



SUBMISSION TO DFAT CONSULTATION ON BENCHMARKS OF THE AUSTRALIAN AID PROGRAM

VIA EMAIL: DEVELOPMENT.RESULTS@DFAT.GOV.AU

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OVERVIEW

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Poverty reduction and economic development programs at the whole-of-aid program level are fully inclusive of and accessible to people with a disability.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Benchmarks must embed meaningful participation of people with a disability and civil society organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Benchmarks must recognise the relevance of both qualitative and quantitative data.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The purpose of benchmarking information should be to inform good practice and build program effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Benchmark information should be structured on a five-year period of review.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Benchmarks should build on current systems, practice and evidence.

INTRODUCTION

CBM Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) consultation on performance benchmarks for the Australian Aid sector. CBM is an International development agency, committed to improving the quality of life of people with a disability in low income regions of the world. CBM Australia has an Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) partnership with the Australian Government/DFAT.

CBM Australia is committed to a more accountable and effective aid program believing that it is in the best interests of everyone, including Australian donors who expect their aid program to make a significant difference to the lives of the poor. The establishment of benchmarks is one tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's foreign aid program.

In this submission, CBM Australia provides a critical analysis of the information available and applies it to the Australian context. In doing so we have provided recommendations on the focus, purpose, timing and process of developing benchmarks.

1. FOCUS OF BENCHMARKS

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

CBM Australia supports the sector-wide call for the Australian aid program to maintain a strong focus on poverty reduction. CBM Australia is pleased to see that following the integration of AusAID into DFAT, the Department's Outcome 1 strategy has been amended to include the goal of reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.¹ In addition, CBM Australia welcomes the Foreign Minister's recent statement that prioritising economic growth does not mean a lesser focus on poverty reduction.²

Drawing on this commitment, it is essential that benchmarks reflect these priorities and place value on sustainable effective development. Research suggests that economic development does not necessarily lead to a reduction of poverty on an equal basis for all.³ There is growing evidence that unless targeted support is included, people with a disability may not always benefit from economic development. For example, researchers have found that the *"disparity between people with disability and the general population appears to increase with overall economic development..."*⁴. Therefore a disability inclusive approach to economic development is essential in reducing poverty.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Poverty reduction and economic development programs at the whole-of-aid program level are fully inclusive of and accessible to people with a disability.

¹ DFAT Additional Estimates Statement, p29 available at: http://dfat.gov.au/dept/budget/2013-2014_paes/2013-14_DFAT_PAES.pdf

² Full speech available at: http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2014/jb_sp_140213.html

³ World Health Organisation, World Bank, 2011, The World Report on Disability

⁴ Mitra, S. et al, 2012, *Disability and Poverty in Developing Countries: A Multidimensional Study*, World Development, p.11, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.024>

RATIONALE

It is well understood that rather than implementing isolated policies and actions, a disability inclusive approach across all development sectors benefits persons and community as a whole.⁵ **Disability inclusive development is fundamental to ensuring effective poverty alleviation because it intentionally targets the poorest and most marginalised.** It demonstrates that the Australian foreign aid program is reaching the most marginalised, excluded and often the poorest.

A benchmark which aims to include people with a disability in all poverty reduction and economic development programs would measure the effectiveness of the aid program because disability inclusive practices:

1.1 Have an economic benefit

It is recognised that adopting a disability inclusive approach to international development has economic benefits,⁶ however these benefits can be difficult to quantify due to the lack of data. Reports on the economic benefits of disability inclusion have been measured in areas such as education and micro-finance. Research demonstrates the economic and broader benefit of economic development programs reaching people with a disability.

1.2 Fulfil Australia's obligations under the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD)

Article 32 of the UNCRPD requires that States Parties ensure all international development efforts both include and benefit people with a disability. This is an ongoing international legal obligation that Australia has as a party to UNCRPD. Therefore information collected through benchmarking will be useful to feed into Australia's reporting to the UN under Article 32.

1.3 Ensure economic development programs are fully inclusive of and accessible to people with a disability

This has been recognised at the international level, where discussions of the post-MDG's framework are focusing on how to address inequality, as a means to tackle the causes of extreme poverty. It is important that Australia's foreign aid program is well-positioned to join other donors and the global community to inform the development of the Sustainable Development Goal's and its focus on addressing inequality. CBM Australia is pleased that the Foreign Minister has spoken out recently on the vulnerability and exclusion of people with a disability in economic growth.⁷

In addition CBM Australia supports the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) recent recommendation for a targeted approach to economic development. CBM Australia supports ACFID's call for 'Inclusive Growth' as a benchmark of Australia's aid program in its recent publication *Benchmarks for an Effective and Accountable Australian Aid Program*.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Benchmarks must embed meaningful participation of people with a disability and civil society organisations

⁵ Berman-Bieler, R., 2008, Mainstreaming Disability in the Development Agenda" in UN Panel Discussion: "Mainstreaming Disability in the Development Agenda" <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=358>

⁶ Walton, O., 2012, Economic Benefits of Disability Inclusive Development, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, available at: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HDQ831.pdf>

⁷ The Hon Ms Julie Bishop, *Opening Address – 2014 Australasian Aid and International Development Policy Workshop*, 13 February: "growth is inclusive of the poorest and most disadvantaged, making sure particular consideration is given to improve [the lives of] people with disabilities, those living in remote and rural communities and ethnic minorities." Full speech: http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2014/jb_sp_140213.html

RATIONALE

Due to limitations of available data, the tracking and reviewing of the participation of people with a disability in development processes could be an important measure of the inclusiveness and accessibility of the Australian aid program. In order to achieve this, all programs require the capacity to report on the level of inclusion of people with a disability in their programs. It is essential that in order to achieve meaningful participation, there must be an investment into the systems to gather the data in the first place. It is essential to note however that meaningful participation of people with a disability in aid programs is not simply about quantifying the number or attendance. Participation must be meaningful, as illustrated by the following case study:

Inclusive Education program: promoting full participation for children with a disability

An aspect of CBM's ANCP-funded SEEPD program in Cameroon incorporates a comprehensive response to inclusive education in a context where only 10% of children with disability access school. SEEPD project staff were aware that simply increasing school enrolments was insufficient to ensure successful participation by children with disability.

In response, teacher training, development of a handbook on inclusive education, provision of assistive devices, awareness raising, advocacy at community and government levels, and the establishment of Learning Support Resource Centres across 14 public primary and secondary schools was implemented. This provided a full complement of strategies to ensure attendance, acceptance and successful participation in education for Cameroon's children with disability.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA IN BENCHMARKING

Due to limited quality and comparable data, it is important that benchmarks do not simply measure quantities such as the number of people reached. Qualitative information and case studies collected from aid projects are a valuable resource to measure and assess the change arising in aid programs. Qualitative information and case studies provide a nuanced and in-depth understanding of barriers to overcoming poverty, while numbers provide perspective on scale. Qualitative measures are particularly important in disability inclusive development because data is limited.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Benchmarks must recognise the relevance of both qualitative and quantitative data

2. PURPOSE OF BENCHMARKS

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

It is essential that benchmarks place value on sustainable effective development by focusing on project outcomes and the inclusion of the most marginalised. Benchmarking needs to have a considered approach. Development is a complex field and reducing poverty requires long term investment. If a short term output level approach to benchmarking is taken this may lead to a weaker aid program which is risk averse and focused on short term outputs avoiding attention to quality, effectiveness or innovation. As former head of USAID Andrew Natsios highlights "development programs that are most precisely and easily

measured are the least transformational, and those programs that are most transformational are the least measurable".⁸ Therefore a focus on program *outputs*, such as the number of people in a program, is information easily gathered, but is not evidence of the program's impact, sustainability or real change.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The purpose of benchmarking information should be to inform good practice and build program effectiveness

RATIONALE

Adopting a broader view of benchmarking, we view its value not as a measure of performance, but as a means to develop best practice and strengthen aid effectiveness.⁹ For example, benchmarking could be applied to:

- develop plans to establish improvement and capacity building;
- borrow and adapt successful ideas and practice from other development actors;
- understand what approaches have already been tried;

NGO's have an important role to play in the application of benchmarks and feeding into the information collected. For example, gathering evidence around innovative approaches, informing practice and sharing qualitative examples. CBM Australia would welcome the opportunity to provide sources of information for benchmarking that could be useful (such as literature reviews, databases and learning forums).

3. TIMING OF BENCHMARK INFORMATION

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

CBM Australia joins the sector in highlighting that short-term changes to funding systems can reduce program effectiveness. Stable and longer term funding cycles are critical to enable appropriate planning, to address underlying causes of poverty and contribute to economic development.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Benchmark information should be structured on a five-year period of review

RATIONALE

Due to the rigour needed to analyse agency work, and the time and resources required to collate benchmark information, it is essential that the period of review be useful and feasible. CBM suggests that a period of five years is appropriate for Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) Partner funding benchmark review to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

4. PROCESS OF DEVELOPING BENCHMARKS: BUILDING ON CURRENT STRENGTHS

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

⁸ Natsios, Andrew, 2010, "The clash of counter-bureaucracy and development", *Centre for Global Development Essay*.

⁹ For example USAID benchmark framework promotes best practice and leveraging of aid resources to strengthen the aid program:

http://www.hciproject.org/improvement_tools/improvement_methods/analytical_tools/benchmarking

The Australian Aid program has been commended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) for its strong approach to evaluation and performance assessment.¹⁰ The peer review found that performance information could be better used to focus on learning as well as accountability. DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), which is overseen by the Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC), recently published a report on independent evaluation and quality assurance. The report highlights that in the Australian aid program "positive steps have been taken to build a stronger, more independent culture of evaluation"¹¹. It is important that benchmarks build upon these current systems and practice.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Benchmarks should build on current systems, practice and evidence

RATIONALE

In regards to Non Government Organisations, there are significant mechanisms already in place to inform assessment for benchmarking. For example the ACFID Code of Conduct (annual self assessment) and DFAT Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Accreditation (every 5 years). A review of the depth of information already available will highlight the systems already in place for Fully Accredited agencies to ensure high quality programs. These systems are rigorous and establish the competence and adequacy of agency systems required to deliver effective aid.

FURTHER INFORMATION

CBM Australia thanks the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process.

Please contact CBM Australia's Policy Officer, Chelsea Huggett on (03) 8843 4578 or at CHuggett@cbm.org.au for further information.

We look forward to reviewing the draft with DFAT following the consultation feedback.

¹⁰ OECD Development Cooperation Peer Review Australia (2013) available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/OECD%20Australia%20FinalONLINE.pdf>

¹¹ Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, *Lessons from Australian Aid* available at: <http://www.ode.dfat.gov.au/publications/pdf/lessons-from-australian-aid-2013.pdf>