aUSTRALIAN NGO COOPERATION PROGRAM (Ancp) learning event 2019: outcomes document

## Stories of Significant of Change (SSC)

1. DFAT provided an overview of how we came to pilot the SSC process, which followed the 2018 Data Systems Validation exercise and recommendations to refresh the ANCP Program Logic and Monitoring, Evaluation And Learning Framework (MELF), specifically to increase the emphasis on qualitative outcome indicators that demonstrate instances of significant change.
2. DFAT agreed to the recommendations and have been slowly, consultatively working our way to implement the recommendations this year. In February and March, the MEL Reference Group discussed the Program Logic and Narrative and mid-year agreed to pilot the SSC process.
3. Eleven NGOs volunteered to be involved in the SSCs – and a further four involved in the verification process at the end of October/early November. ACFID also observed the verification process that included DFAT thematic areas. The pilot involved hard work, particularly for in-country partners, and flexibility as we all navigated the new process. The final 11 stories are rich in content and speak to the diversity of the ANCP cohort. The Stories will be published with a snapshot of 2018-19 ANCP facts and figures instead of the usual APPR.
4. Four Australian NGOs (ANGOs) (ActionAid Australia, Burnet Institute, Oxfam Australia and Motivation Australia) presented their SSCs - PowerPoint presentations will be circulated. Rich discussions followed each presentation.

## SSC Pilot Process Reflections

1. Clear Horizons outlined discussions from the MEL Reference Group and surveys after the verification process, particularly in terms of refining the rationale for using SSCs, the guidance for authors and the process of verification panels. Challenges of being simply positive, of the limitations of the verifier roles, and of diversity across SSCs were considered during group discussion. The value of stories of significant learning was highlighted. The group considered options for engaging verifiers including one where the SSC’s authors could suggest potential verifiers, including in-country involvement. The value of scoring – to provide anchors for analysis – against the disadvantages of scoring – where comparisons became unnecessarily competitive – was also noted.
2. The seven ANGOs who had not had the opportunity to present fully were invited to offer comments. Feedback was positive and generally reflected the nature of these SSCs as pilots, and that we were “building the plane while we were flying it” – organisations learned by doing and knew that their next iterations would be more effective. Much of the discussion reflected a perceived shifting of the audience – where the public values case studies and SSCs are directed more to ‘development experts’.

## DFAT Monitoring and Engagement (M&E) visits

1. DFAT provided an overview of ANCP monitoring and engagement (M&E) visits, noting that 54 per cent of ANCP partners had received at least one visit during 2018-19. The work involved in hosting visits was recognised, and participants generally welcomed them and found them valuable. DFAT’s Posts are increasingly engaged, particularly reflecting significant changes in ODA distribution.
2. DFAT noted that over the last eighteen months the safeguarding approach to collaborative and collective management of risk was becoming increasingly sophisticated, and DFAT was seeing risk management move beyond basic ‘compliance with safeguards’ and ‘risk avoidance’ to more sustainable and effective approaches. DFAT noted that ANGOs needed to keep risk management documentation up to date, and drafted and reviewed in collaboration with partners.
3. The ANCP team highlighted that the ANCP overall has a very strong engagement with DFAT’s gender quality strategy but that the team was eager to see more consideration by ANGOs of disability inclusive development – not just disaggregated data but also analysis of how to be more inclusive and ensure projects are not unintentionally exclusive. Posts in particular are increasingly focusing on the latter. The team also noted that the recommendations provided to ANGOs following the visits are made in the spirit of continuous learning, recognising that DFAT has only observed a small aspect of a project over one day.
4. Discussion reiterated that ANGOs found DFAT’s visits a lot of work but also very valuable and “well worth the effort”. Timing of visits is nonetheless a critical issue. The ANCP has a strong culture of frankness and learning, and NGOs welcomed DFAT’s recommendations. The group acknowledged there will be a great variation in engagement and style from Post to Post.

## Program Logic & MELF refresh

1. DFAT provided a summary of the MELF consultation process that started in February 2019. The current version of the Program Logic was submitted to the Indicator Working Group in early November.
2. The Program Logic work includes a review of reporting indicators, which have dropped from 130 to 103. ANCP is proposing to remove a further 72 - this was met with cheers from attendees. ANCP is aiming to complete the review for implementation in the next Annual Development Plan cycle. Attendees were asked to approach the ANCP team to nominate as an Indicator Working Group member.
3. The guiding principle for the review has been whether indicators were needed and used. ‘Nice to have’ is not a valid criterion although DFAT did acknowledge that the review may result in some gaps. Some indicators must be retained – e.g. DFAT’s Aggregate Development Results (approx. 20 indicators).
4. A discussion amongst attendees focussed on only minor changes to the Program Logic and some questions about content, e.g. whether there were any assumptions that underpin the document. Attendees voted to endorse the refreshed Program Logic.

## MEL priority topics in 2020

1. With facilitation, attendees discussed a ‘convergence of thinking’; the proposal to highlight 2-3 topics as the key focus for 2020, which will then inform Stories of Significant Change and possibly other MEL related items.
2. Discussion included reaching a deeper consensus of what success looks like, whether there were any DFAT priorities that needed to be considered, and whether picking theme/s will narrow the scope, especially for NGOs where the chosen topics do not relate to their work.
3. Attendees undertook an informal voting process. Most popular topics:
* Pathway 1: Supports continuous improvement and learning in program delivery
* Pathway 1: ANCP demonstrates inclusive practices
* Pathway 2: ANGOs strengthen capacity of in-country partners and civil society more broadly
	+ Pathway 1: ANCP delivers value for money programming - came in second.

## Survey Results

1. Of 19 respondents, 95 per cent found the Learning Event “extremely” or “very worthwhile”. Most noted insights of the SSC process particularly valuable while others highlighted networking opportunities and time to engage in group discussion as beneficial. Respondents were also interested to apply lessons from the ANGOs sharing their SSCs and from DFAT regarding M&E visits and the MEL Refresh.
2. November was the clear winner for the 2020 Learning Event with a strong preference to explore Disability Inclusive Practices, followed by Gender Equality. ANGO NGOs also want to be involved in deciding the themes of the event.
3. The majority of respondents (68 per cent) noted they would be more likely to attend the event in Canberra and that pairing with the Annual Reflections made good sense, others noted it can be more difficult to prioritise around other work. Many thanks for your feedback we will work with the MEL Ref Group to incorporate in planning for 2020.

## Next Steps

1. DFAT will deliberate on the results of the MEL priority topics in conjunction with plans to focus next year’s learning event on findings from the Gender Action Platform (GAP) evaluations.
2. DFAT will engage with the MEL Reference Group to refresh TORs and begin stepping out work plan for 2020, this will include consultation on refreshing the ANCP MELF and refining the SSC process.