



Learning from Australian aid operational evaluations

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Evaluations can inform management decision-making and provide rich learning, as well as promoting accountability. This ODE review gathers together lessons from 64 operational evaluations of Australian aid that were completed in 2012.

The purpose of the review is to inform and improve program design and management and to provide learning to the broader development community. It addresses a gap in the dissemination of the findings of Australian aid evaluations.

Each of the 64 operational evaluations was assessed as credible and offering lessons of potential value to a wider

audience. Each evaluation was then systematically reviewed to collect evidence on: **'What worked well and why? What didn't work well and why? In what circumstances?'**

The evidence was analysed to identify nine higher-order lessons (overleaf). While many of the lessons are not new, they are certainly worth our collective attention.

Specific examples from the reviewed evaluations are provided in the full report, which also includes a list of the evaluations supporting each lesson. Those seeking more detailed analysis are encouraged to refer to the original evaluation reports.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF AUSTRALIAN AID

Independent evaluation of the Australian aid program is undertaken at several levels and managed by different areas within DFAT:

- » The vast bulk of DFAT's independent evaluations are commissioned by the managers of individual aid initiatives. These are termed 'operational' evaluations. An operational evaluation is required at least once over the life of every significant aid initiative.
- » ODE evaluations typically focus on strategic issues or cross-cutting themes and often entail cross-country comparison and analysis.
- » Sectoral or thematic evaluations are also occasionally undertaken by thematic areas.



WANT MORE INFORMATION?

For the full report, and the companion review *Quality of Australian aid operational evaluations* access www.ode.dfat.gov.au

Also visit the ODE website for:

- » Departmental guideline 'Manage an evaluation'
- » Good practice examples of evaluation terms of reference, plans and reports.
- » DFAT monitoring and evaluation standards

The following nine lessons for improving development effectiveness were identified by the review:

Lessons on program design and management

- › Improving monitoring and evaluation requires attention to outcomes, better intervention logic and more accessible information
- › Poor coordination adversely affects effectiveness
- › Implementation is stronger where there is close engagement by DFAT staff and the role of managing contractors is clear

Lessons on supporting capacity development and sustainable reforms

- › Capacity development is most effective when it is driven by partners, uses a range of methods and takes the local context into account
- › Public sector reform requires better diagnosis and incremental approaches
- › Improving opportunities for women requires long-term support and targeted programs

Lessons on engaging with partners to make Australian aid more effective

- › Working through multilateral organisations can promote efficiency and expand reach and policy influence but requires active DFAT engagement
- › Support for civil society is most effective when underpinned by longer-term partnerships and selective use of core funding
- › Regional initiatives require flexible funding, a strategic agenda and effective engagement of partners

'I commend to you not just this synthesis report but also the 64 evaluations that fed into it. These evaluations deserve to be revisited and their lessons remembered. This report makes a contribution to all of our efforts to become increasingly adept at learning and thereby continuously improving our international development assistance.'

Jim Adams

Chair, Independent Evaluation Committee

OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) builds stronger evidence for more effective aid. ODE monitors the performance of the Australian aid program, evaluates its results and contributes to international evidence and debate about aid and development effectiveness.