminate.

The Caritas Australia mission, as part of the Catholic Church, clearly states that we must undertake this endeavour. We work through local partners, many of them members of the Catholic Church and the church's network.

Tackling injustice

Caritas works for the freedom of those who are oppressed by injustice, bringing 'sight' to both those who are powerless and powerful and proclaiming to the poor the good news of their human dignity. This work is undertaken principally through the life-giving activities of humanitarian aid and long term development.

At Caritas we realise that we alone cannot effectively tackle the structures which keep communities, families and people trapped in the strictures of poverty.

The only way to effectively and sustainably tackle poverty is to assist communities and people to do it themselves.

We are governed by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching which work as the fundamental principles on which all our work is built but we are not missionaries. In fact, to insist on Catholicism as a condition of our support would contradict our principles. Put simply, 'development' and 'aid' are what we do, 'Catholic' is why we do it.

Caritas delivers humanitarian assistance and in many cases our emergency response helps save many lives. Yet keeping people alive is no cure to degrading poverty.

People are the power

People here in Australia; the people who work in developing countries as our partners; the people in the communities that they in turn work with and the many hundreds of thousands of Church and



community organisations and groups; people like you, are the partnership that can really tackle injustice and free the world from poverty.

Crucially we also work through people here in Australia. Caritas recognises that without practising solidarity here in our own country, without us promoting justice both internationally and domestically, we can never effectively change the structures which keep people trapped in the cycle of poverty.

Partnership the key

Caritas Australia doesn't parachute aid into the 35 countries in which we work. By working together, in partnership with communities on the ground; the ones who are the most affected; who best understand the local situation and culture; and who ultimately will be the guardians of change, we are best placed to deliver positive change that will be appropriate, life giving and sustainable.

Poverty is political?

Poverty is political there's no way round that. When 1 billion people are hungry, yet the world produces more than enough food to satisfy everyone, something is fundamentally wrong. When people struggle to get enough food to eat, struggle to send their children to school, struggle to access health care or are not treated with dignity in their society – this is political. Despite the wealth in the world, never having been so great we have to ask why we have to ask who is responsible, and we have to get our political leaders to change the situation for the better.

Caritas though is never party political. We are interested only in changing policies to benefit the poor. We fight for justice. In this pursuit, we will talk to and challenge whomever can make this happen.

Where do the dollars come from?

The vast majority of Caritas Australia's funding comes from people like you. We get no direct funding from the Catholic Church. Members of the public, often Church goers, but not always, anyone who cares about righting the imbalance that exists between the rich and poor worlds, can and do give to Caritas Australia.

Ultimately, Caritas is your organisation, you allow us to exist because you care; hence we are answerable to you.

The remainder of our support comes from governments, international institutions, trusts and foundations, plus some income from our investments and trading activities. This year, less than 15% came from governments and institutions. Our board has set a ceiling on how much money we can take from governments of 30% to ensure we can maintain our independence.

Your support making a difference

Our money goes directly to our local partners – the people working on the ground, directly responsible to the communities they are working in.

In India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, your money enabled our partners to help half a million people begin to return to some sort of normal life after the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Your contributions made it possible for us to respond quickly and effectively to a drought in Zimbabwe so harsh that the fields were bare and food was running out.

You helped us raise the profile of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Australia, raising the profile of some of the most vulnerable women in the world and helping them to achieve their innate human dignity.

You helped us get people out on the streets for Make Poverty History and enabled us to get over a million Australians to Stand Up Against Poverty.

What about corruption?

We do not give aid to governments. That way, corrupt governments can't misuse our funds. We do recognise that governments are crucial to tackling the problem of poverty and hence we do sometimes work with governments such as the groundbreaking PASHIP program in PNG, which is effectively tackling HIV in our nearest neighbour with the Australian and PNG Governments.

To ensure our partners aren't corrupt and that our money is spent effectively, we have a detailed process for evaluating partners and projects which is as robust as any system implemented by financial institutions around the world.

Whenever we are alerted to a misuse of funds – which is extremely rare – we immediately investigate and take the appropriate action whether that be legal or otherwise.

Corruption occurs everywhere, not just in the developing world, and our partners deal with the consequences of corruption every day. Of course corruption affects the poorest the hardest – the

one's who have to pay a bribe to get through the military cordon so they can get their goods to market, that have to pay a bribe to get their children's results from school. Corruption must be tackled and empowering communities to be able to effectively locate and combat corruption is fundamental to tackling poverty.

When we plan any new project, our staff and partners always check whether there are any other agencies working in the same area, and whether what we are planning to support will complement or duplicate the work they are doing.

The power of our network

Caritas Australia is a member of Caritas Internationalis, one of the largest aid and development networks in the world operating in over 200 countries.

When an emergency happens we collaborate through Caritas Internationalis to coordinate the responses from the many Caritas members across the globe. This increases our impact and our effectiveness by using the many and varied skills of the global Caritas staff and to bring together under one umbrella all of our combined resources.

We are also part of alliances including the global ecumenical network Action by Churches Together, the Australian Council for International Development, we receive support from the World Food Program and other multilateral bodies.

Where to start with tackling poverty?

Every aid agency is different. Many just focus on the individual or on a particular religious or ethnic group or community. Caritas Australia works directly in over 35 countries and is focused on empowering communities to take control of their own futures.

This is harder work than just handing out food or building a hospital. Although we do conduct these activities too, our goal is to give communities the tools to take control and be sustainable. It takes a long term commitment but it is the only way we can ever truly wipe out poverty.

Caritas Australia has clear goals which guide us and our work to eliminate poverty and injustice. New partners are selected to help us meet these objectives. We formally assess each prospective partner to check they share our goals and have the kind of robust financial and organisational structures, skills and capacity to help deliver them.

Child sponsorship offers an easy way to begin the learning journey about international poverty. Ultimately though, it isn't solving the problem. Partnership is the key to solving poverty in the long term. Working together with communities on the ground and giving them the power to really change things for the better. This is how you can really make a difference. Supporting agencies like Caritas, is certainly a step in ridding the world of dehumanising poverty.



 **Caritas**
AUSTRALIA

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