

Australia Awards in Africa

Independent Progress Report (IPR)

Revised December 2013

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND..... | 8 |
| 2. KEY PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS..... | 8 |
| 3. KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES..... | 10 |
| 3.1 EXPANSION OF AUSAID HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN AFRICA | 10 |
| 3.2. ACADEMIC LEVEL OF AWARDS | 14 |
| 3.3 DIVERGENCE FROM AUSAID AND WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT POLICY | 15 |
| 3.4 ROLE DELINEATION | 18 |
| 3.5 STRATEGIC-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS | 21 |
| 4. KEY ISSUES AFFECTING PROGRAM OPERATION AND PERFORMANCE | 24 |
| 4.1 OVERALL PROGRAM PERFORMANCE ISSUES..... | 24 |
| 4.1.1 Key AusAID Performance Issues..... | 25 |
| 4.1.2 Key Contractor Performance Issues..... | 26 |
| 4.1.3 Performance Related Recommendations | 28 |
| 4.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM AGAINST DAC AND AUSAID CRITERIA..... | 29 |
| 4.3 RESPONSES TO TERMS OF REFERENCE QUESTIONS | 29 |
| <i>Question 1: With reference to the five focus countries, are the program objectives being achieved? (Relevance & Effectiveness)</i> | <i>29</i> |
| <i>Question 2: With reference to the five focus countries, what unintended consequences (positive or negative) is AAA having? (Relevance & Effectiveness)</i> | <i>32</i> |
| <i>Question 3: Where do the elements of the program that contribute or reduce program effectiveness and efficiency lie? (Efficiency).....</i> | <i>35</i> |
| <i>Question 4: Is the MC effectively delivering the services specified in the Scope of Services (Schedule 1) of Contract 57041? (Efficiency and Analysis & Learning)</i> | <i>39</i> |
| <i>Question 5: How effectively are enhanced AAA design elements being implemented</i> | <i>42</i> |
| <i>Question 6. To what extent is the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) information provided by the MC useful, and being used? (Monitoring & Evaluation and Analysis & Learning).....</i> | <i>49</i> |
| <i>Question 7. How effective are current AAA selection processes for both long term and short course awards and how could they be improved? (Efficiency)..</i> | <i>51</i> |
| <i>Question 8. What are the implications to AusAID and the MC of refocusing key aspects of AAA promotions, engagement and M&E to fewer countries, while continuing pan-Africa award access? (Relevance).....</i> | <i>52</i> |
| 4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM RESPONSES TO EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS.. | 52 |
| 5. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 55 |
| 5.1 CONCLUSION | 55 |
| 5.2 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS | 57 |
| TABLE 3. RECOMMENDATION PRIORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY MATRIX..... | 61 |
| ANNEX 1. REVISING REINTEGRATION PLANS (RPS)..... | 63 |
| <i>Introduction.....</i> | <i>63</i> |
| <i>Rationalization of Reintegration Plans.....</i> | <i>64</i> |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| THE PRE-RETURN UPDATE FORMAT | 67 |
| THE POST-RETURN UPDATE FORMAT..... | 67 |
| ANNEX 2 PERSONS CONSULTED..... | 70 |
| ANNEX 3 DOCUMENTS REVIEWED | 70 |
| ANNEX 4 TERMS OF REFERENCE..... | 71 |
| ANNEX 5 EVALUATION PLAN..... | 79 |

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| AAA | Australia Awards in Africa |
| AUD | Australian Dollars |
| AusAID | Australian Agency for International Development |
| ALAF | Australian Leadership Award Fellowships |
| ALAS | Australian Leadership Award Scholarships |
| CLE | Cost of Living Entitlement |
| CRC | Contribution to Research Cost |
| EAFD | Equity and Access Fund (Disability) |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| HRD | Human Resource Development |
| LTA | Long Term Awards |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MSC | Most Significant Change |
| NUP | Notification of Unsatisfactory Performance |
| PDA | Professional Development Awards |
| PDB | Pre-Departure Briefing |
| PWD | People with a Disability |
| OASIS | Online Australian Scholarship Information System |
| RP | Reintegration Plan |
| SCA | Short Course Awards |
| SCO | Student Contact Officers |
| SGS | Small Grants Scheme |
| SoS | Scope of Services |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |

Executive Summary

The fact that this program has achieved the targeted scale-up of award numbers well within the intended timelines is an achievement that is strongly commended by the Independent Progress Report (IPR) team. This achievement was a joint effort between AusAID and the managing contractor in which both parties played critical and indispensable roles. The IPR team found some evidence of appropriate impacts in relation to development, linkages and improved Australian profile. From this basic standpoint the program should be considered successful in an overall sense.

The program has also been highly successful in specific areas. The program pioneered short course awards, and during the short life of the program to date, these have become well established and highly valued by all stakeholders. The level of visa overstays and Protection Visa issues have been far lower than anticipated in the design's risk assessment. An approximate gender balance has been maintained in award provision, and AusAID staff members have been active in valuable gender initiatives, such as linking in the Governor General to provide networking opportunities for outstanding African women. Awards have clearly been inclusive and supportive of participation by a significant number of persons living with disabilities. The failure rate of Australian Awards in Africa (AAA) awardees has been extremely low, suggesting that selection approaches are obtaining high quality candidates.

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the delivery of this program has been flawless. The relationship between AusAID and the managing contractor (MC) developed into a mutually defensive, rather than cooperative, one. This was partially as a result of 'mixed messages' coming from AusAID, and is predominantly attributable to an ongoing lack of quality assurance by the contractor in certain areas that necessitated a degree of close management by AusAID operational staff.

A significant proportion of the MC's scope of services¹ were only addressed in a belated or cursory manner -particularly those elements seeking to improve the overall quality of the program. There also appears to have been some diversion of already stressed contractor resources into areas not covered by the scope of services, both by AusAID and the contractor themselves. While some of these diversions can partially be attributed to a legitimate need to adapt to changing circumstances, some appear to have been superfluous and wasteful.

¹ Not including the dropped PDA associated requirements.

While the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems of the program are one area that was addressed quite early in the program, the information collected by the program to date has been largely output based. The little outcome related data obtained are largely anecdotal. Far more focussed and usable outcome level M&E needs to be undertaken to be able to defensibly assess whether the program has succeeded in fulfilling its objectives² and whether the degree of success is commensurate with the resources invested. Despite the fact that it is recognised that the program has made substantial efforts in this regard, the penetration of promotional activities, especially to line ministry level, has been poor. This has resulted in a number of misconceptions about the program amongst targeted employers. These shortcomings will need to be addressed if the benefits of the program are to become sustainable.

The IPR team recognises that achieving the targeted scale up in award number is a commendable achievement. However in accepting the contract, the managing contractor has agreed to meet the full scope of services, not a compromised or expedient lower-quality version. Hence, while the IPR team would agree that the contractor was preoccupied with trying to cope with the huge process-oriented workloads of the scale-up, this factor cannot fully excuse poor performance in other important areas –especially given contractor staffing issues that delayed action in these areas.

The bigger picture in relation to AusAID Human Resource Development (HRD) efforts in Africa has changed significantly since the initial design of this program, and additional plans are in place for continued change during the near future. In taking the program forward, the responses necessary to improve the quality of the program can no longer be considered in the same context as the program was originally designed. These broader changes primarily focus on an expansion of HRD efforts, both in scope and number of programs involved.

To maintain optimal usefulness of the various HRD (capacity building) tools represented by the different forms of Australia Awards, means must be developed of enabling use of these tools across all relevant programs. This will require a review of the provision of AAA as a stand-alone program and will have implications for both external contracting and internal AusAID management. More specifically, it will require that AusAID create contracts that incorporate a service provision function for other AusAID programs and restructure AusAID work units and associated roles to allow AusAID to play an expanded role in producing and implementing a combined HRD strategy and an associated shared promotional plan (applying to all HRD programs).

² While the IPR team observed some evidence of appropriate outcomes, the sample involved in this review is far too small to be conclusive.

This revision of the approach to award delivery will also provide a critical opportunity to revise and clarify the definitions of the full range of capacity-building tools available to HRD programs. This includes more formal tools provided under the Australia Awards banner and the more ad-hoc and highly responsive tools used outside this banner.

1. Introduction and Background

Australia Awards in Africa (AAA) is Australia's flagship program for development cooperation efforts on the continent. The Australian Government's announcement of its intentions to re-engage in Africa in late 2007 brought about AusAID's development of AAA with the final design being completed in 2009. The AAA design built on the previous scholarships program that offered up to 100 scholarships a year to 12 African countries. The current program is designed to deliver a range of development scholarships across Africa and the South West Indian Ocean islands and currently provides approximately 1,000 scholarships to 50 African countries.

On 20 December 2010 AusAID signed a three-year contract with GRM International to manage AAA. GRM International has served as the managing contractor (MC) since April 2004 when AusAID began outsourcing its scholarships management in Africa. GRM International's contract ends 31 December 2013 and has a two-year contract extension option.

2. Key Program Achievements

Strong scepticism existed during the design and the start-up of the AAA program regarding the feasibility of achieving the rapid scale up in award numbers proposed. The AAA monitoring data indicate that these output targets have been achieved, and no program-halting incidents have been reported during this period. The Independent Progress Report (IPR) acknowledges that the meeting of these output targets constitutes a very significant achievement.

The IPR team found that credit for this achievement needs to be shared between both the contractor and AusAID. This finding is based on clear evidence that both have played critical roles in shouldering the extreme workloads that delivering these targets has required, and both have been instrumental in addressing issues that, left unchecked, could potentially have become significant problems.

AusAID's operational staff provided sustained support to the implementation of AAA. This support was necessary to ensure the AAA processes met the set targets and delivered quality outputs. Attention to detail by AusAID operational staff was largely responsible for maintaining quality products in relation to partner government liaison and program promotion. While the contractor sometimes interpreted AusAID's attention to detail as 'micromanagement', the IPR team identified multiple past and on-going examples of GRM lapses in quality control in external

correspondence and other externally targeted material. This suggests that AusAID's sustained close scrutiny of GRM International's work in these areas was necessary for ensuring quality.

Contractor staff members were also instrumental in successfully achieving the scaling up of award numbers to meet targets. AusAID would not have been able to meet these targets without the administrative and logistical resources provided by the contractor. In working with AusAID, the contractor has been willing to rapidly adapt to changing process requirements and AusAID policy revision³. Some responses, especially those related to selection processes and development of associated IT tools within SCHOLAR, have been both successful and well regarded. Others have been less successful. While there is also a perception that there is more to be done in regard to streamlining selection process and associated reporting workloads, there is a recognition that many improvements have been made, especially since the arrival of the new Deputy Team Leader who has had a clear operational focus.

During this scale-up to unprecedented award numbers across an unprecedented number of partner countries, both AusAID and contractor staff members have needed to go well beyond the levels of adaptability and effort required by other AusAID Australia Award programs, especially in the area of promotional activities and course provider liaison. The design document for the program also makes it clear that these very ambitious target numbers (both awards and countries) were set by a range of administratively desired outcomes, rather than a more rational feasibility assessment.

The program has also been highly successful in specific areas. The program pioneered short course awards, and during the short life of the program to date, these have become well established and are highly valued by all stakeholders. The level of visa overstays and Protection Visa issues have been far lower than anticipated in the design's risk assessment. An approximate gender balance has been maintained in award provision, and AusAID staff members have been active in valuable gender initiatives, such as linking in the Governor General to provide networking opportunities for outstanding African women. Awards have clearly been inclusive and supportive of participation by a significant number of persons living with disabilities. The failure rate of AAA awardees has been extremely low, suggesting that selection approaches are obtaining high quality candidates.

Australian Leadership Award Scholarships and Australian Leadership Award Fellowships have also been successfully incorporated into the program, although they were not considered in the design.

Therefore the IPR Team explicitly recognise and commends the level of dedication that was required to achieve the results observed.

³ Including the introduction of the Adviser Remuneration Framework

In addressing the unprecedented tasks associated with the scale up of award numbers in Africa, a significant number of compromises have needed to be made. The contractor, in particular, has not been able to provide the expected level of attention to its full scope of services. Some of these compromises were necessary and some may have been avoided (discussed in Section 4). However, it would be wrong to judge this program's overall performance in comparison to the more routine operation of other AusAID Australia Awards programs. This program spent much of its relatively short implementation period to date (less than two years) in uncharted territory. This suggests that the demands placed on both AusAID and MC staff generated frenetic activity for the entire implementation period. That some compromises were made is therefore unsurprising.

The format of an IPR requires that this program be rated against a number of criteria. The level of these ratings is primarily based upon whether the current situation is 'satisfactory' or not. Given that such a huge amount of effort has been needed to simply achieve the unprecedented output targets and the subsequent compromises made to do so, it is impossible not to recognise that more may need to be done against many of the IPR assessment criteria to bring this program in line with the standards generally set by other (less onerous) AusAID Award Programs. The IPR team therefore provides these rating as an indication of where the next round of effort needs to be focussed, rather than as a statement of relative program performance.

3. Key Strategic Issues

There are several key external considerations that have influenced this IPR. While some of these were outside the original ToR for the report, failure to address them would render the IPR recommendations contextually irrelevant.

3.1 Expansion of AusAID Human Resource Development efforts in Africa

The operational environment of the AAA program within AusAID's broader Africa Program is about to change. Anticipated changes include:

- reconsideration of how to engage in a sustainable way with different African countries,
- significant expansion of the number and scope of human resource development (capacity-building) programs [e.g. Australia Africa Partnership Facility; Mining for Development Institute, Food Security Institute, etc.]
- the need to apply revised AusAID or Whole-of-Government policies pertaining to delivery of Australia Awards

These changes will have significant ramifications on the AAA program.

A number of key findings of the IPR stakeholder interviews are also relevant to this changing context of operation:

A. Limited Penetration of Promotional Effort

It is recognised that the program has made substantial efforts in this regard. However, the evidence provided by stakeholders interviewed by the IPR team strongly suggests that the promotional activities carried out by the program to date have only been effective in raising the profile of the revised program within the highest level of partner governments; namely among direct contacts in the coordinating authorities and government officials directly engaged by diplomatic efforts. There was a clear lack of penetration of these promotional efforts to line ministry human resource (HR) officials, and few persons outside the direct AusAID contacts within coordinating authorities knew about the program. While the high-level engagement achieved to date has been favourable and commendably successful in regard to addressing the fourth objective of the program⁴, it is not a sufficient promotional approach to address the first three program objectives.

This limited penetration of promotional effort was consistently encountered in both newly engaged and longer-term partner countries and has already had serious consequences. Given that, within the sample of respondents interviewed, line ministry officials appeared universally unaware that there were simple strategies they could follow for maximizing their proactive participation in the program⁵, it was not surprising that most who had had experience of AAA's precursor programs regarded the competitive 'open' application approach now used as a 'semi-intentional' means of preventing them from making strategic use of the program. The competitive 'open' application approach has significant transparency and probity benefits, so the IPR team does not support retreating from this particular reform of selection processes. However, it is very important that this reform be accompanied by efforts to inform line ministries and other employer organization of how to utilise the new application approach in a strategic and optimal manner to address their HR needs.

It is recognised that both AusAID and the contractor continually undertook promotional exercises that severely stretched their existing capacity. While some feedback suggested that the formal 'presentations' provided by the contractor were 'unengaging', most relevant respondents clearly appreciated the personal contacts made in these promotional efforts.

⁴ Viz. Objective 4: Recognition of Australia as an active partner in African development.

⁵ E.g. assisting key candidates in course selection, completion of high quality applications and endorsement of reintegration plans.

Unfortunately, regardless of the level of effort put into promotional exercises, feedback from stakeholders clearly showed that it had little penetration into the recipient employer organizations that are best placed to utilise the AAA's capacity-building tools to effectively achieve the first three objectives of the program.

Given that such effective promotion appears beyond the current capacity of either AusAID or the contractor, two options exist to address this problem. The first is to substantially boost the human resources available to undertake promotional activities. The second is to rationalize current promotional efforts. The ToR of this IPR makes it clear that the first option is not a realistic one. However, the second option is wholly in line with discussion papers produced by AusAID's Africa Program that propose something approaching a 'tiered' system of engagement with different African nations.

This lack of penetration of promotional efforts must be improved if the first three objectives of the program are to be effectively addressed. By focussing available promotional effort on the countries with which the program is most substantively engaged, more effective penetration may be achieved for the majority of awards provided without unattainable expansion in human resources. Of course, this means accepting a lesser standard of promotional engagement within non-focus countries, but if the aim is to maximize the overall development impact, this is a necessary compromise.

B. Confusion and Duplication in Promotional Effort

Another serious issue commonly arising in stakeholder feedback was confusion between the different capacity-building tools provided by AAA⁶, as well as confusion between AAA capacity building tools and similar tools provided under other AusAID programs (e.g. the Australia Africa Partnership Facility). This inability to distinguish between the different AusAID offered capacity-building tools has inherent problems that are discussed in the next section (s.3.2), but one ramification was that stakeholders often reported being contacted by multiple AusAID-affiliated parties at varying times of year who all seemed to be offering the same thing, but with different application processes, timelines and associated requirements. The general perception thereby generated was that 'AusAID is unable to organise itself properly', and it was also observed that 'other donors did not have this problem'.

Clearly this is not a favourable perspective, and an effort to remove this confusion and duplicative promotional effort is required.

C. Constraints on Engaging Private Sector Organizations

⁶ Few respondents appeared to know the difference between a Short Course Award and an ALAF.

Key feedback received from both AusAID and the managing contractor (which is also reflected in the AAA program's output data), is that there have been unforeseen constraints on successfully engaging the private sector in the use of long term awards as institutionally-relevant capacity-building tools. In real terms, this has meant that private employers have generally been unwilling to allow their employees to undertake long term awards on any form of paid or unpaid leave arrangements, thereby forcing successful candidates to resign from their posts in order to take up awards. This clearly defeats the intent of attempting to engage relevantly employed candidates in the first instance. While such awardees may still make development contributions on their return, the opportunity to provide targeted institutional benefits is lost. It also results in an understandable reluctance of many private sector candidates to go through with an award, even if they are successfully selected.

Despite clear and sustained efforts on behalf of AusAID staff to lobby private sector employers to revise this stance, little progress has been made on this issue. A key problem is that many private organizations have explicit policies that prevent them giving leave for such extended periods.

As it is well beyond the scope of the AAA program to generate broad reforms in private sector employment policies, this constraint is likely to be a persistent one. Hence, it is appropriate to regard the current targets for inclusion of private sector candidates in LTA provision as unrealistic.

To some extent, this issue may be compensated for through provision of shorter term awards, but LTA private sector targets should still be adjusted down to a more realistic level to prevent the program being inappropriately held to account for a factor that was not fully recognised in the original design.

D. Questionable Cost-Benefit relationship in Provision of PhDs

Issues raised by AusAID staff in relation to the PhD component of LTA provision usually pertained to the disproportionately high workloads associated with their delivery. These PhD awards were often seen as a 'high-prestige' option, rather than more proven development mechanisms, but the fact that partner governments had very little engagement in the provision of these PhD, especially in regard to selection of relevant research topics, also raises doubts as to the related diplomatic impacts of such awards.

In short, there was a perception that offering these PhDs may simply be not a value for money option. The fact that ACIAR already provides Australian PhD scholarships in Africa adds an additional redundancy aspect to this issue. The provision of PhDs under the program and their usefulness to achieving the program's objectives are areas that need careful consideration.

3.2. Academic Level of Awards

A very consistent message arising from line ministries HR officials and alumni was that the current focus of awards on postgraduate level study is not an effective approach for achieving on-the-ground development impacts. Alumni often complained that the courses they attended had “too much theory and not enough practical work”. Even alumni who were already operating at higher levels pointed out that while they appreciated their own training, they were not able to put much of what they had learned into practice because of a lack of trained staff below them with the more practical skills needed to operationalise their proposals or plans. While the IPR team fully acknowledge that the program does already provide some vocational-level technical training⁷, the fact that the program has sector foci in technical fields such as agriculture⁸ and mining governance⁹ suggests the proportion of technical (VET¹⁰-level) training provided could be greatly expanded.

It is also acknowledged that it would be inappropriate to attempt a ‘shotgun’ approach to provision of such expanded technical training. The provision of such technical training should always be integrated into provision of the higher-level capacity building that it is intended to support. The AusAID Africa program has already pioneered such an approach in its provision of integrated TVET ALAFs in Ethiopia, and this pilot now needs to be expanded. This level of integration requires a relatively high level of engagement with participating employer organizations, and is therefore another reason why rationalized engagement with different countries through the proposed ‘tier’ system is recommended. It is also a strong argument for the integration of the provision of awards into other AusAID programs in Africa, including but not limited to the other HRD programs (see fourth dot point of Recommendation 1.)

This expansion into a more balanced emphasis on Vocational Education and Training should apply to all award types. In the case of LTAs, this would require a high-level policy change to allow candidates to choose either Masters level or Diploma/Certificate level VET courses¹¹. This expansion into longer-term (up to one year) VET courses would have the added benefit of helping address the potential

⁷ e.g. the TVET teacher training courses run in Ethiopia, and GIS-related ALAFs.

⁸ An example given by alumni in this field was that they now knew (as a result of their course) that the likely best option for their local farmers was to utilize sub-surface irrigation systems, but that they could not organise trials of this technique, because no one in their department of the local commercial sector had the necessary technical skills to install such systems.

⁹ An example given by alumni in this field was that while they, as mine inspectors, knew what they should be doing in terms planning for inspections, they still did not have the practical skills to actually do the inspections themselves, and neither did any of their staff.

¹⁰ Vocational Education and Training

¹¹ Allowing for undergraduate degree level courses for LTAs remains problematic, and is not recommended.

financial implications for the AAA program of Australian universities now standardizing all Masters level courses to two years duration.

In the case of short courses or fellowships it would simply mean expanding the number and range of VET level opportunities offered. This increased expansion of short course provision into the VET sector would also have the additional benefit of removing high barriers to entry to short courses that might need to be applied if providers are required by new Australia Awards definitions to provide *accredited* training¹².

3.3 Divergence from AusAID and Whole-of-Government Policy

Another strategic consideration relates to AusAID and Australian Government policy pertaining to provision of Australia Awards. Centralised policy regarding Australia Awards has been evolving rapidly since the initial design of the AAA program. Many of these policy changes amount to simplification and other reforms that could potentially reduce current workloads associated with delivering the AAA program. Other policies are revising the standards that Australia Awards are required to uphold.

Policy changes that provide opportunities for reducing workloads primarily pertain to the maintenance of alumni databases and more focussed M&E effort. These are discussed further under other sections (see s3.4 & s4). The policies that set new standards generally define what can be ‘counted’ as an Australia Award. It is important to note that AusAID is not solely responsible for setting these standards, as Australia Awards now have their own whole-of-government (WoG) secretariat in which agencies like DFAT and DEEWR play leading roles. The implication of these policies is that it is no longer possible for the AusAID Africa Program to ‘go it alone’ on issues such as its definition of short course awards (SCAs), which is now inconsistent with the Whole of Government standard. While it is fully recognised that the Africa program pioneered the practice of delivering such SCAs, the centralised theory has now started to catch up with this practice and has identified the need to maintain some consistency across delivery to different countries.

¹² For example, if course providers are themselves required to formally recognise the training they are contracted to provide (beyond a nominal ‘certificate of participation’), they may need to require that short course participants be able to ‘enrol’ at the level of the course material presented. If all short courses are offered at postgraduate level, the field of potential candidates who can meet university prerequisites for enrolment will be limited. However, when an expanded range and number of VET-level courses are also offered, these entry prerequisites become minimal and such barriers to broad participation in the program would be removed. Note that there should be no limitation placed on the level of course material presented in short courses, so undergraduate degree level material should not be avoided. There simply needs to be recognition that the higher the level of the course material presented, the smaller will be the pool of potential applicants.

One key problem is that the definition of SCAs adopted by AAA is so ‘loose’ that it is not possible to distinguish (on the basis of objective standards) between an SCA, an ALAF or more ad-hoc training offered by other AusAID HRD programs. All of these programs can use Australian course providers or link to Australian institutions.

This lack of clarity not only leads to confusion amongst recipient organizations and individuals (see s3.1 above), but also defeats the original purpose of having three types of formal awards. Together, the three types of Australia Awards form an intentional spectrum. The long term awards are very formal, qualification-linked opportunities that must conform to external (provider) timeframes and other requirements. The Short Course Awards offer an intermediate level of flexibility and responsiveness, in that they can be tailored within set limits to meet demand. This partial tailoring can be carried out in terms of content, timing, length and location of delivery. The ALAFs are at the far end of the flexibility/responsiveness spectrum. They can be practically any interaction with an organization maintaining an Australian standard operating environment (i.e. any organization holding an ABN or ACN). Hence, the current definition of SCAs used by the AAA program effectively removes one of the already limited range of capacity-building tools available under the Australia Awards spectrum.

This picture is further complicated in Africa due to the introduction of a number of highly flexible and responsive capacity-building tools under other AusAID HRD programs. While it is acknowledged that there has been some formal coordination between AAA and AAPF in terms of provision of Australia Awards short courses, this coordination has been largely opportunistic, rather than systematic. The problems this overlap creates include confusion and associated unfavourable perceptions within client organizations (see 3.1 B.), but equally importantly, an inability to distinguish between the capacity building tools offered at the highly flexible and responsive end of the spectrum.

This has two main ramifications. The first is that it will become increasingly difficult to ‘count’ the number of legitimate Australia Awards provided in Africa. Secondly, it may easily result in delivery of capacity building opportunities that would fully qualify as Australia Awards not being able to be officially counted as such merely because they are not administered directly by the AAA program or the ALAF program (from Canberra).

The upcoming imposition of a more formal definition of short course awards (see also recommendation 4.) will largely fix this problem in relation to the reestablishment of a full spectrum of Australia Award tools. IPR consultations with alumni and employers suggest that they already have the expectation that any short course completed under the Australia Awards banner will at least be some form of formally recognised training. Although they do not expect that short courses will necessarily lead to a full qualification, they do expect that their successful completion of such an

Australia Award would provide recognised ‘credit’ (e.g. a formal transcript of achievement) towards a qualification that might receive recognition in later study. While some of the short courses provided to date have already satisfied this requirement, others have not. The fact that the ‘certificates of participation’ provided by some current short courses delivered under the Australia Awards program in Africa do not necessarily constitute this level of recognition was received with serious concern and disappointment by both institutions and individuals¹³. This inconsistency also raises an obvious question of why some course providers are able to meet such standards while others are not.

Despite the clarification that may soon to be achieved in relation to short course awards, confusion and overlap will remain between ALAFs and other, more ad-hoc approaches to capacity building. This problem could be solved by the establishment of appropriate protocols with the ALAF desk in Canberra, such that whenever a program other than AAA wishes to undertake a capacity-building exercise that meets the standards of an ALAF, it would apply to the ALAF desk to have the exercise jointly recognised/recorded as such (both in Canberra and in Africa). In practice, this would mean that any exercise that involved registered Australian training providers or linkages to Australian-registered organizations could, at least, be consistently called an ALAF and would be counted as such. No other content standards would apply for ALAFs. The proviso likely to be required by the ALAF desk in Canberra would be that the programs designing and facilitating these ‘external’ ALAFs would remain entirely responsible for their funding and administration. This approach to ALAFs is not without precedent within AusAID and establishment of such locally driven ALAFs would also address a concern that was commonly expressed to the IPR team, which was that the current approach to ALAFs renders them more supply-driven than demand-driven¹⁴.

More ad-hoc capacity building exercises that do not involve registered Australian training providers or linkages to Australian registered organizations would remain very important, and would sit on the spectrum of capacity-building tools available in Africa (but not under the Australia Awards banner) as totally unconstrained, ‘super-responsive’ options, that exceed even the high flexibility offered by ALAFs. This four-point spectrum of tools would provide a systematised approach to AusAID HRD in Africa that could then support unambiguous reporting and consistent promotional strategies.

¹³ Note that there is no suggested implication that all capacity-building provided by AusAID should meet this standard. These comments apply only those courses promoted as Australia Awards. Ad-hoc and highly responsive approaches to training courses, such as those provided separately under the AAPF remain both very necessary and highly valuable (see also s3.2).

¹⁴ Note that the current (approximately 200) Canberra administered ALAFs would continue to be delivered under this scenario, their numbers would simply be augmented by the suggested ‘external’ ALAFs.

3.4 Role Delineation

The consultations conducted by the IPR team revealed significant confusion regarding the roles of AusAID and the contractor in relation to:

- Partner Government and Coordination Authority Engagement (and associated promotional activities)
- Populating an alumni database with individuals predating the contractors' involvement in AusAID scholarships in Africa

It is important to note that involvement of both parties in the above matters was necessary and unavoidable, so the IPR does not criticise the joint involvement to date. Rather, it is the confusion surrounding the delineation of roles that has created issues¹⁵. The expansion of AusAID's portfolio of HRD programs in Africa will likely exacerbate role delineation issues, not only with the AAA program, but also across all HRD programs. It is therefore an opportune point in time to consider how best to revise and clarify roles in relation to the issues listed above so that a new approach can be adopted that will serve the broader needs of the AusAID Africa program in the longer term.

The first requirement for rationalizing management roles across a more coordinated HRD portfolio is the development of a HRD Strategy covering all relevant programs. This is naturally an in-house task for AusAID, as it will span a number of separate contractors. The development of an overarching HRD Strategy is a necessary precursor to development of a shared HRD Promotional Strategy covering all relevant programs and the full spectrum of capacity-building tools (see s.3.2). Again, as this shared promotional strategy spans multiple programs and contractors, it will be necessary for AusAID to take a lead role in its implementation. This means that while some of the administrative and logistical tasks associated with its implementation would still be assigned to relevant contractors, all higher-level functions, including consistent and non-duplicative partner government/organization engagement, strategic planning and policy related decision-making would necessarily remain within AusAID¹⁶.

To support this consolidated approach to HRD programming within AusAID, it will be necessary to subsume the Africa Post's current scholarships unit into a broader HRD unit. Creating a combined HRD management structure within AusAID would allow for better-coordinated implementation of all existing and future HRD programs.

¹⁵ E.g. the 'doubling up' of approaches to CAs in some countries and inconsistencies in 'who does what' in different sub-regions; and ad-hoc approaches to dealing with opportunistically obtained 'names' of older alumni.

¹⁶ To leave this coordination role to the competing managing contractors responsible for separate programs is never likely to result in good practice due to their naturally competitive relationships. In reality, coordination-oriented negotiations between contractors always require strong AusAID arbitration and direction.

The creation of such a management structure also provides an opportunity to establish clear lines of command and communication, both within AusAID and between AusAID and HRD contractors, including the AAA managing contractor. This revised structure could be used to address both ‘mixed messaging’ issues associated with current management of AAA and attempt to break the current cycle of mutually defensive communication that has developed between AusAID and the AAA contractor (-as discussed in relation to operational issues: see s.4).

The reclaiming of such key strategic functions is in line with broader trends in AusAID scholarship program design¹⁷, which are based on lessons learnt in earlier programs that have:

- inadvertently lost the necessary level of control of strategic decision-making by outsourcing closely related operational functions;
- lost the ability to acquire and maintain key relationships and retain institutional memory in relation to award provision; and
- come to the realization that in many respects it is simply easier to do certain sensitive and strategically important work yourself, rather than continually scrutinize and iteratively redirect a contractor who is not directly privy to the rapidly changing strategic and policy environments existing within Government, and whose internal communications systems add an additional layer in which strategic direction and policy may be misinterpreted in application¹⁸.

Under a more integrated HRD strategy, the AAA program would need to be revised into a ‘partial facility’. Rather than servicing external stakeholders, this ‘facility’ component of the revised AAA program would service other AusAID programs. This approach simply recognises that Australia Awards are valuable capacity building tools that can and should be utilised across any AusAID development program that would find them relevant to achieving their desired outcomes. Thinking of a scholarship program as a stand-alone entity actively prevents Australia Awards from coordinating with other AusAID development efforts and thereby reduces both their development credibility and impact.

Encouraging the use of Australia Awards (and their precursors) as capacity building tools across entire country strategies has been AusAID policy for many years. To its credit, the Africa program has recently put this into practice through ad-hoc coordination between the AAA program and AAPF in the area of short course provision. Although a good start, this ad-hoc approach needs formalisation, especially in the area of maintaining appropriate Australia Awards’ standards (see s.3.3). Under

¹⁷ See the Aide Memoire for the Pacific Outsourcing Design. AusAID, July 2012.

¹⁸ In the AAA context, the development of an agreed set of Terms of Reference for the recently completed Gender Study provides an example of a task that took many months of iterative adjustments between AusAID and the contractor, but could have been completed much more quickly and efficiently if AusAID had simply kept this task in-house.

a partial facility approach, AAA would become responsible for assisting other AusAID programs (including, *but not limited to* other HRD programs) to utilize Australia Awards as capacity building tools. This would cover both long and short term award types, where relevant. The assistance provided by the AAA contractor would include advice as to the requirements for proposing or accessing an Australia Award and potentially some administrative and logistical assistance. However, a significant proportion of the associated workloads (including standardized M&E requirements) could be passed on to the recipient program (and/or to the course provider).

The maintenance of a useful alumni database that has reasonably complete historical content is an area that would need greater AusAID involvement in the context of a better-coordinated portfolio of HRD programs. No single program contractor would be capable of compiling the complete picture of alumni arising from application of the available spectrum of capacity-building tools in any one year, and no existing managing contractor, including the AAA incumbent, currently has the capacity to ‘backfill’ a database with entries that predate their involvement in AusAID scholarships in Africa.

To date, the AAA managing contractor has been responsive in attempting to update earlier entries based on opportunistic or anecdotal information gathering by their own or AusAID personnel. However, this opportunistic approach is neither effective nor sustainable in the long term, and is responsible for significant diversion of already stretched contractor administrative resources. To attempt to create or update full entries on the basis of only a name acquired in passing is not easy. Internet and other searches are only likely to succeed in the case of highly visible persons, and will not be useful in cases of most ‘standard’ development workers in Africa.

The best approach to backfilling would be to conduct a substantial ‘one-off’ tracing exercise. This exercise would be limited to identifying earlier alumni and obtaining the minimum mandatory information from them¹⁹. It would require specialist expertise in techniques for locating persons (to a non-intrusive extent), and could be systematically based on the historical records of AusAID scholars obtained from the Scholarships Section in Canberra and/or teaching institutions. Once this tracer exercise has been completed, its outputs would be accepted as the new and permanent baseline of alumni data to be kept up to date from that point forwards.

Centralised initiatives associated with Australia Awards alumni management that are currently underway make it a very good time to reform the AAA approaches to maintaining an alumni database. A global Australia Awards Alumni Database has just been launched. This is a centralised database that requires no IT support from Posts and is able to be updated *and searched* over a web-based portal. The mass uploading of existing AAA alumni data to this new database will soon make the current AAA contractor-maintained database redundant. Ongoing updating of the information in

¹⁹ It would have little methodological resemblance to a ‘tracer study’.

this central database will remain the responsibility of relevant Posts (or their contractors), but the creation of this permanently AusAID-owned resource would avoid well-documented problems associated with having transitory contractors manage long term information storage. In addition to the introduction of this centralised database, funds have already been made available to help improve the completeness and currency of the alumni information to be entered. Such funding may well be available to partially cover the cost of the tracer exercise suggested above.

It is recognised that AusAID is not in a position to markedly increase its own staffing in order to create a combined HRD unit, especially in regard to creation of new A-based positions. However, given the reform opportunities discussed above and the improved coordination of currently separate staff duties across different HRD programs, some redundancies may be removed and only a modest increase in O-based staffing (an additional 2-3 positions) and reassignment of a small number of existing A-based resources might be necessary.

The scope and specific details of AusAID restructuring and the various contract revisions required for such an approach is well beyond the scope of this IPR, and will (at least) require a partial redesign mission to determine. Recommendations provided in this regard are therefore offered as general rather than detailed guidance.

3.5 Strategic-level Recommendations

Recommendation 1

AusAID should:

- combine all of its existing and proposed human resource development (HRD) programs under a single management structure with clear and unambiguous lines of internal authority and contractor communication
- have this combined AusAID HRD unit develop and implement an overall HRD strategy that clearly identifies the capacity building tools available from AusAID and their appropriate application
- have this combined AusAID HRD unit formulate a related *joint promotional and partner government engagement strategy* that consistently pertains to all HRD programs
- enable the AAA program to be modified into a ‘partial facility’ with the aim of assisting other AusAID programs (including, *but not limited to*, other HRD programs) to utilize the various capacity development tools offered by Australia Awards, while also maintaining the ability to maintain a ‘base-load’ of direct award provision to ensure overall targets continue to be met.

Interim Recommendation 1a

AusAID immediately develop an action plan to begin bringing selected responsibilities for AAA partner government engagement, promotional, and alumni activities back to existing AusAID Scholarships staff.

Recommendation 2

AusAID utilise the proposed ‘tiered’ approach to rationalizing engagement in Africa to streamline (and therefore render more effective) HRD promotional workloads. In the case of HRD programs, including the AAA program, it may be best to limit the number of tiers to two levels. In the first (most engaged) tier countries, expanded promotional activities would be designed and implemented to more substantially engage potential employer agencies. In the second (lesser engaged) tier countries promotional activities would mostly target Coordinating Authorities, and would only expect to directly engage employer agencies opportunistically, such as through other AusAID programs.

Recommendation 3

Use the option available in the current managing contractor’s contract to extend their period of service for an additional period of one year, in order to:

- allow the necessary amendments to current roles to be clarified and contractual responses to be formulated
- provide an opportunity for the contractor to better demonstrate its ability to fulfil the broader requirements of the current Scope of Service.

Recommendation 4

The definition of Short Course Awards under the AA program be readjusted to: *“Opportunities for formal study or training, generally of less than 3 months duration, and no more than 5 months’ duration, delivered by an approved Australian higher education provider (see Table A, B, & C of the Higher Education Support Act 2003) or an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO), that while being customised to specific needs of recipients will, as far as practicable, also result in a formal statement of credit or attainment that is:*

- *recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)*;*
- *approved in accordance with state- specific legislative frameworks for Australian universities; or*
- *recognised under Australian Nationally registered Vocational Education or Training (VET) material.*

Standard notes:

1. In competitive bidding for course provision, preference will always be given to providers willing to formally recognise their own training delivery (through a statement of credit or attainment)

2. In cases where a qualification of any form can realistically be attained, opportunities to do so should be maximized. and this will also be viewed favorably in competitive bidding processes.

**Excluding school sector accreditation (primary and secondary) see:
<http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqfqual.htm>*

Recommendation 5

Selection processes for contracted short course providers, and bidding processes for specific course delivery to include a dominant selection criterion related to the providers willingness to provide accredited recognition of course completion. Such recognition may be made available on the basis of opt-in/opt-out assessment, if necessary, but any selection by a course participant to opt out of assessment would require written approval of their employer.

Recommendation 6

AusAID expand the permissible form of LTAs beyond solely Masters courses by allowing VET diploma or certificate courses of up to one year duration to be included in what may be applied for under long term awards in Africa. No target should be set for proportion of Masters versus VET courses provided as LTAs; rather this should be informed by demand identified in the application process.

Recommendation 7

The current range of contracted short course providers be reviewed to enable delivery of a greater percentage of VET-oriented short courses. Coordinating Authorities, line ministries and other employee organizations should be made aware that VET opportunities are available under the program and encouraged to identify relevant course topics at this level.

Recommendation 8

The delivery of VET-oriented long or short term awards be focused on ‘Tier 1’ countries (see Recommendation 2.), so that they are applied in a coordinated manner with higher level Australia Awards (e.g. post-graduate courses) to vertically integrate capacity development and thereby remove existing skills-based barriers to generating positive development impacts.

Recommendation 9

Prescriptive targets for private sector involvement in LTA provision be removed, and replaced with a stated aim to progressively increase private sector involvement from its current baseline.

Recommendation 10

Remove the PhD component from the program. If the benefits of retaining them are assessed to outweigh the streamlining opportunity represented by their potential removal, investigate the feasibility of the allocation of a set number of Australia

Award PhDs to CSIRO and/or ACIAR to administer and deliver should be considered to remove administrative and promotional redundancies.

Recommendation 11

The AAA program make full use of the opportunities related to alumni now offered by centralised Australia Awards initiatives, including use of the centralized alumni database, and potential partial funding for conducting a definitive ‘tracing exercise’.

4. Key Issues Affecting Program Operation and Performance

4.1 Overall Program Performance Issues

As discussed above, strong scepticism existed during the design and start-up of the AAA program regarding the feasibility of achieving the rapid scale up in award numbers proposed. The AAA monitoring data indicate that these output targets were achieved, and no catastrophic incidents were reported during this scale-up period.

The IPR team found that credit for this achievement needs to be shared between both the contractor and AusAID. Both have played clear roles in shouldering the massive workloads that delivering these targets has required, and both have been instrumental in addressing issues that, left unchecked, could potentially have become catastrophic problems.

However, the delivery of output targets alone is not a clear indication of overall program success, and many other aspects of implementation have had problems.

- There are challenges with the gender representation in the program. This encouraged a gender study that identified key areas to focus on in order to increase gender equity. At the time of this report these findings and recommendations had not been shared and therefore the IPR team could not assess their feasibility or useability.
- The program has been slow to encourage alumni networks. A strategy now employed by GRM International is to conduct regional workshops that encourage engagement with alumni and the formation of alumni associations. This has resulted in the development of at least one alumni association recently established in Uganda.
- Targeted promotional strategies are only now starting to show progress, and this progress has been limited.

- Outcome level monitoring is still in a nascent and somewhat ‘work-in-progress’ form. While this might be partially attributed to a lack of significant numbers of long term award returnees to date from within the lifespan of the AAA program, the program did have responsibility for two returning long term award cohorts from the previous program and generated significant numbers of short course award returnees.
- Long standing vacancies in mid-level and technical advisory positions within the MC has impeded delivery of quality-oriented aspects of the program.
- Change management has not been well planned.

4.1.1 Key AusAID Performance Issues

Attention to detail by AusAID operational staff

AusAID operational staff provided sustained support to the implementation of AAA. This support was needed to ensure the AAA processes met set targets and delivered quality outputs. Attention to detail by AusAID operational staff was largely responsible for maintaining quality products in relation to partner government liaison and program promotion. While the contractor sometimes interpreted AusAID’s attention to detail as ‘micromanagement’, the IPR team identified multiple past and on-going examples of GRM lapses in quality control in external correspondence and other externally targeted material. This suggests that AusAID’s sustained close scrutiny of GRM International’s work in these areas was necessary for ensuring quality. While some of the mutually defensive communication dynamics that this close scrutiny has generated are unfortunate, it does not negate the demonstrated need for such scrutiny.

Inconsistent messages from AusAID to GRM International

One sustained problem in AusAID’s oversight of AAA is inconsistent messages provided to the MC. A number of AusAID A-based officers have had responsibility for providing direction to the MC and this direction has not always been consistent. There have been examples of simultaneous conflicting direction being given, and initial direction being given by one officer and then rescinded by another at a later stage. These mixed messages had several results. First, the mixed messages negatively influenced partner government liaison and promotional areas due to inconsistency in approaches. Second, it impacted on the MC’s ability to set management directions. Third, it made the contractor’s expected role in more strategic areas less certain. For example, in some cases the contractor was directed to take the lead in contacting

partner governments, while in other cases they were instructed to excuse themselves from related meetings²⁰.

This ‘mixed messaging’ issue needs to be addressed urgently as the relatively recent split of award management within AusAID, to now include an additional Scholarships Counsellor position, is widely perceived to have exacerbated the problem. More consistent and regular information sharing with relevant AusAID staff prior to interacting with the MC would be extremely useful. As this problem is not wholly personality driven, modifying AusAID staffing frameworks and communication mechanisms would also assist in addressing this issue.

4.1.2 Key Contractor Performance Issues

Responses to the scale-up in award numbers

The contractor was instrumental in successfully achieving the scaling up of award numbers to meet targets. AusAID would not have been able to meet these targets without the resources and other assistance provided by the contractor. In working with AusAID, the contractor has been willing to rapidly adapt to changing process requirements and AusAID policy revision²¹. While the level of success of innovations introduced by the contractor has been variable, there has always been a willingness to respond to requests.

Some responses, especially those related to selection processes and development of associated IT tools within SCHOLAR, have been successful and well regarded. While there is a perception that there is more to be done to streamline selection process workloads, there is recognition that many improvements have been made.

Responses to other aspects of the program

The outcomes of other contractor responses have been regarded as less favourable. At times the responses have appeared to be based on misinterpretation of what AusAID wanted as an end product (e.g. early attempts at promotional material, the initial gender study terms of reference and some issues with outcome-level M&E data targeted). One explanation proposed for this performance issue is that the MC’s higher leadership appears to primarily promote an academic or educational approach to delivery of scholarships, rather than AusAID’s required ‘capacity-building for development outcomes’ focus.

²⁰ The scope of services identifies AusAID as being responsible for partner government engagement.

²¹ Including the introduction of the Adviser Remuneration Framework

IPR interviews with senior contractor staff did not reveal any lack of awareness of the intended development focus of the program, but there remains an ongoing over-emphasis on monitoring of process-oriented output data and collection of outcome data that disproportionately identifies individual benefits. A lack of firm planning for the collection of outcome data to provide for analyses of verifiable, development-related actions by alumni, potentially contributes to this ‘academic bias’ perspective – especially in comparison to other AusAID capacity-building programs such as the Africa Australia Partnership Facility (AAPF).

A complicating factor in the MC’s gathering of outcome data that emphasizes individual benefits, has been the apparent creation of a misperception within HOMs and other diplomatic stakeholders that this is what the scholarships are legitimately meant to achieve. This perception has subsequently generated an increased demand for these types of welfare-oriented ‘good news stories’ (rather than development-related ‘good news stories’). This type of emphasis on welfare-related reporting and publicity has generated a high degree of public and institutional cynicism in Australia regarding the validity of scholarships as an aid delivery mechanism. This cynicism is understandable; given that both AusAID and ACFID have strict policies that (except in the case of humanitarian emergencies) forbid the use of aid funding for welfare-oriented activities.

In relation to process/output data, the MC was often challenged by AusAID to provide ad hoc data in a very short time frame. For most of the first two years of the program the contractor did not have systems in place that allowed rapid extraction and presentation of this data. The need to prepare ad-hoc responses to these requests placed significant strain on the MC’s resources, and diverted them from other pressing tasks. This problem appears to have been addressed recently by upgrading the SCHOLAR system.

Another responsiveness-related issue that appears to negatively influence AusAID’s perceptions of contractor performance was an apparent tendency for the contractor to agree to some requests too readily or ambitiously. Subsequent ‘reality checks’ related to on-the-ground constraints or resourcing issues resulted in the MC occasionally withdrawing or downgrading initial commitments or, in some cases, failing to deliver them on time. The IPR noted that in a number of these cases (e.g. production of a new [versus updated] AAA website by September 1st, this year) the requests were largely outside the MC’s existing contractual requirements. However, the MC must take some responsibility for creating the expectation within AusAID (and subsequently within their whole-of-government partners, coordinating authorities and potential candidates) that these products were to be delivered.

Mutually Defensive Communication

The development of a mutually defensive approach to communication between AusAID and the contractor is discussed earlier in this report. A mitigating

consideration in the development of this mutually defensive approach may have been the late finalization of initial contracting of GRM to begin processes for the first intake of AAA. This late finalization of the contract resulted in compressed timelines and placed extreme pressure on GRM for rapid program start-up in order to begin the scale-up process. This ‘busyness’ was likely a contributing factor in generating early quality assurance lapses in regard to external correspondence and other matters. Although relatively minor in nature, these quality assurance lapses have continued throughout later intakes thereby sustaining the need for close scrutiny by AusAID of minor program outputs. The mutually defensive approach to communications needs to be addressed on both sides, but it will be difficult to do so while such quality assurance lapses continue.

4.1.3 Performance Related Recommendations

Recommendation 12

AusAID should use the opportunity presented by consolidation of an overarching AusAID HRD program in Africa to streamline and clarify lines of decision making and communication thereby ensuring unambiguous directions from AusAID to the AAA MC.

Interim Recommendation 12a

Current overlaps between AusAID staff responsible for direction of the MC, in relation to both short and long term courses, to be clearly identified and related interim protocols to be developed for avoiding conflicting direction.

Interim Recommendation 12b

The current schedule of fortnightly inter-regional forums between AusAID scholarships staff should be expanded to include fortnightly meetings of key staff with duties that are separated along long and short course lines.

Recommendation 13

Both the MC and AusAID should take greater care when suggesting or approving tasks that are outside the existing scope of services. Approval for such additional tasks should only be given in cases where additional associated workloads do not divert resources from other critical tasks.

Recommendation 14

Greater direct involvement by AusAID in partner government engagements, promotions and alumni activities, should be used to reduce the potential for minor mistakes and diffuse the mutually defensive communications.

Recommendation 15

The MC should continue to review and hasten implementation of its recruitment processes, particularly in relation to advisory and mid-level staff.

4.2 Assessment of the Program against DAC and AusAID Criteria

The IPR's terms of reference require that the team respond to eight key evaluative questions. To avoid extensive repetitiveness in this report the evaluative questions from the terms of reference have been mapped to relevant DAC and AusAID criteria that need to be addressed under an IPR. This mapping is as follows:

| Evaluation Criteria | Related Primary Focus Questions (pages 3-4) |
|----------------------------|--|
| Relevance | Q1 & Q2 & Q8 |
| Effectiveness | Q1 & Q2 |
| Efficiency | Q3 & Q4 & Q7 |
| Sustainability | Q5 |
| Gender Equality | Q5 |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | Q6 |
| Analysis & Learning | Q4 & Q5 & Q6 |

Hence the responses to these questions constitute the discussion of each criterion. A summary of scores against each criterion is provided at the end of section 4.

4.3 Responses to Terms of Reference Questions

Question 1: With reference to the five focus countries, are the program objectives being achieved? (Relevance & Effectiveness)

Objective 1: AusAID alumni within African government agencies develop and apply sound policy and practice relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors, and in additional areas of demand.

While the IPR team collected data with regard to this objective, the sample size was limited. In the public sector of each country visited, the IPR team identified that the majority of alumni met were able to provide verifiable examples of development-related policies or practices they have used their award-gained skills to contribute to since their return. Many alumni from earlier AusAID scholarship programs gave strong examples spanning a decade or more of contributions; demonstrating a

sustainability of benefits that is rare in most aid programs. While these earlier alumni predated the current program, there is no reason to believe that recent changes to the program have affected the ability of alumni to deliver such long-term contributions.

While the IPR cannot fulfil the role of an impact evaluation, a wide range of contributions were identified, including²²:

Long-term Awards

An alumnus now designs and facilitates national cabinet processes, including translating cabinet decisions into policy and issuing directives to related implementing agencies.

An alumnus set up and runs the Research, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Section of the Ministry of Finance to deliver new products like a local market price indexes, etc.

An alumnus revised curricula and supervises delivery of nursing courses offered in government health services institutes

An alumnus designed and implemented government-sponsored youth training in rural areas

An alumnus now oversees Reserves Management and Financial Risk Management at National Reserve Bank

Two Alumni, one older, one more recent, have each (sequentially) been on the core drafting teams of the last two successive 5-year National Development Strategies (the latest version included strategies for meeting all relevant MDGs)

An alumnus conducted baseline studies of disabled persons and their issues, and developed and implemented responsive government policies/programs of assistance to disabled persons. Also the alumnus developed volunteerism programs as a low-cost means of assisting disabled persons.

An alumnus developed and implemented government programs designed to improve linkages between small farmers and potential markets.

An alumnus developed and implemented national health and nutrition policies, reproductive health policies and programs and became chair of the Forum for African Women's Education in home country. Also set up self-help groups for people living with HIV.

²² Note associating these contributions with specific alumni is problematic as IPR interviews were conducted in-confidence.

An alumnus conducted a Functional Review of all government line ministries, developed the National Training Policy and National Performance Management Policy.

An alumnus developed and applied economic modelling necessary to provide GDP growth projections to government.

An alumnus designed and provided national extension services to maize and corn farmers, food processors, and other industry players

An alumnus provided analysis of agricultural market information for use by government and related industries (food security)

An alumnus undertook a study of the effects of irrigation on market prices of food crops (food security)

An alumnus developed and implemented a pilot program on small feedlot dairy production in peri-urban areas.

An alumnus undertook a study of post-harvest loss in food production (food security)

Short-Term Awards (including ALAFs)

An alumnus was able to digitise geologic survey maps that had only been available in (non-updated) hard copies since the Soviet era.

Alumni were able to provide digital cartographic services to government agency responsible for geologic survey.

An alumnus developed a data management policy for the (entire) public service.

This small sample of outcomes is a good indication of the types of findings available on a much larger scale, if M&E instruments focus on the collection of the right forms of data (see Annex 1.)

***Objective 2:** AusAID Alumni within African non-profit civil society and African development organisations develop and apply sound operational policy and practice, including collaborative engagement, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors.*

There were few IPR team interactions with alumni that are currently working in the non-profit civil society sector or in African development organisations. While the data are limited, they did provide some indication that these alumni are also contributing to development in their sub-sectors and to the public sector, with the few that were interviewed providing examples of how they supported government policies and rollouts of health government health programs. Additional impact research

specifically targeting this alumni group is needed before any firm conclusions are made about success against this objective.

Objective 3: AusAID alumni within African commercial private sector organisations develop and apply sound corporate policy and practice, including industry linkages, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified subsectors.

Issues associated with private sector involvement include the reluctance of commercial organizations to allow their staff to take the long term leaves of absence necessary for them to undertake long term awards. The program has usefully applied short term awards to address these issues, but private sector involvement remains problematic (see s3.1 C). Alumni rarely demonstrated the maintenance of sustained linkages with Australia. This also applied to public and civil society sectors. In a few identified cases where such linkages still existed, they were mostly of a personal nature. Inter-alumni links were also found to be relatively rare and weak in most countries visited, especially at a professional level. Exceptions included inter-country (in Africa) networks of recently returned SCA alumni.

Objective 4: Recognition of Australia as an active partner in African development.

Identifying how and to what extent Australia is recognized as an active partner in African development proved challenging. In terms of raising the profile of Australia as an African development partner within the public sector, the program has only had significant success at the highest levels of governments. These higher levels of governments are generally senior staff of agencies directly engaged in the program (e.g. coordinating authorities) or senior government officials and politicians contacted through AusAID or DFAT diplomatic efforts. This higher-level success in increasing the profile of Australia is important given broader aid program policy objectives, but for such an increase in profile to become sustainable, it will need to eventually penetrate further into the more operational levels of governments. AusAID alumni from earlier programs working within the public service knew very little about recent (< 3 years) changes to the program. Senior line ministry HR staff from countries that were not newly engaged by the AAA program were also generally unaware of any recent changes.

Question 2: With reference to the five focus countries, what unintended consequences (positive or negative) is AAA having? (Relevance & Effectiveness)

The team identified the following positive unintended consequence of changes to scholarship provision introduced under the AAA program:

- Reduction in risk of fraud and an increase in transparency in selection processes. Strong AusAID involvement in selection processes has included detailed reviews of applicant pools, close scrutiny of short-listing outcomes, chairing of interview panels and moderation of final selections. While some of this earlier involvement was regarded as a necessary response to quality issues associated with the

outcomes of managing contractor approaches, the high level of AusAID participation has significantly reduced the risk of fraudulent or corrupt activities within selection processes. This risk has been further reduced through the recent introduction by the contractor of a set process for dealing with 'exceptions'.

For the last AAA intake, this exception process allowed for the provision of additional assistance to deserving candidates to complete applications that would otherwise be deemed incomplete and therefore ineligible. The high percentage of incomplete applications received to date has meant that the provision of such 'follow-up' assistance on applications is necessary, but the growing total number of applications received has rendered it impossible to provide such assistance to all applicants.

The exception process allows program officers to select incomplete applications deserving of further assistance, but in doing so they must document the reasons for making each selection against a set of fixed 'exception criteria'. Both the relevant senior program officer and the LTA or SCA manager review these selections and justifications before any approval to allow an application to proceed further is given.

While this exception process was primarily designed to overcome an untenable increase in workload, the probity checks included have successfully avoided an otherwise inevitable risk-laden situation in which the need to identify exceptions in an ad-hoc manner provided opportunity for fraudulent or corrupt activities. It should be noted that the IPR team does not feel that such risks of fraud were high amongst contractor staff, but the actions taken by both the contractor and AusAID have increased the resilience of program selection systems to potential probity problems.

The IPR Team identified the following negative unintended consequences of changes to scholarship provision introduced under the AAA program:

- The failure of the program to communicate existing options for maximizing line ministry involvement in supporting and influencing applications from their staff led to some problems. HR staff of previously engaged line ministries reported a feeling of disempowerment. For example HR staff that did know of some changes in the selection approach adopted under AAA pointed to the use of direct applications as a factor that has disempowered their involvement in putting forward candidates. Further there was a general lack of awareness of how to be engaged in the new process by past and newly engaged line ministries.

This perception by line ministries' HR personnel is a dangerous misconception. These HR staff need to be made aware that AusAID would welcome line ministries responding to calls for applications by reviewing their HR needs (within stated priority areas), identifying appropriate staff to apply, identifying

appropriate courses for these staff to undertake, and assisting their preferred applicants to complete high quality applications, including employer endorsement and input in reintegration planning. Deepening the penetration of targeted promotion to line ministry HR staff would be likely to result in far less resistance to the improved transparency of AAA application systems²³ and an improvement to the average quality of applications from the public sector.

This relatively shallow level of engagement is regarded as a consequence of fact that the involvement of all African nations in the program has spread the available promotional and engagement resources, both within the contractor and AusAID, very thinly across the continent. It is unlikely that this situation will improve without some rationalization of this engagement or a significant boost in promotional and engagement resource.

- Weakening the definition of what can constitute a short course award (SCA) under the Australia Awards banner for the African program has led to a situation in which it is often difficult to separate these SCAs from more ad-hoc capacity-building efforts.

One result of this has been confusion between the roles and outputs of the AAA program and other capacity-building programs, such as the Australia Africa Partnership Facility (AAPF). This confusion has been noted amongst candidates, coordinating authorities and program staff. Another consequence of this poor delineation of Australia Awards from ad-hoc short courses or other ad-hoc capacity-building exercises is that, if it is allowed to continue, it will eventually result in an inability to separate and report specifically upon delivery and impact of Australia Awards in Africa. This is a serious issue, given that AusAID is not the sole manager of Australia Awards and that such separate reporting is a necessary requirement of the overall Australia Awards program.

In contradiction to the use of the weaker SCA definition, the IPR Team also found a strong preference within line ministry staff and alumni that SCAs offered under the Australia Awards banner include internationally recognised assessment and accreditation. While they did not expect a full qualification of any kind, many alumni and HR staff interviewed wanted the short courses to partially contribute to attaining a qualification. For line ministries this consideration links directly to their desire to increase their levels of appropriately qualified staff. While most people interviewed also value more ad-hoc training options as provided by programs such as AAPF, these ad-hoc opportunities do not meet this particular agenda, and are therefore a potential strength of the SCA modality.

²³ Which was consistently supported by applicants.

- The mutually defensive approach to communications that has developed between AusAID and the managing contractor has had the highly undesirable effect of placing a great deal of stress on lower-level, operational staff of the MC. The word “fear” was mentioned in several MC interviews. For example, a disproportionate “fear” of making even minor errors is now not uncommon and has led to these staff being reluctant to embrace changes, especially given that a large number of changes have been happening very rapidly. This fear within such operational staff has resulted in some resistance to innovation, even when it was universally agreed that such innovation would be beneficial in the longer term. From the perspective of lower level staff, these reactions appear understandable. It is the responsibility of higher contractor management to ensure that change management measures are sufficient to mitigate such effects at lower levels.
- The rapidity of the scale up in numbers of awards under the AAA program was responsively met by the managing contractor; with a number of positive and innovative changes made to operational practice, including streamlining of parts of the selection process. The rapidity of this change created an additional problem; the contractor’s change management and technical systems were not able effectively or efficiently manage this high rate of change. This problem was further exacerbated by a lack of staff training (other than on-the-job training), a reactive Quality Assurance Manual and the absence of a clear change management strategy. In short, the contractor appears to have attempted to persist in attempting to conduct processes in traditional ways until it became apparent that they were no longer feasible, rather than proactively plan for new and predictable operational scenarios.

Question 3: Where do the elements of the program that contribute or reduce program effectiveness and efficiency lie? (Efficiency)

To what extent are existing management arrangements (including staffing) appropriate for delivering up to 1,000 scholarships across the African continent?

The rapid and adaptive change necessary to achieve the output targets heavily stressed both AusAID and the MC’s operational staff capacity. This situation was made worse by: (1) AusAID’s partially ambiguous management/communications structures that created mixed messaging to the MC, and (2) the fact that a number of the contractor’s mid-level and short-term adviser staff positions remained vacant for long periods and/or experienced significant turnover in personnel. These factors intensified change management issues, because program direction was less clear, and rapid ‘catch-ups’ were required when MC positions were filled with new staff who often needed to reform past practices that were no longer viable. At the time of this review several MC positions still remain empty.

The stress imposed by meeting output targets has also resulted in a reduction in the quality of the MC's workflow management. In practice this meant that self-tasking within the contractor often became reactive rather than forward-planned. Examples include not processing applications as they arrived (because relevant operational staff members were engaged in other duties) and leaving logistical arrangements for recent PhD interviews until the last minute due to immediate pressures to complete Masters interviews. In some cases this appeared to negatively influence the PhD process with panel members receiving the wrong information and being unprepared for the interviews. It should also be noted that the additional pressure placed on the PhD interview process was partially a result of AusAID Canberra revising forward the timelines for finalization of successful candidate lists.

Mitigating factors such as the need to respond to unforeseen difficulties associated with an unprecedented scale-up, mixed messaging from AusAID, and agreeing to additional tasks outside of the TOR, predisposed the MC to these problems. Yet the MC could have positioned itself better to cope with largely predictable challenges by addressing internal issues such as having a full complement of staff, providing staff training and adapting key systems earlier, rather than at crisis points.

A final issue with regard to management arrangements relates to AusAID requests outside of the TOR, and the MC's acceptance (and at times suggestion) of those additional tasks (e.g. development of a 'new' website, etc.), with or without requests for associated additional funding. While accepting additional duties is partially the contractor's prerogative, AusAID also needs to take stock of existing contractor performance before adding additional work, or accepting the MC's suggestion of additional work not already specified in the Scope of Services.

Some contractor contributions had both positive and negative aspects on program management. For example, changes to the (AusAID owned) SCHOLAR information system enabled streamlining of real-time information flows amongst the MC, selection panels and real-time AusAID oversight of selection processes. The systems new 'Moderation Tools' were widely appreciated by AusAID and led to more effective and efficient processes. On the other hand, it would appear that the desire to 'keep everything electronic' has created a momentum that resists reform in some areas, such as the current time-consuming practice of uploading all documents from all applications, even those that are clearly incomplete or of very poor quality. This additional labour-intensive task affects the quality of all information uploaded on the system (as the increase in workload negatively impacts data quality assurance), and therefore affects operation of selection and interview panels.

Document the efficiencies and innovations that have been introduced during implementation and consider how responsive the MC has been to the changes AusAID has requested?

The rapid up scaling of award numbers has necessitated considerable innovation by the contractor. The identified innovations have included: (1) streamlining of the selection process, including incorporating an 'exceptions process' to allow efficient

and transparent targeting of application-related assistance to the most deserving candidates; (2) updating of SCHOLAR to include ‘applicant checklists’ which has provided selection and interview panels better access to candidate information and allowed real-time AusAID oversight of selection processes; and (3) the deployment of Moderation Tools within SCHOLAR which has added considerable efficiency to the final selection stage.

In regard to responsiveness to requests made by AusAID, the contractor has attempted to be responsive in most circumstances involving major requests, but in some cases appear to have unwisely over-committed themselves and therefore failed to deliver. Cases in which the contractor has been relatively non-responsive have included filling of long-standing vacant positions (e.g. the gender adviser) and improved quality assurance of external correspondence. While the latter example appears relatively minor, it has played a very significant role in the development of mutually defensive approaches to communication between AusAID and the MC, as well as associated perceptions of micromanagement. This problem has in turn had significant impact on effectiveness and efficiency of the program.

How have the main changes from the original design (especially Professional Development Awards being replaced by Australian Leadership Award Fellowships and using a different model for in-Africa Short Course Award delivery) affected efficiency and effectiveness of AAA delivery?

The findings in the IPR suggest that the decision not to proceed with the introduction of Professional Development Awards (PDA) was appropriate. As the design document for the program indicated, these PDAs were expected to potentially be the most labour intensive awards to implement. The level of difficulty encountered to date in meeting the scale up targets suggests that including PDAs in this mix would not have been achievable. The introduction of ALAFs as one substitute has been useful and had the added benefit of further reducing AusAID Africa and contractor staff workloads and overall program costs (ALAFs are largely administered and funded centrally by the AusAID Scholarships Section).

The relaxing of the definition of what constitutes a short course award under the Australia Awards has also been useful in achieving overall target numbers of awards. However, as this definition now fails to effectively differentiate Australia Awards from more ad-hoc approaches to training (e.g. the two week courses providing only a ‘certificate of attendance’ offered under the AAPF), it is not sustainable. The IPR team has already observed evidence of confusion regarding what constitutes an Australia Award during interviews with candidates, partner governments and both AusAID and contractor operational staff. An inability to report specifically on the delivery and impact of Australia Awards will result in the longer term. This is unacceptable given that Australia Awards is a Whole of Government initiative with its own specified reporting requirements. Now that the scale up has been largely achieved, it is therefore necessary to consolidate this achievement by revising the existing definition of AAA Short Course Awards into one that is more sustainable and aligned to centralized policy.

IPR consultations with alumni and employers suggest that they already have the expectation that any short course completed under the Australia Awards banner will at least provide some type of formally recognised training. Although they do not expect that short courses will necessarily lead to a full qualification, they do expect that their successful completion of such an Australia Award would provide recognised ‘credit’ (e.g. a formal transcript of achievement) towards a qualification that might be used in later study. The fact that the ‘certificates of participation’ provided by some current short courses delivered under the Australia Awards program in Africa do not necessarily constitute this level of recognition was received with serious concern and disappointment by both institutions and individuals²⁴.

Pressure to relax the original definition of Short Course Australia Awards used under the AusAID African program has often come from potential Australian-based course providers. This is problematic, as the Australian tertiary institution lobby has been a key champion for the firm linking of Australia Awards to accredited Australian institutions and recognised curricula standards. It should be noted that the current relaxed definition of SCAs used in Africa defeats this objective, as without the link to upholding formal Australian curricula standards, the relaxed definition effectively allows Australian providers to avoid upholding the same formal standards that they are governed by in Australia. Without this link to Australian standards under a formal Australia Awards program, the rationale for maintaining the link to provision solely by Australian institutions therefore becomes questionable from a development effectiveness perspective.

Bidding and proposal processes appear to reveal that some institutions have perceived a greater level of difficulty in regard to adhering to a more rigid definition of Australia Awards than others. This may be a reflection of the willingness of different potential providers to adapt and change their approaches to delivery of recognised and accredited course content. It would therefore appear that some institutions are far more willing to be adaptive and innovative than others. Given this variation and the need to maintain recognised Australian standards under the Australia Awards banner, it is therefore recommended that this responsiveness to meeting accredited standards be used as a selection criterion for tender and proposal assessment in future²⁵. This may have the effect of shifting some of the balance of selection preference towards the VET (Vocational Education and Training) sector, but this would be competitively appropriate and would also address a strong demand for more practical, technical training identified by the IPR team within many line ministries.

²⁴ Note that there is no suggested implication that all capacity building provided by AusAID should meet this standard. These comments apply only those courses promoted as Australia Awards. Ad-hoc and highly responsive approaches to training courses, such as those provided separately under the AAPF remain both very necessary and highly valuable.

²⁵ I.e. their response to the ‘as much as possible’ clause in the suggested definition given in Recommendation 8.

The IPR team recognise that the ALAF component of the program is not required to meet the same standards as suggested here for SCAs. This is because the AusAID system of LTAs, SCAs and ALAFs (in Africa, used as a replacement to the PDAs of the original design) form an intentional spectrum ranging from highly formal opportunities for study, to more flexible and response ones. Hence, the definition of SCAs cannot be as relaxed as the definition used for ALAFs, because this would defeat the purpose of creating SCAs as a middle point on that spectrum. The application of ALAFs under the AAA program was useful, both in terms of reducing workloads and cost. To date, ALAFs have been regarded as heavily supply-driven, with providers having little interaction or integration with the rest of the AAA or broader AusAID Africa program.

Question 4: Is the MC effectively delivering the services specified in the Scope of Services (Schedule 1) of Contract 57041? (Efficiency and Analysis & Learning)

Assess the quality of the services delivered by the MC to date, including their administrative systems and resourcing;

Administrative systems and resourcing have been problematic. Specific issues identified include turnover of key MC staff, key MC staff positions not filled, shortcomings in effective systems to manage the award application processing and on-demand, output reporting. Some long-standing vacancies have recently been filled, and the MC has improved SCHOLAR to better manage their selection processes and output reporting.

The quality of LTA awards was generally regarded, by both alumni and employers, as high. Key issues raised included the overemphasis of higher academic opportunities (i.e. Masters) at the expense of more vocational and practice-oriented qualification. This was a very common theme presented to the IPR team by line ministry supervisors and HR officials, particularly in the agriculture and mining sectors. One senior HR official estimated that the most appropriate ratio of higher academic opportunities to VET opportunities needed in these fields should be around 1:4. Another official who was also an SCA alumnus gave a practical example of this problem by stating that from his experience in Australia he had learnt that subsurface irrigation systems may be very useful in his local agricultural context, but that neither he, nor his operational staff (nor anyone else in his country), had the technical know-how to install such systems. In the interests of improving development effectiveness of the AAA program, this LTA focus on Masters courses requires careful reconsideration. A shift to also allow up to one year VET diploma or certificate courses as LTAs would have the added benefit of reducing the potential cost impact of the immanent shift to standardised 2 year Masters courses in Australia.

The demand for more VET focussed SCAs was found to be equally strong, with many alumni suggesting that the courses they attended were ‘too theoretical’, and supervisors/HR officials wanting to see more applied learning. While the program

already provides some ‘train the trainer’ opportunities at the VET level under SCAs, this needs to be expanded to allow direct tuition in more specialized fields.

Greater expansion into VET short course awards would also overcome a potential objection to the tightening of the SCA definition to encourage provision of official transcripts of credit to awardees. It has been suggested that one barrier to provision of such credit is that it creates a barrier to participation in SCAs, because providers would be obliged to check the ability of candidates to be enrolled in the course from which the accredited material and assessment are drawn. However, this barrier only exists if providers wish to maintain that only Masters or Degree level material and assessment be used in relation to SCAs. Entry requirements to VET level SCAs would be minimal. Even the relaxed definition of SCAs used in Africa explicitly allows any level of study to be targeted, but a universal misconception appears to have developed within AusAID and MC staff that the short courses need to target post-graduate level.

The quality of SCAs offered under the AAA program to date has varied. Most alumni and employers were generally satisfied with administration provided by course providers, but indicated a number of areas in which improvements may be made:

- More opportunities to practice and apply learning need to be incorporated into courses
- More vocational level courses and content should be offered
- Provision of translation services and recognition that it is neither efficient or effective to try to run all short courses only in English
- Care needs to be taken to ensure that all course participants have roughly equivalent prior knowledge and that teaching does not target those that already have higher levels of prior knowledge than is the norm.

With regard to language issues, while the original design for the AAA program included an ability to provide translation services (up to and including the delivery of entire courses in relevant languages), this does not appear to be happening.

It would seem obvious that if AusAID wishes to target non-English speaking parts of Africa it is necessary to deliver some courses (or at least provide simultaneous translations of presentations and course material) in the languages spoken in the various countries and regions involved. Some Alumni reported highly disruptive scenarios in which they and large subsets of their classes were receiving simultaneous tuition and English language training. This is not a conducive approach to learning for the non-English speaking candidates as they found that by the time their English proficiency was sufficient to understand the presentations, they had missed the prerequisite learning they needed to understand the material presented. The

English speaking candidates also reported that they found this ‘teach half the class English as you go’ approach very disruptive to their own learning.

From the limited information available to the IPR team it would appear that the main resistance to provision of translation services for short courses has come from course providers themselves, though this needs to be further researched. This is unacceptable, especially given the relaxation of the formal definition of short course awards to date. Often the largest hurdle to foreign language delivery of accredited Australian course content is that delivery other than in English requires an additional approval process. With the link to accredited course material effectively broken by the relaxed definition used for SCAs in Africa, there would appear to have been very little impediment to delivery of courses in other languages.

While this report also recommends the necessary revision of the SCA definition to re-establish appropriate standards in Australia Awards delivery, it should be noted that the Australian approval processes for delivery of accredited course material in other languages were created to be applied to precisely the types of challenges faced by this AusAID program. The fact that it is an additional requirement placed on course providers is simply a critical challenge of operating in a professional international development environment. It is therefore suggested that an ability to meet foreign language delivery requirements be used as a key selection criteria when assessing bids. Those institutions unable to meet such routine challenges of operating in a professional international development environment should rightly have selection biased against them in bidding processes.

The approach adopted by AAPF has also revealed that it may be possible to have short course providers be more responsible for the logistic and administrative support needed by participants. This shift of some of the administrative workload to the short course providers may assist the MC to place more time on the quality assurance aspects of program management. It would also serve to ensure that course providers face the full implications of designing courses that included more than two countries of delivery (i.e. Australia and one African country). While multi country delivery is not discouraged, it does add very significant administrative burdens relating to logistic and visa requirements. Having providers face these administrative burdens when suggesting non-standard approaches would ensure the overall efficiency of delivery (both academic and administrative) is maintained.

Other, more practical, problems reported in relation to perceived quality of award provision related to the difficulties associated with bringing families along on award stays. These problems were regarded as particularly significant for women with young children, and may be a very significant barrier to increasing the pool of available female candidates. More easily addressed problems included a lack of guidance as to where to book appropriate interim accommodation (for LTA awardees, where required). A number of awardees reported selecting accommodation from the

Internet, only to find themselves in inappropriate backpacker (dormitory) style accommodation on arrival.

The IPR team also encourages the consideration and implementation of the recommendations as specified in the Gender Study (2012).

Issues associated with the PhD component of LTA provision usually pertained to the disproportionately high workloads associated with their delivery. These PhD awards were often seen as a 'high-prestige' option, rather than more proven development mechanisms, but the fact that partner governments had very little engagement in the provision of these PhD, especially in regard to selection of relevant research topics, also raises doubts as to the related diplomatic impacts of such awards.

In short, there was a perception that offering these PhDs may simply be not a value for money option. The fact that ACIAR already provides Australian PhD scholarships in Africa adds a redundancy aspect to this issue. The provision of PhDs under the program and their usefulness to achieving the program's objectives are areas that need careful reconsideration.

Consider whether the level of AusAID resourcing allocated to AAA is reasonable, particularly to provide strategic direction for the program and to support the MC's delivery. Recommend how AusAID could be organised more efficiently bearing in mind that it is unlikely AusAID will be able to allocate further human resources to AAA. Compare the Contractor Performance Assessments and resourcing of GRM with those of the Australia Africa Partnership Facility (AAPF), the other pan African capacity building program. Recommend how the two initiatives could collaborate to create further efficiencies and learn from each other.

AusAID resourcing to AAA programs has been appropriate to date, but the need for detailed oversight of the contractor (due to identified lapses in quality assurance of some outputs) has stretched these resources to their maximum limit. The suggestion to consolidate AusAID management structures across all HRD program, including the return of greater responsibilities in regard to partner government engagement, promotion and alumni to AusAID staff (see Recommendation 1 & 1a), would require a revision of the current staff numbers. However, this is unlikely to exceed an addition 2-3 O-based positions and the reallocation of at least one A-based position to an alumni focus. This increased tasking of AusAID staff would naturally imply the 'moving' of the need for such resources from the contractor to AusAID, so the overall resource requirement would largely remain unchanged.

Question 5: How effectively are enhanced AAA design elements being implemented

i. Promotions, Public Diplomacy and Communications

Data collected suggest that the effectiveness of the promotions varied. With regard to identifying sufficient numbers of acceptable candidates, the promotions appear to be

adequate in the countries reviewed. There were some criticisms regarding the ‘one-liner’ used to emphasize the recruitment of women and the disabled (namely that both of these groups were mentioned simultaneously), although some data suggested that having this in the advertisement did at least encourage women to apply for the scholarship.

The use of newspaper advertisements and word of mouth appeared to be the default means of attracting applications in the countries reviewed. This is generally regarded as an adequate approach to attracting sufficient numbers of applications, but the very high percentage of incomplete or poorly completed applications received would suggest that it is not an efficient means of attracting quality applications.

There is considerable room for improvement with regard to direct promotions within line ministries and other private or civil society organizations. In regard to civil society, a quick interim measure might be to utilize existing AusAID links to NGOs operating in Africa through ANCP and similar programs. This would have the added benefit of further integrating scholarships with other programs that fall under the combined AusAID strategy for Africa.

One consequence of this lack of substantive engagement within the public sector line ministry level is that the SCAs offered to date have been strongly biased towards delivery by universities, and biased against more practical and hands on and vocation-specific learning opportunities that could be offered by TAFE and other VET sector RTOs. The IPR team recorded a very strong and urgent demand for lower-level practical learning opportunities (especially in the agriculture and mining sectors), but also noted a prevalent lack of awareness that such courses could be offered. Line ministries were also largely unaware of their options for assisting their favoured candidates to compete for awards (including appropriate endorsement in work plans on return, and more practical measures such as assisting them to submit complete applications). This suggests that promotional and engagement activities can be greatly enhanced.

In fairness to the MC, the bias against VET sector courses to date can be nominally explained by an apparent greater effort from universities in proposal and bidding processes. However, this is not a fully satisfactory explanation, because the IPR team also found that many line ministries were unaware that such practical level courses were potentially on offer under the program (and within the Australian tertiary education system). They were therefore failing to request such courses through their relevant CAs. While this issue is currently mostly relevant to SCAs, it is also recommended that, given the very clear demand for VET opportunities, the sole focus of LTAs on Masters level courses should be reconsidered to allow for diploma and other long term VET courses.

ii. Ancillary Awards

In the countries visited the ancillary awards appeared to be a useful part of the overall program design.

Ancillary awards appear to be operating efficiently. Most awardees who undertake these awards, meet the upgraded English proficiency required to undertake an LTA in Australia. Awardees suggested a number of operational modifications (e.g. the allowance for a reunion airfare in longer [9 month] ancillary awards), but also identified benefits in being able to network with their eventual AAA cohort prior to departure. The numbers of ancillary awards provided to date are considerably less than projected by the design, but the contractor has suggested that there may be more room for using these awards to promote inclusion of women and the disabled in the LTA component of the program. Other stakeholders also suggested targeted use of ancillary awards to actively increase the inclusion of awardees from non-English speaking countries.

iii. Reintegration Planning

Please refer to the more detailed response to Question 6 and the approach consequently suggested by Annex 1.

iv. Alumni engagement

Alumni engagement is an area of relatively poor performance by the program, though one that appears to be gaining some momentum in the last few months. For example, as the result of a GRM workshop that targeted all types of Australian alumni, Uganda started an official alumni chapter in April of this year that includes all Australian alumni. It needs to be noted that the options for progressing alumni engagement stipulated by the scope of services are limited. The MC could be said to have now addressed these contractual requirements, albeit often in a somewhat cursory manner. The problems associated with alumni engagement are therefore better viewed systemically as an issue that requires a response from within both AusAID and the MC²⁶.

One key area of broadly perceived underperformance in relation to alumni is in the development and maintenance of a useful alumni database. To be useful, this

²⁶ For example, other AusAID programs have recognised that creating alumni associations with no self-sustaining functions does not work, and have started approaching the establishment of such associations more as establishment of 'professional associations'; membership of which confers some enhanced professional recognition.

database will need to include alumni from intakes and return cohorts preceding this program, and maintain up to date positions and contact details of all inclusions.

The level of difficulty associated with achieving these apparently modest requirements is extreme. AusAID (both in Africa and corporately) needs to bear some responsibility for this problem, as its own systems for maintaining records of past award provision have not been robust. In a context in which the contributions of contractors cannot be guaranteed to be continuous, problems with maintenance of database contents is predictable.

The current contractor only has a clear obligation for maintaining entries created during its engagement²⁷. The MC has been responsive in attempting to update earlier entries based on opportunistic or anecdotal information gathering by itself or AusAID. However, this opportunistic approach is neither effective nor sustainable in the long term, and is responsible for significant diversion of already stretched contractor administrative resources. To attempt to create or update full entries on the basis of only a name acquired in passing is not easy. Internet and other searches are only likely to succeed in the case of highly visible persons, and will not be useful in cases of most 'standard' development workers in Africa. This suggests the need for more focussed and separately resourced tracing exercises.

Note that such tracing exercises would be limited to identifying earlier alumni and obtaining the minimum mandatory information from them. This would require specialist expertise in techniques for locating persons (to a non-intrusive extent), and could be systematically based on the historical records of AusAID scholars obtained from the Scholarships Section in Canberra and/or teaching institutions.

v. Gender equality

The MC conducted an intensive gender study this year and a more in-depth look at gender can be reviewed in that report. This IPR confirmed many of the gender study findings that listed barriers to women's participation. These barriers included the 'weak' statement on including gender as part of promotion and the lack of support for bringing young children (some as young as 2 months) or families along on award stays.

The implementation of gender related measures under the program was significantly impeded by the longstanding vacancy of the gender specialist position within the contractor. Key effects of the absence of gender expertise were the significantly delayed production of a gender study (and an associated gender strategy) and the continuing lack of clear guidelines for how the Gender Access and Equity Fund may

²⁷ Given the MC was also responsible for the previous iteration of the program, this extends back to approximately April 2004.

be used. A result of the latter example is that this fund is yet to be substantively utilised, mainly because operational staff do not know what uses can be permitted.

From an AusAID corporate policy perspective there is an additional challenge regarding the role of the 50% gender target in maintaining gender sensitivity of the program. There are fears that this blanket target may be unrealistic in the African context, particularly in relation to the Public sector, and that this unrealistic target is potentially having perverse negative effects on broader gender issues. In many of Africa's smaller countries women are severely under-represented within public and private sector workforces. This is largely due to the lack of prerequisite educational and other career advancement opportunities.

This situation requires redress, but simply assuming that there exists an unrestricted supply of women with necessary prerequisite foundational skills available to undertake Australia Awards may not be a 'do-no-harm' compliant solution. It is not difficult to identify scenarios in which women have been pushed up in selection preference merely to help attain the current target. While this type of affirmative action may be beneficial up to a point, if the program goes beyond this limit it will potentially amount to systemically setting women up for a higher rate of failure than males. Employers who review performance statistics of returned awardees may then mistakenly conclude that female candidates are less worth sending for such opportunities.

The IPR team suggests that a rapid assessment be carried out to identify the available pools of suitably eligible women in the public sectors of targeted recipient countries, and this information be used to adjust equality expectations in these countries to match these country-based constraints. To illustrate this point, consider a targeted government sector within a country that has 13 suitably eligible women working within it. Over the course of a number of years, it may be possible to offer all of these women awards. The program would therefore meet the 'best possible' target of providing 100% of available women with awards. However, given that there may be hundreds of suitably qualified males within this sector, and that total awards numbers in the country may be high, this may not come close to achieving a 50% ratio of inclusion of women. It is possible to moderate this effect over a number of sectors and countries, but not if the sectors are those which traditionally favour male employment.

If the program is serious about gender equity, it will therefore need to expand the opportunities available to women in a more gender sensitive manner that includes both selection of a different range of priority sectors and a range of courses with lower entry requirements (e.g. VET courses). Both long and short course awards could offer valuable opportunities in this regard.

In short, the program appears to have a choice about 'getting serious' about assisting women to participate in the program, or 'getting realistic' about setting gender targets.

As already discussed, just attempting to blindly adhere to abstract targets has the potential to create perverse and negative effects on women at a range of levels.

vi. Disability inclusion and access

The disability inclusion and access approach adopted by the program has generated examples of both problems and successes. Unlike the Gender Access and Equity Fund guidance for the use of the Disability Access and Equity Fund was developed relatively early in the life of the program. The MC has used this fund to help a significant number of participants (e.g. the provision of medical assessments and other assistance to an awardee in order to obtain use of an appropriately fitted wheelchair while in Australia).

One challenge is that some people with disabilities do not disclose them, particularly those with disabilities that can be 'hidden', and these disabilities do not become apparent until the person is on the program and it is too late to assist them properly. Some examples of this include persons with depression or other similar disorders that were identified only at the time of the participant having significant problems after their arrival in the country of study. This problem impedes the development of early coping strategies and also has implications for insurance coverage of awardees.

Meeting blanket targets for disabled persons' participation in the program has similar issues with the meeting of blanket gender targets. A means of addressing the blanket target for disability inclusion that has already been used by the MC is to allow this target to include participants working in the disability sector. This is a worthwhile modification, provided it is only used to fill the gap between the available disabled participants and the target.

vii. Private/civil society participation

In Uganda there were several examples of alumni from the private sector that had used their new skills, knowledge and abilities to effect change when they returned. All of these examples were in the health sector and many of the examples of change related to working with or supporting government policy and programs.

The participants from the private sector often had different challenges than those in the government sector, namely: (1) they sometimes had difficulty obtaining their supervisor's signature on the application form, and (2) that they had to resign from their current positions in order to accept the scholarship. This meant that they returned to their home country with no job security. This was especially challenging for the single mothers in the program.

When the IPR team was able to identify alumni from this sector, these alumni were consistently able to provide examples of useful development outcomes from the application of their award skills.

viii. Open application processes

Alumni generally commented very favourably on the ‘open’ application process. Most felt that the process was very transparent and encouraged them to apply. For example several mentioned that they saw the advertisement in the paper, applied, and were awarded scholarships, ‘and we didn’t even know someone.’ Most Coordinating Authorities consulted had reservations about their ‘loss of control’ under the new system (with only Uganda being an exception to this rule). While this reaction is predictable, more needs to be done by the program to inform CAs (and line ministries) of how to make best use of the open and competitive process. Many CAs currently just see the new system as ‘an absence of a fixed quota’, and are not aware of appropriate strategies for competitively profiting from this system by encouraging line ministries to support submission of higher quality applications.

ix. Management of critical incidents and study issues.

An omission from the current Quality Assurance Manual (QAM) has become apparent in view of recent events. These events concern issues involving awardees who have experienced difficulties while on award, or on return. These types of ‘critical incident’ events are generally undesirable and therefore currently sit outside the scope of standard QA processes. However, while the exact nature of such incidents may be unpredictable, in a program of this size it is certain that unforeseen problems will occur when arranging international activities for such a large and diverse cross-section of people. If addressed in an ad-hoc manner, such incidents have the potential to draw program staff away from their core duties to a highly disproportionate degree.

A contingency measure is therefore needed to address these issues. The simplest approach would be to recognise that these incidents will happen and internalise responses to them through pre-specified mechanisms. It is therefore suggested that a ‘Critical Incident Management Team’ be created, with key persons being allocated to this team on an ‘on-call’ basis. Constitution of the team would include relevant advisers and higher management of GRM, but would also need to encompass key AusAID, DIAC and DFAT staff. The need for broader representation is driven by recognition that responses to such critical incidents will be creating important policy precedents for AusAID Australia Awards. AusAID representation on this standing team should therefore, if possible, extend to AusAID Scholarships Section staff.

The maintenance of a critical incident log, including documentation of precedents set and lessons learnt, should be an additional responsibility of this critical incident management team.

It is acknowledged that this measure is similar to contingency planning relating to security incidents, and the team composition could be designed so that both types of incident could be addressed and logged.

Question 6. To what extent is the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) information provided by the MC useful, and being used? (Monitoring & Evaluation and Analysis & Learning)

1. To improve accountability;

Both AusAID and the MC demonstrated the use of basic output data to monitor the program, albeit with AusAID sometimes reflecting on the difficulty of obtaining the data that they needed and the MC reflecting that ad hoc requests for data sometimes presented a challenge. However both organizations were able to track and then confirm the delivery of over 1000 scholarships. On-award monitoring of the participants was also undertaken to a satisfactory level, often through the use of standard AusAID instruments and systems available for this purpose.

2. Tell a positive story about AAA impact;

AusAID Scholarship programs generally, and the AAA program in particular, have consistently faced ‘credibility issues’, in terms of not being perceived as valid development assistance. It is easy to simply become defensive in the face of such perceptions, but it needs to be recognised that much of the M&E information ‘traditionally’ collected by AusAID scholarship programs has actively promoted this unfavourable perception.

This traditional type of information was heavily influenced by an academic or educational interpretation of the purpose of scholarships by implementers. This led to the collection of a wealth of perceptual (satisfaction-based) data and the use of indicators that tended to focus on the effect on the individuals involved (rate of promotion, etc.). While this provided for reporting of many heart-warming stories of ‘how the scholarship made a huge difference in a recipient’s life’, it has actively damaged the reputation of scholarships as a valid aid delivery mechanism.

Most development related institutions (including AusAID and ACFID) make a clear distinction between delivery of ‘development’ and delivery of ‘welfare’, with ‘development’ necessarily generating broader and sustainable effects on communities or countries, and ‘welfare’ providing personal benefits to individuals. Except in response to humanitarian emergencies, AusAID and ACFID policies actively oppose the provision of welfare using aid funding. Hence, the type of personal effects traditionally recorded as outcomes by AusAID scholarships programs strongly reinforce the view that scholarships are ‘not real aid’. Note that the problem is not that scholarships produce individual benefits, rather that the programs try to ‘get

credit for them' in a development context, when such benefits are not the appropriate goals of an aid intervention.

While it is easy to argue that scholarships are simply a capacity-building tool and that capacity-building is a necessary element of development theory, the reality of the current situation is, that by gathering the 'wrong data', the subsequent lack of more valid and meaningful outcome data (e.g. verifiable examples of how alumni have applied their skills since return) means that programs do not yet have a defensible and robust basis upon which to make a clear assessment of the true development effectiveness of this form of aid.

The approach adopted to date by the M&E systems of the AAA program makes these classic errors, and urgently needs to refocus its outcome-level data collection and analyses to the approach suggested in Annex 1.

A significant benefit of changing scholarship M&E in recognition of these factors is that programs could stop collecting a lot of ultimately unusable and inappropriate data, and focus solely on gathering valid development effectiveness information. This change will amount to a significant reduction in M&E workloads. Recent AusAID Scholarships Section guidance on application of reintegration plans has strongly promoted this reform process²⁸. Annex 1 of this report presents a synopsis of how this reformed and streamlined guidance on reintegration plans might be applied in the context of AAA.

3. Contribute to continuous improvement of AAA;

Evidence that the information is systematically gathered under the existing M&E framework for use in improving processes and direction of the AAA program is difficult to find. The Quality Assurance Manual is continuously updated, but this occurs largely on an ad-hoc basis, rather than in response to systematic monitoring. Responsiveness is commonly generated through external requests.

4. Using the IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation report as a starting point, recommend how the M&E framework for AAA may be improved to strengthen its usefulness, ensuring that it is a practical and useful instrument to guide AAA;

Given the IPR findings relating to poorly focussed and inadequate collection of basic outcome data (particularly in regard to development effectiveness), the team does not support the introduction of the complex and adaptive systems approach to M&E suggested in the IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation. There is an urgent need to successfully implement more simple and direct approaches to outcome monitoring, and this should be demonstrably achieved before any more involved or untested approaches are considered. This position is not intended to challenge the validity of complex and adaptive systems theory and associated M&E approaches. Even the

²⁸ It is hoped that Tracer Study guidance will also soon follow suit.

'Most Significant Changes' approach, currently applied to some outcome monitoring under the AAA program, is considered too unfocussed at this stage²⁹.

The IPR team therefore recommends that the outcome components of the AAA M&E framework be refocussed on the application of work plan-on-return tracking (reintegration plans) and tracer studies. The content of these instruments should be revised to primarily collect verifiable examples of practical uses of award-acquired skills by alumni. Successfully communicating to alumni the form of practical example required in this approach is challenging, but tests conducted by the. The IPR team found that gathering practical examples required only modest additional effort (see summary of examples provided in Annex 2).

Question 7. How effective are current AAA selection processes for both long term and short course awards and how could they be improved? (Efficiency)

i. Are the processes sufficiently transparent and if not, what can be done to improve transparency?

There are a number of factors positively contributing to the transparency of the AAA selection processes (see response to Question 2). The level of transparency is generally appreciated among applicants, with even the occasional coordinating authority candidly admitting that the transparency involved in 'open' application processes prevents many of the potential abuses associated with (past) direct nomination by partner governments.

ii. Consider the benefits, issues and risks of organising group interviews for LTAs, particularly the resourcing requirements.

Assessment of the option of using group interview approaches to reduce workloads is not straightforward. Perceptions that this approach may save interview effort need to be tempered by the recognition that group interviews cannot be held in the form of a 'focus group' meeting. Valid group interview approaches require much more involved facilitation techniques and resources. The high risk of visa violations by African scholarship recipients also calls into question the comparative value of a group interview as an informal screening tool for necessary 'character assessment'.

²⁹ In that it is too easily diverted into collection of data concerning effects on individuals, rather than development outcomes.

Question 8. What are the implications to AusAID and the MC of refocusing key aspects of AAA promotions, engagement and M&E to fewer countries, while continuing pan-Africa award access? (Relevance)

The overall AusAID approach for engagement in Africa is currently under review. This review is looking at how best to rationalize engagement in with different countries and regions. It will likely result in some form of ‘tiered’ arrangement, delineating the different levels of engagement to be attempted in each country.

This IPR will not attempt to pre-empt the findings of such a review but, given that the resources available for promotional activities and other engagement with stakeholders are limited (both within the contractor and AusAID), such rationalizations would be of significant benefit to the program and would assist in focusing available resources to increase promotional and engagement efforts in priority countries. In lower priority countries engagement could still be maintained indirectly through other AusAID programs (including ANCP partners) operating in these locations, as well as by other relevant institutional linkages with Australia (e.g. through CSIRO or ACIAR). This approach would work well with the partial facility model for future AAA implementation proposed in the recommendations of this report.

4.4 Recommendations Arising from Responses to Evaluative Questions

Recommendation 16

That the outcome level components of the AAA M&E framework be urgently refocussed in line with data collection and analysis approach suggested in Annex 1 of this IPR.

Recommendation 17

The program should focus on achieving a basic degree of relevant outcome monitoring before considering expansion into any more complex approaches to M&E, including those proposed in the *IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation report*

Recommendation 18

Course providers should be required to provide simultaneous translation of short course delivery, as necessary.

Recommendation 19

Consideration be given to passing on a greater degree of responsibility for administrative and logistic workloads associated with short course delivery to course providers (including responsibility for awardee travel and visa acquisition), particularly when non-standard delivery options are proposed.

Recommendation 20

Consider using ancillary awards to further increase the participation of women, disabled persons and candidates from non-English African speaking countries in the LTA component of the program.

Recommendation 21

Conduct a rapid review of target organisations to assess real world availability of female candidates and use of this information to review blanket targets or reassess reporting against blanket targets. AusAID should consider how addressing gender and equity issues fits in with the larger overall HRD strategy.

Recommendation 22

The option of provision of awards to both disabled persons and people working in disability sectors as a means of addressing disability targets should be continued provided care is taken to ensure that this does not impede the persons living with a disability from accessing awards.

Recommendation 23

A Critical Incident Management Team should be created for addressing unforeseen problems faced by applicants, awardees or alumni, and the creation of this team and the procedures for them to follow be reflected in amendments to the QAM.4.5 Ratings against each Criterion

Table 2.

(Please note: this is an overall assessment and is not directly always reflective of contractor performance)

| Evaluation Criteria | Rating | Explanation |
|---------------------|--------|---|
| Relevance | 5 | All forms of award constitute tools that can be used to address necessary capacity building conditions for generating development impact. This was confirmed by all stakeholders. |

| Evaluation Criteria | Rating | Explanation |
|----------------------------|---------------|---|
| Effectiveness | 3 | <p>The information gathered directly by the IPR provided consistent evidence of significant development impacts by returnees. Linkages were less well achieved. Raising the profile of Australia has been achieved at higher levels within partner governments, but penetration of awareness of how to benefit from the program needs to be extended into line ministries, if the maintenance of this improved profile is to be sustained.</p> <p>The IPR team had limited exposure to private and civil society sectors and therefore reserves its judgement on associated impacts.</p> <p>The program's own systems for collecting outcome information used to date were often anecdotal or perceptual and were therefore not of much use in making the above determinations.</p> |
| Efficiency | 4 | Scale-up targets were met well within schedule. The joint effort between AusAID and MC staff that made this possible was mutually defensive at times and this resulted in iterative tasking that did not at times rather than cooperative. This lost some efficiency |
| Sustainability | 5 | General development impacts of alumni appear to be significant and sustained over many years (and in some cases decades). Provision of targeted assistance to alumni to maximize their development impact is only cursory and has not been broadly implemented to date. |
| Gender Equality | 3 | While gender targets have been met, the MC has neglected a number of key requirements of the SoS for much of the program life to date. A Gender Study has only just been completed, and the Gender Equity and Access Fund has been under-utilized to date because of a lack of clear guidelines defining what constitutes legitimate use. The application of blanket gender targets may be unrealistic and consequently require approaches to selection that are damaging to gender sensitivity of the program. |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | 3 | Systems for tracking basic output data has significantly improved. Tools used for collecting outcome and impact level data should be revised to focus on collection of more relevant data. |
| Analysis & Learning | 4 | The MC and AusAID appear to be continually attempting to identify improvements to the program, particularly in selection processes and have been implementing these as the need arises. However, this has largely been a reactive process, and there are areas of improvement that have been neglected (promotional approaches and M&E systems). |

Rating scale: 6 = very high quality; 1 = very low quality. Below 4 is less than satisfactory.

5. Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This Independent Progress Report (IPR) found that the Australian Awards in Africa program has been successful on a number of levels. The level of visa overstays and Protection Visa issues have been far lower than anticipated in the design's risk assessment, approximate gender balance has been maintained in the award provision and inclusive and supportive participation by a significant number of persons living with disabilities is also evident. The failure rate of AAA awardees has been extremely low, suggesting that the selection approaches used are obtaining quality candidates. The IPR team found that the AAA program has registered appropriate impacts in development, linkages and improved Australian profile in the region, and has achieved the targeted scale-up of award numbers.

The IPR team recognises that achieving the targeted scale up in award numbers is a commendable achievement, however, partially as a result of 'mixed messaging' coming from AusAID and partially as a result of an ongoing lack of quality assurance by the managing contractor in certain areas, the relationship between AusAID and the contractor was not an entirely cooperative one. There are also indications that some diversion of already stressed contractor resources into areas not covered by the scope of services has occurred. Consequently, parts of the Managing Contractor's scope of services were addressed only in a belated or cursory manner.

While the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems of the program are one area that was addressed quite early in the program, a more focussed and usable outcome level M&E approach needs to be undertaken to be able to defensibly assess whether the program has succeeded in fulfilling its objectives³⁰ and whether the degree of success is commensurate with the resources invested.

Promotional activities, especially to line ministry level, have not been highly successful; resulting in a number of misconceptions about the program amongst targeted employers. These promotional shortcomings will need to be addressed if the benefits of the program are to become sustainable.

Some means must also be developed of facilitating the use of the various Australia Awards HRD (capacity building) tools across all relevant programs. This will require a revision of the provision of AAA as a stand-alone program and will have implications for both external contracting and internal AusAID management. Creation

by AusAID of contracts that incorporate a service provision function for other AusAID programs will be necessary and a restructure of AusAID work units and associated roles is needed to allow AusAID to play an expanded role in producing and implementing a combined HRD strategy and an associated shared promotional plan (applying to all HRD programs).

The fact that this program has achieved the targeted scale-up of award numbers well within the intended timelines is an achievement that is strongly commended by the IPR team. This achievement was a joint effort between AusAID and the MC in which both parties played critical and indispensable roles. From this basic standpoint the program should be considered successful in an overall sense.

5.2 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

AusAID should:

- combine all of its existing and proposed human resource development (HRD) programs under a single management structure with clear and unambiguous lines of internal authority and contractor communication
- have this combined AusAID HRD unit develop and implement an overall HRD strategy that clearly identifies the capacity building tools available from AusAID and their appropriate application
- have this combined AusAID HRD unit formulate a related *joint promotional and partner government engagement strategy* that consistently pertains to all HRD programs
- enable the AAA program to be modified into a ‘partial facility’ with the aim of assisting other AusAID programs (including, *but not limited to*, other HRD programs) to utilize the various capacity development tools offered by Australia Awards, while also maintaining the ability to maintain a ‘base-load’ of direct award provision to ensure overall targets continue to be met.

Interim Recommendation 1a

AusAID immediately develop an action plan to begin bringing selected responsibilities for AAA partner government engagement, promotional, and alumni activities back to existing AusAID Scholarships staff.

Recommendation 2

AusAID utilise the proposed ‘tiered’ approach to rationalizing engagement in Africa to streamline (and therefore render more effective) HRD promotional workloads. In the case of HRD programs, including the AAA program, it may be best to limit the number of tiers to two levels. In the first (most engaged) tier countries, expanded promotional activities would be designed and implemented to more substantially engage potential employer agencies. In the second (lesser engaged) tier countries promotional activities would mostly target Coordinating Authorities, and would only expect to directly engage employer agencies opportunistically, such as through other AusAID programs.

Recommendation 3

Use the option available in the current managing contractor’s contract to extend their period of service for an additional period of one year, in order to:

- allow the necessary amendments to current roles to be clarified and contractual responses to be formulated

- provide an opportunity for the contractor to better demonstrate its ability to fulfil the broader requirements of the current Scope of Service.

Recommendation 4

The definition of Short Course Awards under the AA program be readjusted to: *“Opportunities for formal study or training, generally of less than 3 months duration, and no more than 5 months’ duration, delivered by an approved Australian higher education provider (see Table A, B, & C of the Higher Education Support Act 2003) or an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO), that while being customised to specific needs of recipients will, as far as practicable, also result in a formal statement of credit or attainment that is:*

- *recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)*;*
- *approved in accordance with state- specific legislative frameworks for Australian universities; or*
- *recognised under Australian Nationally registered Vocational Education or Training (VET) material.*

Standard notes:

- 1. In competitive bidding for course provision, preference will always be given to providers willing to formally recognise their own training delivery (through a statement of credit or attainment)*
- 2. In cases where a qualification of any form can realistically be attained, opportunities to do so should be maximized. and this will also be viewed favorably in competitive bidding processes.*

**Excluding school sector accreditation (primary and secondary) see: <http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqfqual.htm>*

Recommendation 5

Selection processes for contracted short course providers, and bidding processes for specific course delivery to include a dominant selection criterion related to the providers willingness to provide accredited recognition of course completion. Such recognition may be made available on the basis of opt-in/opt-out assessment, if necessary, but any selection by a course participant to opt out of assessment would require written approval of their employer.

Recommendation 6

AusAID expand the permissible form of LTAs beyond solely Masters courses by allowing VET diploma or certificate courses of up to one year duration to be included in what may be applied for under long term awards in Africa. No target should be set for proportion of Masters versus VET courses provided as LTAs; rather this should be informed by demand identified in the application process.

Recommendation 7

The current range of contracted short course providers be reviewed to enable delivery of a greater percentage of VET-oriented short courses. Coordinating Authorities, line ministries and other employee organizations should be made aware that VET opportunities are available under the program and encouraged to identify relevant course topics at this level.

Recommendation 8

The delivery of VET-oriented long or short term awards be focused on ‘Tier 1’ countries (see Recommendation 2.), so that they are applied in a coordinated manner with higher level Australia Awards (e.g. post-graduate courses) to vertically integrate capacity development and thereby remove existing skills-based barriers to generating positive development impacts.

Recommendation 9

Prescriptive targets for private sector involvement in LTA provision be removed, and replaced with a stated aim to progressively increase private sector involvement from its current baseline.

Recommendation 10

Remove the PhD component from the program. If the benefits of retaining them are assessed to outweigh the streamlining opportunity represented by their potential removal, investigate the feasibility of the allocation of a set number of Australia Award PhDs to CSIRO and/or ACIAR to administer and deliver should be considered to remove administrative and promotional redundancies.

Recommendation 11

The AAA program make full use of the opportunities related to alumni now offered by centralised Australia Awards initiatives, including use of the centralized alumni database, and potential partial funding for conducting a definitive ‘tracing exercise’.

Recommendation 12

AusAID should use the opportunity presented by consolidation of an overarching AusAID HRD program in Africa to streamline and clarify lines of decision making and communication thereby ensuring unambiguous directions from AusAID to the AAA MC.

Interim Recommendation 12a

Current overlaps between AusAID staff responsible for direction of the MC, in relation to both short and long term courses, to be clearly identified and related interim protocols to be developed for avoiding conflicting direction.

Interim Recommendation 12b

The current schedule of fortnightly inter-regional forums between AusAID scholarships staff should be expanded to include fortnightly meetings of key staff with duties that are separated along long and short course lines.

Recommendation 13

Both the MC and AusAID should take greater care when suggesting or approving tasks that are outside the existing scope of services. Approval for such additional tasks should only be given in cases where additional associated workloads do not divert resources from other critical tasks.

Recommendation 14

Greater direct involvement by AusAID in partner government engagements, promotions and alumni activities, should be used to reduce the potential for minor mistakes and diffuse the mutually defensive communications.

Recommendation 15

The MC should continue to review and hasten implementation of its recruitment processes, particularly in relation to advisory and mid-level staff.

Recommendation 16

That the outcome level components of the AAA M&E framework be urgently refocussed in line with data collection and analysis approach suggested in Annex 1 of this IPR.

Recommendation 17

The program should focus on achieving a basic degree of relevant outcome monitoring before considering expansion into any more complex approaches to M&E, including those proposed in the *IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation report*

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A Critical Incident Management Team should be created for addressing unforeseen problems faced by applicants, awardees or alumni, and the creation of this team and the procedures for them to follow be reflected in amendments to the QAM.4.5 Ratings against each Criterion

Table 3. Recommendation Priority and Responsibility Matrix

| Rec. # | Type | Priority | Responsibility |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa and Schols Section)</i> |
| 1a | <i>Interim</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 2 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 3 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa); AAA MC</i> |
| 4 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa and Schols Section)</i> |
| 5 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID(Africa and Schols Section); AAA MC; Course Providers</i> |
| 6 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID(Africa and Schols Section) ; AAA MC; Course Providers</i> |
| 7 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID(Africa); AAA MC; Course Providers</i> |
| 8 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID(Africa); AAA MC; Course Providers</i> |
| 9 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa); AAA MC</i> |
| 10 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 11 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa and Schols Section)</i> |
| 12 | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 12a | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 12b | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 13 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa); AAA MC</i> |
| 14 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AusAID (Africa); AAA MC</i> |
| 15 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AAA MC</i> |
| 16 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID (Africa and Scols Section)</i> |

| | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------|--|
| 17 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID(Africa and Scols Section)</i> |
| 18 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Course Providers; AAA MC; AusAID (Africa and Scols Section)</i> |
| 19 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>Course Providers; AAA MC; AusAID (Africa and Scols Section)</i> |
| 20 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 21 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID (Africa and Scols Section)</i> |
| 22 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>Medium</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID (Africa)</i> |
| 23 | <i>Operational</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>AAA MC; AusAID(Africa and Scols Section)</i> |

Annex 1. Revising Reintegration Plans (RPs)

Rough Guidance –currently being refined across a number of programs

Introduction

Scholarships Section guidance on Reintegration plans has recently been revised. This revision recognizes that early ‘good practice examples’ of reintegration planning were inadvertently based on formats used by programs that incorporated a substantial component of direct human resource management capacity building within a set of selected recipient institutions. Any prescriptive approach for defining a plan of action and then checking whether this plan is adhered to is only feasible or logical for programs incorporating such components.

Other programs, (including AAA) face a much more non-linear (unpredictable) results environment. In such environments attempting to constrain alumni contributions within prescriptive plans is not only impractical, it is also potentially counterproductive. For example by constraining alumni/employers to doing what they initially agreed, the program may prevent them from utilizing unpredicted opportunities to achieve more relevant or useful results). The new AusAID guidance recognises these factors and allows for a much simpler and more flexible approach to reintegration planning and tracking. This annex uses this new guidance to develop options for RP revision in the Africa context.

Important Update: Please note, since this annex was drafted DFAT guidance has moved further along these lines with set format and incorporation of case studies into the system already successfully trialled. Any modification of M&E systems for Award programs should therefore also refer to this latest guidance and testing.

Purpose(s) of Reintegration Plans (RPs)

There are three valid purposes for doing reintegration plans.

The most relevant two are:

- As initial selection tools. The quality of thought that goes into how a candidate intends to use the skills gained from an award provides a solid and additional selection criteria.
- As a ‘basis’ of tracking development (or linkage) contributions made post-return by alumni (i.e. outcomes). For reasons explained below, this ‘basis’ should be a very loose one in most circumstances.

The other purpose is useful, but less measurable:

- As a performance enhancement tool. The RP can encourage candidates to think about how they can realistically use the new skills they will gain, so they can better position themselves to do so on return. This is something that

would be largely done ‘on faith’ as it will be quite hard to measure if it ever really makes much difference.

Rationalization of Reintegration Plans

A number of key issues arise that should guide rationalized approaches to use of reintegration plans:

- The first issue is that if you are using RPs in a way that does not satisfy one of the above purposes, you are wasting effort.
- Secondly, if you do not explicitly recognise which purpose(s) you are attempting to address with your use of reintegration plans, you are likely to develop very inefficient (i.e. very over-complicated) instruments.
- Compromising good survey design principles in attempts to streamline analysis is false economy.

The first issue guiding rationalization is pretty clear. If you are not addressing a valid purpose, why are you doing RPs? No one should do RPs, just for the sake of doing RPs.

The second issue guiding rationalization is a little subtler, but has significant ramifications. If we are doing an initial RP for a selection purpose, an updated one (say just before return) for a performance enhancement purpose, and some post-return updates as outcome monitoring, then each phase of RP use has a separate purpose, and there is no logical need to have them ‘intimately connected’. For simplicity, put aside the pre-return update, and consider it this way:

If a candidate gives us a set of worthwhile ‘intentions’ before departure, do we really care if those particular intentions are fulfilled, provided they do produce development impacts. Also, would we rather that alumni were adaptable enough to make the optimal use of all and any appropriate opportunities that arise for use of their award-based skills? If we merely encourage them to ‘stick to plan’, we may well be unintentionally constraining/discouraging them from taking opportunities to do even better things.

In practice, it is very apparent that the temporal employment environment faced by most awardees is ‘non-linear’³¹. Under such conditions a reintegration planning and tracking approach that assesses how well awardees stick to their initial plans is making the survey design error of ‘mismeasurement’ –it wishes to measure development outcomes, but actually measures how well a candidate can predict the future.

Given this consideration, post-return updates of reintegration plans need not be complicated, inter-related comparisons of past intentions and actual achievements –they just need to collect the actual achievements made.

³¹ In real terms, this just means it is highly unpredictable.

Note: it is recognised that these considerations fall on a spectrum. RPs associated with short courses may not face such a high degree of unpredictability, and even longer-term scholarship programs that are highly integrated with HR planning of specific institutions³² may be able to plan with a bit more certainty (-and may also want to inject a bit of institutional accountability). However, experience shows that most of AusAID's current long term Scholarships do operate in a largely non-linear employment environment, even (if not especially) those in 'Public' categories.

The third point affecting rationalization is simply the need to practice good survey design that explicitly recognises the purpose of the survey instrument and does not defeat those purposes. A common problem of more complex RPs is that they often ask respondents to 'pre-codify' the responses, regardless of the impact of this on data quality. This allows for 'easy' later analysis, but is very dangerous. For example, using questions like "Which development related sectors do you intend to contribute to?" and "Which MDGs do you intend to contribute to?" with response options that require checking of appropriate option boxes in set lists.

Yes, this approach makes later analysis easy, but it also makes it largely meaningless for two reasons:

1. If you are doing an initial reintegration plan for the purpose of assessing how well a candidate has thought about the development contributions they wish to make, then these checkbox approaches mean you are not just leading them to the extent of 'telling them the answers we want to hear', but you are not letting them answer anything badly! This defeats the purpose of using the results to separate those candidates who have put some real thought in responses from those who have just randomly checked boxes. In short, such approaches are critically flawed in regard to generating RPs of differentiable quality³³.
2. The checkbox approach effectively asks respondents to categorize their own responses.. The problem with this is that respondents are not (and cannot be) trained in maintaining consistent classification.. For example, different respondents may well classify the same achievement under different sectors or MDGs. So while responses come in pre-classified form from such approaches, there is no basis to ensure that the classification is consistent. An inconsistent classification is not a valid or useful classification. Hence, while analyses will be easier, they will also be largely meaningless.

Proposed Changes

³² In fact, the current over complication of RP usage can be traced to their genesis in the Philippines program. These early RPs were (rightly) quite detailed and linear, as the Philippines schols program was highly integrated with associated HR planning within specific institutions. The mistake made was to take these detailed formats as good practice for *all* schols programs, without recognising that the Philippines was an exceptional case.

³³ And the accompanying narrative components suffer the same limitation on structured analysis as the open narrative entries of the application form that they effectively duplicate (see later).

The revised set of more focussed RP formats will include:

1. An initial (on-application) format
2. A pre-return update format
3. A post-return update format

The Initial (on application) Format:

CANDIDATE:

Q1. Please provide (up to 10) practical and realistic examples of how you will try to use the skills or Australian connections gained during your scholarship, and state the main constraints you may face in doing so:

(Note examples may be professional or personal in nature)

| Examples | Probable Constraints |
|----------|----------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
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Note this does not go much further than what is already asked in the standard application form, but the differences are significant. In order to be able to codify and thereby analyse such qualitative data there is a minimum required level of structure that must be required of responses (see below). The open-ended narrative responses boxes of the standard application form do in provide for this.

The purpose of this initial format is mainly as a basis for improving selection, and each RP will be given a tentative 'quality score' (after eligibility checking) that will be fed into shortlisting and later assessments.

An expanded format is also available for bringing in employer input where feasible. This expanded format would also include:

EMPLOYER (where applicable)

Q2. Please provide (up to 5) practical and realistic examples of how you will try to provide this returnee with opportunities to use the skills or Australian connections gained during their scholarship, and state the main constraints you may face in providing these opportunities:

| Examples | Probable Constraints |
|----------|----------------------|
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The Pre-Return Update Format

RPs may be updated prior to return of awardees on two occasions. The first at the Pre-departure Briefing of the selected awardees, where feedback from course advisors or the selection panels will be used to reality-check the awardees' initial intentions. The format of this update is the same as that of the initial format, except that at completion of these updates, program staff³⁴ will insert codification against all entries to enable analysis:

Coding

(Note examples may be professional or personal in nature)

| Examples | Probable Constraints | Sector | MDG | Etc. |
|----------|----------------------|--------|-----|------|
| | | | | |
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The key use of this first pre-return update will be to allow very tentative outcome reporting (at the intention level) of likely contributions to be made by new cohorts³⁵. Another pre-return RP update may also be conducted just prior to return of an awardee. The purpose of this will be limited to performance enhancement (i.e. getting awardees thinking about what to do on return), so it will again just use the initial format and codification is unnecessary.

The Post-Return Update Format

This is the key outcome-monitoring format. It will consist of a slightly augmented version of the initial format and codification will always be added to responses by program staff (–respondents will not see these columns).

CANDIDATE:

Q1. Please provide (up to 10) practical and realistic examples of how (in the last six months), you have used the skills or Australian connections gained during your scholarship:

Coding

(Note examples may be professional or personal in nature)

| Examples (state specific policies, projects or practices worked on where relevant) | Sector | MDG | Etc. |
|--|--------|-----|------|
| | | | |

³⁴ These program staff will be trained to maintain a consistent classification regime.

³⁵ Note there is therefore no need to codify responses of RPs from all applications.

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Q2. Please provide (up to 10) main constraints you have faced (in the past six months) in using the skills or Australian connections gained during your scholarship, and give any suggestions for addressing these constraints³⁶:

| Constraints | Coding | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Const. Type | Suggestions |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

An expanded format is again available for bringing in employer input/accountability where feasible. This expanded format would also include:

EMPLOYER (where applicable)

Q3. Please provide (up to 5) practical and realistic examples of how (in the past six months) you have provided this returnee with opportunities to use the skills or Australian connections gained during their scholarship:

| Examples (state specific policies, projects or practices where relevant) |
|--|
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Q4. Please provide the (up to 5) main constraints you have faced (in the past six months) in providing such opportunities, and give any suggestions addressing these constraints:

| Constraints | Suggestions |
|-------------|-------------|
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³⁶ The reason that the suggestions for overcoming constraints is not included in the pre-return formats is that it is regarded as more appropriate to focus on the more informed suggestions that will come with experience, rather than consider too much conjecture.

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The application of this post-return (outcome-monitoring) update will be at 6, 12 and 18 months after return. It will be applied to a stratified sample of approximately 5-10% of returnees.

Annex 2 Persons Consulted

The Management Response (page 2) notes that the consultants interviewed DFAT staff in Canberra (Scholarships Section and Africa Desk); DFAT staff in Africa; GRM staff in Brisbane and in Africa; Australia Africa Partnership Facility (AAPF) managing contractor staff; partner government representatives Coordinating Authorities (CAs) and line Ministries where relevant); alumni; alumni peers; and industry and civil society groups. The review team was unable to supply a list of persons consulted.

Annex 3 Documents Reviewed

A list of the documents reviewed appears at the end of the Terms of Reference (Annex 4)

Annex 4 Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference: Mid-Term Review for Australia Awards in Africa

Introduction

Mid-Term Reviews are standard AusAID processes governed by the AusAID Guideline entitled “Manage the Independent Evaluation of an Aid Activity”. Mid-Term Reviews are now more commonly referred to as Independent Progress Reports. As per the Guidelines, Independent Progress Reports focus on three areas:

- Assessing progress against objectives;
- Improving implementation quality;
- Informing the design of any follow-on phases/new activities.

To meet AusAID requirements, this Mid-Term Review will need to address the following standard Evaluation Criteria, using the AusAID wide ratings.

| Evaluation Criteria | Related Primary Focus Questions (pages 3-4) |
|----------------------------|--|
| Relevance | Q1 & Q2 & Q8 |
| Effectiveness | Q1 & Q2 |
| Efficiency | Q3 & Q4 & Q7 |
| Sustainability | Q5 |
| Gender Equality | Q5 |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | Q6 |
| Analysis & Learning | Q4 & Q5 & Q6 |

Rating scale: 6 = very high quality; 1 = very low quality. Below 4 is less than satisfactory.

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) was established in the Australia Awards in Africa (AAA) design to:

“...consider program outcomes and MC performance ... its findings will help determine whether the MC should manage the program for a further two years. Specifically, the MTR will provide advice on ways to improve the impact and/or sustainability of the program for the remainder of its implementation period, and possibly beyond. It will also provide an opportunity to update risk and sustainability assessments and management. It will assess the quality and progress in delivery of program outputs and objectives (including the PDA ‘pilot’); assess any issues or problems and their impact; assess the progress made towards achieving sustainable benefits, and identify and document any essential refinements to the program design. Members of the TAG may be engaged to undertake or to participate in the Mid Term Review.” Note: Managing Contractor is abbreviated as MC here.

The MTR will undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of the impact of AAA. It will include evaluating scholarships impact in five focus countries: Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Togo and Uganda, complimenting the recent evaluation of two countries (Kenya and Mozambique) in the Outcomes Evaluation (Independent Completion Report of the In-Africa Australian Development Scholarship Management Program). The MTR will also consider the operational aspects of implementation by AusAID and the MC, GRM International Pty Ltd with field visits to Nairobi and Pretoria. The MTR will focus on contractor performance, the effectiveness of the M&E framework and functional processes. In so doing, the MTR will assess the quality and progress in the delivery of program outputs in realising AAA objectives; assess any issues or problems and their impact and also assess the progress made towards achieving sustainable benefits, and recommend how the operational management of AAA could be improved.

The implications for AAA of refocusing promotional and engagement efforts to fewer countries, particularly in terms of monitoring and evaluation, will be an area of consideration for the Review Team, including the impact this would have on the AAA initiative, particularly around resourcing. The mix of awards available to countries will also be reviewed.

Background

Australia Awards in Africa (AAA) is a flagship of Australia's development cooperation efforts on the continent. It comprises the delivery of a range of development scholarships across the whole of Africa, including to the islands of the South West Indian Ocean. The design was completed in 2009 following the Labor Government's announcement of its intentions to re-engage in Africa after its election in late 2007.

AAA built on the previous scholarships program which offered up to 100 scholarships a year to 12 African countries in 2008. After a period of rapid scale up, by 2012 1,000 scholarships are being provided to 50 African countries (including North Africa).

A three year contract for the management of Australia Awards in Africa was signed on 20 December 2010 with GRM International. GRM International had been first appointed to as Managing Contractor in April 2004 upon outsourcing of scholarships management in Africa. The end date of the current contract period is 31 December 2013. There is a contract extension option in the contract of two years. The design incorporates a Mid Term Review (MTR) to be completed around six months before the end of the first three-year phase of the program (June 2013). AusAID wishes to bring this timing forward to inform the decision around extending the existing MC for a further 2 years beyond the December 2013 contract end.

Purpose

The Mid-Term Review has two objectives:

1) to explore the impact as per the goals set in the design on a selected sample of Australia's African partners;

2) to assess how effectively and efficiently AAA is being implemented by both AusAID and GRM with a view to strengthening delivery for the remainder of the contractual period.

Scope

The Review will:

- primarily assess both AusAID's and the MC's performance in administering and supporting the delivery of the Australia Awards in Africa during 2011 and 2012;
- recommend options for strengthening the implementation of AAA; and
- be supplemented by an independent financial analysis of AAA to be commissioned by the AusAID Africa Desk.

Focus questions for the Mid-Term Review:

1. To what extent are the AAA objectives identified in the design being achieved? The four objectives are:

Objective 1

AusAID Alumni within African government agencies develop and apply sound policy and practice relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors, and in additional areas of demand.

Objective 2

AusAID Alumni within African non-profit civil society and African development organisations develop and apply sound operational policy and practice, including collaborative engagement, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors.

Objective 3

AusAID Alumni within African commercial private sector organisations develop and apply sound corporate policy and practice, including industry linkages, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors.

Objective 4

Australia is increasingly recognised as an active partner in African development.

2. What unintended consequences (positive or negative) is AAA having?
3. How effective are current AAA selection processes for both long term and short course awards and how could they be improved;
 - i. Are the processes sufficiently transparent and if not, what can be done to improve transparency?

- ii. Consider the benefits, issues and risks of organising group interviews for LTA, particularly the resourcing requirements.
4. Where do the elements of the program that contribute or reduce program effectiveness and efficiency lie?
 - i. To what extent are existing management arrangements (including staffing) appropriate for delivering up to 1,000 scholarships across the African continent?
 - ii. Document the efficiencies and innovations that have been introduced during implementation by both AusAID and the MC and consider how responsive the MC has been to changes requested by AusAID?
 - iii. How have the main changes from the original design (especially Professional Development Awards being replaced by Australian Leadership Award Fellowships and using a different model for in-Africa Short Course Award delivery) affected efficiency and effectiveness of AAA delivery?

 5. Is the MC effectively delivering the services specified in the Scope of Services (Schedule 1) of Contract 57041?
 - i. Assess the quality of the services delivered by the MC to date, including its administrative systems and resourcing, identifying both strengths and challenges faced;
 - ii. Consider whether the level of AusAID resourcing allocated to AAA is reasonable, particularly to provide strategic direction for the program and to support the MC's delivery. Recommend how AusAID could be organised more efficiently bearing in mind that it is unlikely AusAID will be able to allocate further human resources to AAA;
 - iii. Compare the Contractor Performance Assessments and resourcing of GRM with those of the Australia Africa Partnership Facility (AAPF), the other pan African capacity building program. Recommend how the two initiatives could collaborate to create further efficiencies and learn from each other.

 6. How effectively are enhanced AAA design elements being implemented, including but not limited to:
 - i. Promotions, Public Diplomacy and Communications
 - ii. Ancillary Awards
 - iii. Reintegration planning
 - iv. Alumni engagement
 - v. Gender equality
 - vi. Disability inclusion and access
 - vii. Private sector/civil society participation
 - viii. Open application processes
 - ix. Management of critical incidents and student issues.

7. To what extent is the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and information provided by the MC useful for, and being used to:
 - i. improve accountability;
 - ii. tell a positive story about AAA impact;
 - iii. contribute to continuous improvement of AAA?

Using the IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation report as a starting point, recommend how the M&E framework for AAA may be improved to strengthen its usefulness, ensuring that it is a practical and useful instrument to guide AAA.

8. What are the implications to AusAID and the MC of refocusing key aspects of AAA promotions, engagement and M&E to fewer countries, while continuing pan-Africa award access? Recommend how this refocusing could be undertaken.

These questions will be addressed acknowledging the DAC Evaluation Criteria³⁷ around which the IPR document is structured.

Method

The MTR will be undertaken by the TAG to AAA. A Tasking Note will be prepared to formalise the inputs for the MTR (Tasking Note 1). The TAG Team Leader will be responsible for coordinating the inputs of Mid-Term Review to team members. The MTR will include a desk review and field work. The MTR team will interview, at least: AusAID staff in Canberra (Scholarships Section and Africa Desk); AusAID staff in Africa; GRM staff in Brisbane and in Africa; AAPF managing contractor staff; partner government representatives (coordinating authorities and line Ministries where relevant); alumni; alumni peers; industry or civil society groups where relevant.

Team Composition and responsibilities

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) members will undertake the Mid-Term Review: Mr Colin Reynolds as Team Leader and Dr Donna Podems as the Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser.

Team Leader Responsibilities: Mr Colin Reynolds

It is expected the Team Leader will:

1. Perform the role of Mid-Term Review Team Leader and work collaborative with the M&E Adviser
2. Be AusAID's primary contact point for the Mid-Term Review
3. Have overall responsibility for producing and presenting reports

³⁷ The team recognizes that some overlap between DAC criteria and key questions will occur.

4. Organise the inputs of the team to complete the following tasks in response to Tasking Notes received from AusAID:
 - Assess documents prepared by the MC including but not limited to: quality at implementation reports, strategy documents, annual plans, annual reports, six monthly reports, monthly exception reports, M&E framework and reports, gender review/s, quality assurance plans, quality assurance reports, handover plan, activity completion report;
 - Conduct fieldwork in Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Togo and Uganda
 - Form a view, based on analysis on the focus questions
 - Submit a draft report in accordance with AusAID Guidelines and Templates for Independent Progress Reports
 - Attend an AusAID Peer Review meeting to present and discuss the findings
 - Submit a final report taking account of AusAID's comments.
5. Other duties as directed.

Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser Responsibilities: Dr Donna Podems

It is expected the Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser will:

1. Perform the role of Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser during the Mid-Term Review
2. Work collaboratively with the Mid-Term Review Team Leader
3. Contribute to completing the Mid Term Review Tasking Note received from AusAID in line with tasking received from the Team Leader
4. Participate in field work visits
5. Assess monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and monitoring and evaluation skills of MC staff
6. Assess the effectiveness of the links between AAA monitoring and evaluation and external communications
7. Provide advice to AusAID on the quality and relevance of the monitoring and evaluation information the MC is collecting for evaluating impact, effectiveness and sustainability of scholarships and as a tool for public diplomacy
8. Assist in identifying and developing means of capturing greater efficiency and effectiveness in AAA approaches and processes, including but not limited to the areas of promotion, processing, risk management and M&E
9. Advise on assessing the annual performance of the MC
10. Other duties as directed by AusAID.

Timeframe and Reporting

The MTR will start on 25 June 2012 and to be completed by 31 October.

Table 1: Anticipated MTR work plan with estimated inputs/timeframes

| Activity | Input Days | Proposed Dates | Location |
|---|-------------------|---|--|
| Prepare an evaluation plan and undertake an initial field visit | 15 days | Initial field visit – first week of July 2012 Evaluation plan prepared by 20 July 2012 | South Africa and Botswana |
| Desk review analysing existing background documents and including briefing session with AusAID Canberra | 30 days | By mid-August 2012 | Australia/South Africa |
| Field Work | 30 days | August – Sept 2012 | Pretoria, Nairobi, Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Togo, Uganda |
| Submission and Presentation of Aide Memoire | 2 days | September 2012 | Pretoria |
| Draft Mid-Term Review (Independent Progress Report | 20 days | By Oct 8 2012 | Australia/South Africa |
| Peer Review, revise MTR Report and Final Submission | 10 days | By 31 Oct 2012 | Australia/South Africa |
| Total | 107 days | | |

Background Documents

- AusAID Guidelines: *Manage the Independent Evaluation of an Aid Activity*
- AusAID Template: Independent Progress Report template
- AusAID Scholarship specific Monitoring and Evaluation Criteria
- Australian Scholarship for Africa Design document, February 2010
- Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility Design document, November 2009
- GRM program documentation including but not limited to:
 - Annual Plans
 - Six monthly reports
 - Exception reports
 - Mobilisation Plan
 - Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

- Scholarship Promotion, Public Diplomacy and Communication Plan 2012
- Alumni Plan
- Contractor Performance Assessments (GRM International and Cardno Emerging Markets)
- Independent Outcomes Evaluation Report for In-Africa ADS Management Program
- The Contract for Australia Awards in Africa and the Australia Africa Partnerships Facility
- GRM Gender Study

Annex 5 Evaluation Plan

Independent Progress Report for the Australia Awards in Africa Program:

Draft Evaluation Plan

1. Background

The Terms of Reference for this IPR provided the basis for developing the evaluation plan which defines the objectives, scope and key evaluation questions for the assessment.

1.1 Objectives

The IPR's stated objectives are:

1. based on the objectives of the Australia Awards in Africa (AAA) described in the design, to explore the impact of AAA on a selected sample of AAA African partner countries
2. to assess how effectively and efficiently AAA is being implemented by both AusAID and GRM, the Managing Contractor, with a view to strengthening delivery for the remainder of the contractual period, including the optional two year extension.

1.2 Scope

The IPR will:

- undertake a limited impact assessment of AAA on a selected sample of AAA partner countries in Africa;
- primarily assess both AusAID's and the Managing Contractor's (MC) performance in administering and supporting the delivery of the Australia Awards in Africa during 2011 and 2012;
- recommend options for strengthening the implementation of AAA; and
- be supplemented by an independent financial analysis of AAA to be commissioned by the AusAID Africa Desk.

1.3 Key Questions

The TORs present eight key questions which will be considered with reference to the five focus countries selected for impact evaluation (Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Togo, Uganda) and, where relevant, the main AusAID/GRM locations (Nairobi and Pretoria).. The questions are:

1. To what extent are the AAA objectives identified in the design being achieved? The four objectives are:

Objective 1

AusAID Alumni within African government agencies develop and apply sound policy and practice relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors, and in additional areas of demand.

Objective 2

AusAID Alumni within African non-profit civil society and African development organisations develop and apply sound operational policy and practice, including collaborative engagement, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors.

Objective 3

AusAID Alumni within African commercial private sector organisations develop and apply sound corporate policy and practice, including industry linkages, relevant to designated sectors, particularly in specified sub-sectors.

Objective 4

Australia is increasingly recognised as an active partner in African development.

2. What unintended consequences (positive or negative) is AAA having?
3. How effective are current AAA selection processes for both long term and short course awards and how could they be improved;
 - i. Are the processes sufficiently transparent and if not, what can be done to improve transparency?
 - ii. Consider the benefits, issues and risks of organising group interviews for LTA, particularly the resourcing requirements.
4. Where do the elements of the program that contribute or reduce program effectiveness and efficiency lie?
 - i. To what extent are existing management arrangements (including staffing) appropriate for delivering up to 1,000 scholarships across the African continent?
 - ii. Document the efficiencies and innovations that have been introduced during implementation by both AusAID and the MC and consider how responsive the MC has been to changes requested by AusAID?
 - iii. How have the main changes from the original design (especially Professional Development Awards being replaced by Australian Leadership Award Fellowships and using a different model for in-Africa Short Course Award delivery) affected efficiency and effectiveness of AAA delivery?
5. Is the MC effectively delivering the services specified in the Scope of Services (Schedule 1) of Contract 57041?
 - i. Assess the quality of the services delivered by the MC to date, including its administrative systems and resourcing, identifying both strengths and challenges faced;
 - ii. Consider whether the level of AusAID resourcing allocated to AAA is reasonable, particularly to provide strategic direction for the program

- and to support the MC's delivery. Recommend how AusAID could be organised more efficiently bearing in mind that it is unlikely AusAID will be able to allocate further human resources to AAA;
- iii. Compare the Contractor Performance Assessments and resourcing of GRM with those of the Australia Africa Partnership Facility (AAPF), the other pan African capacity building program. Recommend how the two initiatives could collaborate to create further efficiencies and learn from each other.
6. How effectively are enhanced AAA design elements being implemented, including but not limited to:
 - i. Promotions, Public Diplomacy and Communications
 - ii. Ancillary Awards
 - iii. Reintegration planning
 - iv. Alumni engagement
 - v. Gender equality
 - vi. Disability inclusion and access
 - vii. Private sector/civil society participation
 - viii. Open application processes
 - ix. Management of critical incidents and student issues.
 7. To what extent is the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and information provided by the MC useful for, and being used to:
 - a. improve accountability;
 - b. tell a positive story about AAA impact;
 - c. contribute to continuous improvement of AAA?

Using the IAAMP Outcomes Evaluation report as a starting point, recommend how the M&E framework for AAA may be improved to strengthen its usefulness, ensuring that it is a practical and useful instrument to guide AAA.

8. What are the implications to AusAID and the MC of refocusing key aspects of AAA promotions, engagement and M&E to fewer countries, while continuing pan-Africa award access? Recommend how this refocusing could be undertaken.

These questions will be addressed acknowledging the DAC Evaluation Criteria³⁸ around which the IPR document is structured.

2. Approach

The approach will be guided by utilisation focused evaluation approach combined with a stakeholder based evaluation. In this approach the IPR team designs the methodology, implements the related processes, and writes up the report. Key stakeholders will guide the refinement of the methodology. Given that key stakeholders interviewed in this evaluation are most likely experts on AAA, they will have significant input into the selection of the evaluation criteria and the interpretation of the findings.

³⁸ The team recognizes that some overlap between DAC criteria and key questions will occur.

The primary objective of stakeholder-based evaluation is to provide the stakeholders with feedback for program improvement while not sacrificing any rigor, validity, or objectivity in the process, so that the needs of the main client (e.g. AusAID) are met. Involving key stakeholders will enhance the evaluation's credibility and ownership among key stakeholders. Further the evaluation questions will focus on objectives rather than activities.

Stakeholder based evaluation will guide the design and therefore the suggested design below may change slightly after discussion with key stakeholders. In response to the key evaluation questions, evaluation requirements, and criteria set out by the Terms of Reference, this IPR will seek to gather data from three main sources:

- A Desk Review of relevant documents (including past evaluative reports and contractor performance assessments)
- Selected extracts and analysis of data from existing data repositories (including program M&E and Management Information Systems, as well as other AusAID scholarships databases)
- Stakeholder Interviews (individually and as focus groups)

2.1 Core Background Documents

The main background documents to be reviewed include, but may not be limited to:

- AusAID Guidelines: *Manage the Independent Evaluation of an Aid Activity*
- AusAID Template: *Independent Progress Report template*
- AusAID Scholarship specific Monitoring and Evaluation Criteria
- Australian Scholarship for Africa Design document, February 2010
- Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility Design document, November 2009
- The Contracts for Australia Awards in Africa and the Australia Africa Partnerships Facility
- GRM program documentation including but not limited to:
 - Annual Plans
 - Six monthly reports
 - Exception reports
 - Mobilisation Plan
 - Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
 - Scholarship Promotion, Public Diplomacy and Communication Plan 2012
 - Alumni Plan
- AusAID Contractor Performance Assessments (GRM International for AAA and Cardno Emerging Markets for AAPF)
- Independent Outcomes Evaluation Report for In-Africa ADS Management Program
- GRM Gender Study
- Financial assessment of AusAID/GRM's management of AAA

These core documents will be augmented as required to follow up on key issues identified during the course of the assessment.

2.2 Data Repositories

The second source of secondary data collection will come from the SCHOLAR and OASIS Systems. This may be supplemented by additional financial, M&E or management information systems used by stakeholders, where appropriate and feasible.

2.3 Interview Approach and Data Compilation

The evaluation team will also conduct primary data collection. The primary research conducted by the IPR team will include qualitative stakeholder interviews. Most interviews will be conducted face-to-face. When and if necessary phone and Skype interviews will take place. The interviews will be semi structured to ensure that qualitative data collection addresses the key evaluation areas and yet allows for identification of additional issues.

Interview and/or focus group discussion data will be organised and analysed using a ‘Qualitative Compilation Table’ that includes a SWOT’ (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) approach. Specifically, the SWOT framework provides a straightforward and robust means of structuring information gathering. The SWOT framework ensures that any issues or observations raised by respondents are tested for relevance to program progress or performance³⁹. SWOT is also an efficient means of identifying the key issues as perceived by respondents compared to necessarily more prescriptive design-focused questioning.

In addition to the SWOT, the IPR team will use a ‘Qualitative Compilation Table’ (QCT –see Figure 1). This compilation table approach is based on the collection of pertinent structural data with a consistent set of related dependent information. In practice, this means allowing respondents to raise any SWOT issues (the ‘structural’ data) ‘that they think are important’ in relation to the program; either in an (initial) unprompted part of an interview or in relation to a set of predetermined prompt topics.

The prompt topics will be introduced only after respondents have been given the opportunity to raise their own priority issues. Prompt topics will also be used selectively to ensure that relevant topics are raised with each respondent type. The set of prompt topics is initially drawn from the key evaluation questions provided in the Terms of Reference (See Table 1.), and will likely grow during the course of the evaluation as new (unforeseen) issues are raised.

- The structured interview approach offers a proforma approach to transcribing and consolidating interview notes. This provides a consistent format for sharing of information between team members, as the team members will sometimes need to work independently during the evaluation. Finally, the approach ensures a transparent review of the data that supports evidence based discussion and recommendations.

³⁹ No matter how forcibly presented, any information provided that does not easily fall into one or more of the SWOT categories is likely to be irrelevant.

Table 1 below provides the prompt topics.

Table 1 Initial Prompt Topics

| | 'Issues Associated with:' |
|------------|---|
| Question 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development contributions of Returnees • Changes in Perception of Australian Aid |
| Question 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unintended consequences |
| Question 3 | 3.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MC capacity- staffing • MC capacity – Processes & Procedures • MC capacity – Country Coverage/Lang/Hubs 3.2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MC Learning & Innovation • MC Responsiveness (to AusAID) 3.3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to Original Design -Short course delivery/ALAF • Changes to Original Design -Other |
| Question 4 | 4.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MC capacity- staffing • MC capacity – Processes & Procedures • MC capacity – Country Coverage/Lang/Hubs 4.2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AA capacity- staffing • AA capacity – Processes & Procedures • AA capacity – Country Coverage/Lang/Hubs 4.3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences between AAA and AAPF processes and performance • AAA and AAPF cooperation/coordination |
| Question 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotions, Public Diplomacy and Communications • Ancillary Awards • Reintegration planning • Alumni engagement • Gender equality • Disability inclusion and access • Private/civil society participation • Open application processes • Management of critical incidents and study issues. |
| Question 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E – Accountability • M&E – Case Studies • Evidence-based Promotion of AAA • MC Learning and innovation |
| Question 7 | 7.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion • Selection • Mobilization • On-Award • Reintegration • Transparency • Gender Inclusiveness |

| | |
|------------|---|
| Question 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disability Inclusiveness 7.2 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential for group Interviews• Rationalizing Country Foci & Engagement Levels |

Figure 1. Interview Record Sheet

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Ref No. | |
| Name & Position: | |
| Location: | |
| Date: | |
| Sex: | |
| Type: | |
| Doc Ref. | |

| | Issue Raised | SWOT | Prompted? | Issue Type | Effect of Issue on Program | Key Players/Roles | How Resolved? /Suggested Actions? | Our Comments: (Sources/Reminders) |
|---|--------------|------|-----------|------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | |

Note: this table is not filled out during an interview. Interviews remain conversational and notes are still taken with a notepad and pencil, but these notes are transcribed into this table (as an Excel spreadsheet) at a later point.

2.4 Sampling

Key Stakeholders

In order to address the evaluation questions, a highly targeted (stratified) approach to selection of interviewees is proposed. As far as possible, fieldwork will attempt to consistently engage the following stakeholder groups (where present) in countries visited:

- AusAID Staff (in Africa and Australia) – AAA and AAPF officers
- GRM Program Staff (in Africa & Australia)
- DFAT Staff (including High Commission Staff)
- DIAC Staff in Pretoria and Nairobi
- Partner Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officials
- Partner Government Coordinating Authority Officials
- Recipient Partner Government Line Ministry HR Officials
- Recipient Partner Government Line Ministry Returnee Supervisors/Peers
- Recipient NGO or Private Sector Employers HR Staff
- Recipient NGO or Private Sector Returnee Supervisors/Peers
- Recipient Teaching Institution Staff
- Australia Africa Partnership Facility Program (Cardno) Staff
- AAA Alumni

African Countries

The IPR Team will visit the following African countries:

- Botswana
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Malawi
- South Africa
- Togo
- Uganda

This pragmatic sample includes:

- A mix of heavily-engaged and lesser-engaged countries
- A number of countries that were visited during the design mission for the program
- Countries with a range of types and numbers of awards provided

This list avoids countries that have already been heavily-visited by other recent program assessments or other intensive exercises and takes into consideration the time available for fieldwork and the need to attempt to meet with a relatively consistent set of stakeholder types within each country (see s2.4.). Unforeseen logistical constraints may further constrain fieldwork. This will be mitigated by the IPR Team remaining flexible and splitting up, as necessary.

2.5 Key IPR Activity and Deliverable Dates

The ToRs outline the relevant milestones and associated dates for this IPR. These include:

| Activity | Proposed Dates | Location |
|---|---|--|
| Prepare an evaluation plan and undertake an initial field visit | Initial field visit – first week of July 2012 Evaluation plan prepared by 20 July 2012 | South Africa |
| Desk review analysing existing background documents and including briefing session with AusAID Canberra | By mid-August 2012 | Australia/South Africa |
| Field Work | August – Sept 2012 | Pretoria, Nairobi, Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Togo, Uganda |
| Submission and Presentation of Aide Memoire | September 2012 | Pretoria |
| Draft Mid-Term Review (Independent Progress Report) | By 8 October 2012 | Australia/South Africa |
| Peer Review, revise MTR Report and Final Submission | By 31 October 2012 | Australia/South Africa |

2.6 Proposed Itinerary (Approximate)

The proposed travel itinerary is as follows:

| Country | IPR Team Member | Dates |
|----------------|-----------------|---|
| South Africa | Colin and Donna | 16-21 August |
| Botswana | Donna | 22-24 August |
| Malawi | Colin | 21 – 24 August |
| Kenya | Colin and Donna | 25 – 29 August |
| Uganda | Donna | 29 - 31 August |
| Ghana and Togo | Colin | 29 August - 4 September |
| South Africa | Colin and Donna | 6 - 7 September (Colin may arrive in Pretoria a day earlier, depending on flights). |

These dates are subject to the time required for the organised interviews which may be shorter or longer as appropriate.

2.7 Aide Memoire Format and Intent

The Aide Memoire will be a 3-5 page summary of initial key findings and likely recommendations. The Aide Memoire will serve two purposes. First, it will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide early feedback on the appropriateness of the likely direction and content of the final report. Second, AusAID's feedback on the Aide Memoire will potentially identify additional relevant data that may have an impact on initial findings, and will be further explored by the IPR team.