

2013

Australian NGO Cooperation Program

Meta-Evaluation

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a desk based meta-evaluation of nine evaluations undertaken for the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The *ANCP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework* (MELF)¹, launched in 2012, provides the evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ANCP. Under the MELF, the former AusAID² has committed to carrying out a biennial meta-evaluation of NGO evaluations of ANCP funded projects. The intent is to provide insight into the way in which NGOs are assessing their ANCP projects and programs and learning from their experiences and those of their in-country partners.

The overall finding, given the size of the investment and the complexity of the interventions, was that these evaluations were adequately evaluating and reporting on ANCP project activities. Particular strengths were noted in the NGOs' consultative processes and use of innovative and targeted participatory methodologies, most notably when working with vulnerable and marginalised groups (e.g. children or people with disabilities).

When compared with the 2006 ANCP meta-evaluation³, NGO evaluations being undertaken in 2011–12 were notably stronger in their intentions toward learning and continuous improvement, demonstrated concrete evidence of their efforts to move beyond output level assessment and analysis and had responded almost universally to suggestions regarding independent review.

The evaluations reviewed did, however, demonstrate some recurring gaps in quality. Most notably, these included a lack of clarity in terms of reference (ToRs) and a tendency to present assertions and conclusions that were not always well supported by evidence and/or analysis. It was noted that the evaluations examined represented an average (median) spend of less than \$7 000 (less than two per cent), putting clear parameters on the quality and extent of the evaluation. Given an average overall investment of approximately \$450 000 per activity (over three years), it raises the question why expenditure on (mainly end of project) evaluations was not higher.

In line with the *Civil Society Engagement Framework* (CSEF)⁴, these evaluations prioritised the identification of lessons learned. Some consistent lessons for ANCP NGOs (working in Cambodia) were identified. These related to the importance and

¹ *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework* (2012):

<http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Documents/ancp-monit-eval-and-learning-framework.pdf>

² In November 2013 AusAID was integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

³ Colin Reynolds (2006) *A metaevaluation of NGO evaluations conducted under the AusAID NGO cooperation program*, http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/ngo_eval.pdf

⁴ CSEF: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/civil-society-engagement-framework.aspx>

complexity of working with government structures to achieve sustainable results and efficiencies to be gained through targeted partnering with other NGOs.

Consistent with other recent NGO reviews,⁵ these evaluations also highlighted the difficulties in reaching the poorest of the poor, particularly through micro-credit programs. At the same time, these evaluations reinforced the message that disability programs require concurrent attention to income-generating (and/or credit) schemes in addition to broader programming around access to services.

The sample of nine projects or programs included two disability-focused interventions and two initiatives focused strongly on gender or women. Surprisingly, outside of these issue specific projects, the attention to gender and disability in the evaluation reports was quite minimal, with almost no evidence of disaggregated data or gender/disability specific analysis. While some of these projects may pre-date the *Development for All Policy*⁶, it is nevertheless a timely reminder for ANGOs to ensure that in-country partners are providing due consideration to these issues, including mechanisms to monitor and evaluate them.

Although the OECD DAC evaluation criteria were inconsistently referenced in the evaluation reports, it was nevertheless possible to draw out some emerging trends. In terms of *relevance*, ANCP NGOs demonstrated their particular strengths in undertaking and applying community needs assessments and in their capacity to build sustained and trusting relationships with a range of stakeholders. The evaluations also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the policy context and a capacity for NGOs to develop synergies or challenges to the status quo where considered necessary.

While there were constraints to assessing *effectiveness*, if equated with 'participation' then these projects and programs achieved more than moderate successes. One of the key factors influencing effectiveness is, perhaps not surprisingly, the capacity of the implementing partners, particularly with regard to their skill in (re) emerging areas such as micro-credit. Assessment of in-country partner technical capability is an area requiring closer scrutiny at appraisal stage.

Community based development initiatives are often extremely resource intensive—but effective. It was disappointing, therefore, that not one of these evaluations gave any consideration to cost effectiveness or value for money (VfM)—i.e. *efficiency*—in their evaluation reports.

Conversely, *sustainability*, particularly through a considered, systems thinking approach to capacity building, was strongly evident across almost all ANCP activities reviewed. While a number of these low-cost, fairly simple (methodologically) evaluations made reference to *impact*, this was largely aspirational, with the

⁵ <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/ancp-2011-thematic-review.aspx>

⁶ *Development for All Towards a disability-inclusive Australian aid program 2009–2014*, <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/dev-for-all.pdf>

exception of one evaluation. The thematic review highlighted the scope and potential for higher level evaluations to consider issues such as impact and learning.

The key recommendations emerging from the report are summarised below in priority order:

Recommendations to ANCP NGOs:

- i. *Ensure explicit attention in evaluation reporting to cross-cutting issues, including gender equality and disability.*
- ii. *Require and demonstrate more explicit consideration of efficiency, inclusive of value for money (VfM), throughout the full project cycle.*
- iii. *Ensure adequate evaluation expertise throughout evaluation processes.*
- iv. *Clarify processes and definitions, and provide clear direction for the capturing and documenting of lessons learned from project level evaluations.*
- v. *Demonstrate stronger attention to M&E structures and frameworks for measuring across the full project cycle, including baseline data, a theory of change and intended outcomes against which to report.*
- vi. *Improve the quality of ToRs and planning for the evaluation of activities including through familiarity with and reference to Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation.*
- vii. *Ensure adequate assessment and ongoing monitoring of partners' technical capabilities.*

Recommendations to DFAT/ANCP:

- i. *Provide clarity and guidance to ANCP NGOs on expectations and or frameworks for considering value for money (VfM).*
- ii. *Review average expenditure on evaluation activities for ANCP and provide further guidance to ANCP NGOs on the use of up to ten per cent funding allocation for DM&E activities.*

In addition, the following suggestions may be useful for subsequent meta-evaluations:

- *Consider an interactive component to enable some level of assessment of the dissemination and follow-up of findings and learning.*
- *Allow for a more thorough financial analysis of project or program expenditure on 'evaluative' activities across the project cycle.*
- *More explicitly address donor policy alignment.*
- *Use a consistent sampling frame or methodology and repeat cyclically every two years to monitor or demonstrate trends.*

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Acronyms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ALNAP	Active Learning Network in Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ALWS	Australian Lutheran World Service
ANCP	Australian NGO Cooperation Program
ANGO	Australian NGO
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BWAA	Baptist World Aid Australia
CAPF	Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework
CBM	CBM Australia
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSEF	Civil Society Engagement Framework
DAC	Development Assessment Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MELF	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework
SCA	Save the Children Australia
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
VfM	Value for Money
WEAL	World Education Australia Limited
WVA	World Vision Australia

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report presents the findings of a meta-evaluation of a sample of evaluations undertaken under the auspices of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The ANCP is the Australian Government's largest and longest running NGO aid program.⁷ The ANCP supports 44 accredited Australian NGOs (ANGOs) to undertake community based development work in over 50 countries, with an estimated budget of \$141 million for the 2013–14 financial year. The stated goal of the ANCP is to:

Support the development activities of Australian NGOs that directly and tangibly alleviate poverty in developing countries.

The *ANCP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework* (MELF), launched in 2012, provides the evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ANCP in achieving results in poverty reduction.⁸ The MELF draws from NGO reporting systems and facilitates the tracking and evaluation of ANCP results on reducing poverty and achieving value for money.

Under the MELF, the former AusAID⁹ committed to carrying out a biennial meta-evaluation of NGO evaluations of ANCP funded projects. The intent is to capture the more in-depth and detailed assessments undertaken by NGOs to complement the summary data presented in ANCP NGO Annual Performance Reports. These meta-evaluations are expected to provide an opportunity for NGOs to share learning and outcome information within DFAT, and with other NGOs and interested stakeholders.

Evaluations are central to aid effectiveness and results in driving ongoing learning, which informs the direction, design and management of the ANCP. ANCP guidelines require all NGOs to undertake an evaluation of ANCP projects and programs periodically and provide for up to ten per cent of ANCP funds to be allocated to design, monitoring and evaluation. These evaluations allow NGOs to measure outcome and impact, and to assess their strategies and approaches in a way that complements results based reporting. Ongoing evaluative activities are a useful source of data, providing additional information to meet the MELF objectives of accountability, outcome information, and learning.

Working with non-government organisations is an integral part of Australia's approach to achieving the strategic goals of the aid program. The *Civil Society Engagement Framework* (CSEF) sets out how Australia will work more effectively with civil society

⁷ ANCP: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Pages/home.aspx>

⁸ *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework* (2012): <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Documents/ancp-monit-eval-and-learning-framework.pdf>

⁹ In November 2013 AusAID was integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). In this report, 'AusAID' is used to refer to the achievements and performance of the agency prior to the integration. 'DFAT' is used to refer to the future aid commitments of the integrated department.

organisations (CSOs) both in Australia and overseas to increase the impact of aid for the world's poorest.¹⁰ The CSEF describes ten principles which guide the engagement between the Australian Government and CSOs, including mutual accountability for results, shared learning and collaboration, and building local capacity to ensure sustainability.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

This meta-evaluation is a set and complementary component of a comprehensive framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning, the MELF. While there is certainly an element of accountability and contribution to broader donor goals, the stated intent of this evaluation is to “instill a process of continuous improvement to build on the effectiveness and sustainability of aid delivered under the ANCP”.¹¹ The key users will thus be the commissioning agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and ANCP NGOs.

While the evaluation will consider the evaluation reports of nine identified agencies, their involvement is to an extent considered to be instrumental in the process of broader learning. The key focus is not to compare evaluations and/or NGOs but to examine and report on lessons learned and overall quality and range of outcomes for the ANCP. Success will be measured by the degree to which these can be extracted and distilled in an accessible format for the intended audience. The aims of the evaluation are to:

- Provide insight into the way in which NGOs are assessing their project approaches and learning from their experiences and those of their in-country partners; and
- Identify opportunities for shared learning on what does or does not work in NGO project/program design and evaluation.

Given the diverse range of approaches, to both implementation and evaluation, DFAT is mindful of the need to keep the focus of the meta-evaluation broad. The main areas of inquiry identified are reflected in the six key focus questions;¹²

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the NGO evaluations and what are the factors that contribute to their quality?
2. How effective are the evaluations at examining the value of the particular project/program approach?
3. How do the evaluations consider gender equality, age and disability? And do the evaluations provide disaggregated data (if relevant)?
4. What are the main lessons learnt? What works and why?
5. Are there any trends or patterns regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristics of evaluated projects?
6. What evidence is there that the ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals?

¹⁰ CSEF: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/civil-society-engagement-framework.aspx>

¹¹ ANCP 2013 Meta-evaluation Terms of Reference, pg. 1 (see Annex 1 of this report)

¹² Additional 'sub-questions' can be referenced in Table 1 of the Evaluation Plan (Annex 2)

The MELF process and the subsequent development of the ToRs for this task have been highly consultative, seeking regular input from ANCP NGOs in the form of the MELF Reference Group. Through this consultation process, the reference group acknowledged the shift in the purpose of the meta-evaluation. Originally stated as “to examine and report on lessons learnt and overall quality and range of outcomes for ANCP”, through consultation with the reference group this moved to also include a more substantive focus on the quality of the NGO evaluations themselves.¹³

The Sample

The CSEF recognises the strength that diversity brings to the delivery of effective aid. As such, the sampling for this meta-evaluation endeavoured to capture evaluative processes from a reasonably representative cross-section of organisations. A desk analysis showed that the highest number of evaluations of ANCP activities over the past five years had occurred in Cambodia (n=45). These evaluations were then sorted according to the five strategic goals of the Australian aid program at the time.¹⁴ A significant number (greater than 30 per cent) of these evaluations were aligned with the goal of *promoting opportunities for all*. This subset of evaluations from Cambodia provided the pool from which the subsequent nine NGO evaluations were selected for inclusion in this meta-evaluation. Evaluations have been selected opportunistically from a single geographical and thematic focus area. All evaluations are from Cambodia and have been assessed as falling under the strategic goal of *promoting opportunities for all*.

The sample of nine evaluation reports was from ANCP NGOs holding full ANCP accreditation status; including three Partner NGOs that have signed ANCP Partnerships Memorandum of Understanding. While the picture is mixed, it should be noted that a majority of the reports reviewed were in-country NGO partner initiated and implemented evaluations, funded and supported by the Australian NGO through the ANCP. Given the responsibilities of ANGOs under the ANCP, this distinction has not been analysed in this report.

Table one below details the sample of reports used in the meta-evaluation.

¹³ *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework*, op. cit. pg. 5

¹⁴ *Helping the World's Poor Through Effective Aid: Australia's Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework to 2015-16*, <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/about/Documents/capf.pdf>

Table 1: ANGO Evaluation Sample

Agency Name	Project	Time frame	Evaluation Type
ActionAID	Improved food security for vulnerable farmers	2011-2012 (1 year)	Formative Review
Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	A New Day for Kids	2008-2011 (3 years)	End of Project
Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS)	Empowerment of Women through the Village Bank Initiative	2005-2011 (6 years)	End of Project
Baptist World Aid Australia (BWAA)	National Centre of Disabled Persons (NCDP) Community Based Rehabilitation Project	2006-2011 (5 years)	End of Project
CBM Australia	Community Based Rehabilitation Project	2010-2012 (3 years)	End of Project
International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)	Women's Right to Safety and Security		Thematic Review
World Education Australia Ltd (WEAL)	Happy School Support Project	2007-2010 (3 years)	End of Project
World Vision Australia	Community Care for Children Project	2008-2012 (4 years)	End of Project
Save the Children Australia	Strengthening Partnerships for Child Safe Communities	2011-2012 (1 year)	Mid-term Review

1.3 Methodology and Approach

The meta-evaluation was limited to a desk review of the nine NGO evaluation reports without additional reference material or engagement with NGOs. Where necessary, NGOs were contacted to provide associated terms of reference (ToRs) for their submitted evaluations and/or relevant project or evaluation costs.

The meta-evaluation tools and process endeavoured to capture a balance between assessing the quality and integrity of the evaluation, and broader learning about the approaches and strategies and how these influence outcomes. The first stage of the appraisal process dealt with understanding the approaches taken by the NGOs to their evaluations, to confirm rigor, approach and validity of findings (quality, strengths, weaknesses and factors affecting). The second stage dealt more with the content of their findings to look for trends, common lessons and outcomes. As required in the ToRs for this task, particular attention was paid to cross-cutting issues, capacity building for sustainability and cross-reference to standard evaluation, good practice DAC criteria—e.g. relevance, effectiveness and impact.

Meta-evaluation is a methodology proposed by Michael Scriven in 1969 to describe his plan to evaluate educational products, now acknowledged as an independent category of evaluation in the Program Evaluation Standards.¹⁵ In essence, meta-evaluation is a systematic and formal assessment of evaluations against a set of critically recognised evaluation standards, adapted for purpose. Meta-evaluation has been widely used in international development, most notably by UNICEF, DFID, SIDA and the Active Learning Network in Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

This meta-evaluation reviewed a range of evaluation standards and meta-evaluation methodologies to construct a relevant framework for undertaking this evaluation, and ultimately generating data which would contribute to meeting the meta-evaluation objectives and to answering some of the key focus questions. The resulting framework is included at Annex 2 (*Appendix 1* of the Evaluation Plan) and was developed with strong reference to the 2013 *DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards*¹⁶, 2010 *DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation*¹⁷ and the 2005 *ALNAP Quality Proforma*.¹⁸ The framework covered eight key areas of inquiry, against which commentary was made for subsequent analysis and synthesis. Ratings of poor, satisfactory, good or very good were applied to Evaluation Quality (Section 2.1) and Cross-Cutting Issues (Section 2.3).

¹⁵ Michael Scriven (2009), *Meta-evaluation revisited*, Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation, http://journals.sfu.ca/jmde/index.php/jmde_1/article/view/220/215

¹⁶ see <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/monitoring-evaluation-standards.aspx>

¹⁷ see <http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/36596604.pdf>

¹⁸ see <http://www.alnap.org/pdfs/QualityProforma05.pdf>

Table 2: Quality Framework—Outline

	Area of Enquiry	Key Criteria
1	Purpose Planning and Design	<i>Clarity, rigour, validity</i>
2	Implementation	<i>Evaluation expertise, depth and scope of consultation, efficiency</i>
3	Reporting	<i>Readability, accessibility, analysis, limitations</i>
4	Follow-up & Dissemination	<i>Quality of evidence and analysis – feasibility and clarity</i>
5	NGO Outcomes	<i>Trends regarding relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact</i>
6	Cross-Cutting Themes	<i>Focus on Gender Equality and Disability</i>
7	Capacity Building	<i>Contribution to sustainability through in-country capacity of individuals or organisations</i>
8	Lessons Learned	<i>Conclusions that can be generalised beyond the specific case</i>

Rating

- Very Good: Demonstrating many aspects of good practice as defined in evaluation standards
- Good: Demonstrating evidence of good practice across at least 50% of standard criteria.
- Satisfactory: Adequate or just ‘good enough’. Meeting the key standards to the minimum requirement.
- Poor: Unsatisfactory. Failing to meet the minimum standards.

The evaluation task is situated within a broader consultative “utilization” focused process and as such is loosely informed and guided by Michael Patton’s *Development and Utilization Focused Evaluation* approaches. In practice this implies constant reference to the end users of the evaluation and situates the process within a context of development ‘uncertainty’.

It needs to be reiterated here that this meta-evaluation was conducted solely as a desk exercise, reviewing a single evaluation report for each of the projects or programs. There were no opportunities to triangulate or verify assumptions against other sources. The process was undertaken intermittently over a four-week period commencing June 2013. This draft report was circulated to stakeholders for comment at end July 2013 and an interactive feedback session with interested stakeholders was held before the publication of the final report.

1.4 Limitations

As with any review process, there are inherent limitations. Those noted include:

- i. Small sample: This meta-evaluation reviewed only nine evaluation reports. The total number of 'evaluation activities' noted for ANCP activities over the past five years was in excess of 300, including approximately 45 evaluations in Cambodia. This, combined with the sampling methodology, will need to be kept in mind when considering broader generalisation of findings.
- ii. Self-selection for inclusion: It was noted that only nine out of a possible 15 evaluations identified were provided by ANCP NGOs. This may be an issue of definition of evaluation (and a reluctance to provide informal overviews) but may also indicate reluctance by NGOs to provide weaker or less successful evaluation reports for these shared learning processes. This should be clarified for future processes.
- iii. Diversity: As emphasised in MELF Reference Group feedback, Australian NGOs are celebrated for their diversity. This diversity extends to the size, complexity and sophistication of engagement, development and partnership approaches as well as varying methods and mindsets relating to evaluation and learning. This presents a degree of complexity in endeavouring to accommodate this diversity and draw out common themes and lessons, particularly within such a small sample.
- iv. Policy Temporality: This meta-evaluation considered nine NGO evaluations undertaken through 2011 and 2012. These evaluations related to a range of activities, predominantly 'end of project' evaluations for activities which commenced between three and six years previously. That is, almost all of these evaluations were of activities which were conceived, designed and implemented well in advance of the policy documents and frameworks current at the time of the meta-evaluation. Seeking retrospective alignment would therefore be a fruitless exercise. This is of particular relevance for any discussions around disability and value for money (VfM).
- v. Scope: Any assessment or conclusions from a meta-evaluation exercise can be based solely on the content of the evaluation report itself. The quality of any evaluation is truly measured by its planning and implementation, and subsequent interpretation, application and dissemination et cetera. The actual report can only hold a mirror to this.¹⁹ A review of project evaluation reports provides only limited understanding of how NGOs are learning from their experiences and those of their in-country partners.

¹⁹ UNICEF (2004), UNICEF Evaluation Report Standards, Evaluation Office, NYHQ, http://www.unicef.org/azerbaijan/evaluation_report.pdf

2. Findings

This section presents the findings of the meta-evaluation structured around the six key focus questions.

2.1 Evaluation Quality

What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the NGO evaluations and what are the factors that contribute to their quality?

By its very definition, meta-evaluation asks the following questions: “Was the evaluation done well? Is it worth using? Did the evaluation meet professional standards and principles?”²⁰ There is a clear and strong quality element to the approach and a more detailed consideration of this quality is included in the sections below. It is, however, equally important to be pragmatic and consider whether evaluations have provided credible and useful findings. Michael Quinn Patton, in his recent meta-evaluation of the Paris Declaration, suggested that it should be considered not whether an evaluation is *ideal* but whether it is *adequate*, given the constraints and challenges of the context. Quinn Patton described what he termed the “good enough rule”, where elements of quality standards may not have been met, but modest data and process could be shown to support relatively modest conclusions.²¹ Invoking this ‘rule’, the meta-evaluation concluded that eight out of the nine ANCP evaluations reviewed were of adequate quality to provide useful information on project and program activities. Only two, however, were considered to be ‘good’.²²

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Overall ‘Quality’	1	6	2	

As a process, evaluation could be considered as four distinct phases:

- i. *Planning and design*: including articulation of the purpose, evaluation objectives and questions to be answered.
- ii. *Implementation*: and the search for answers to the evaluation questions.
- iii. *Reporting* of findings, both verbally and written.
- iv. *Dissemination*: application and use of the report and its findings for management and/or learning.

²⁰ Michael Quinn Patton (1997) *Utilization Focused Evaluation*, 3rd Ed, Sage, California (pg. 193)

²¹ Michael Quinn Patton (2011) *Evaluation Of The Phase 2 Evaluation Of The Paris Declaration: An Independent review of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Lessons*
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/48620425.pdf>

²² This assessment was based on a qualitative assessment of the overall utility of the reports, with additional reference to the comments and ratings against the quality framework. An overall quantitative ‘rating’ for the evaluations was not considered appropriate, as endeavouring to calculate some ‘mean score’ could have involved combining a ‘good’ score or rating for evaluation design with an unsatisfactory score for implementation or quality of report producing a potentially meaningless average score which appeared that the evaluation was satisfactory overall.

This appraisal considered the first three of these, in so far as was possible from the assessment of evaluation reports. Reviewing the process of dissemination and application of findings was beyond the scope of this meta-evaluation.

Planning and Design:

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
1	4	3	1

The appraisal of the quality of the planning and design was informed by a detailed review of the evaluation terms of reference (ToR) and any supplementary information provided in the introduction or background sections of the reports. Fundamentally it was queried whether the evaluation was well planned and the ToRs well formulated to ensure clarity of task. Terms of reference were available for each of the nine evaluations. Four of these ToRs were annexed to the main report with the remainder provided through requests to the ANGOs for supplementary information. While four evaluations were rated as better than adequate for this criterion, only one of these demonstrated ‘very good’ alignment against good practice evaluation standards. More than half were *just* satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The overall assessment of the ToRs reviewed was that there was potential for improvement. It is acknowledged ToRs in these multi-stakeholder programs are endeavouring to address multiple and diverse expectation and that there are frequently competing interests. Nevertheless, an over ambitious or ambiguous ToR will almost certainly result in an evaluation process and report of lower quality.

Evaluation Purpose: A number of the evaluation ToRs failed to describe the overall rationale, purpose and intended use and end users of the evaluation clearly. This lack of clarity makes it more difficult for the evaluator to focus and direct both their methods and their report narrative and recommendations to ensure maximum utility to intended users. This is particularly the case where evaluation objectives are overly ambitious. At least half of this sample had objectives which asked for more than evaluators could have possibly delivered on, given the time and resources available to them. The complexity of achieving clarity and consensus where multiple stakeholders with diverse and often competing interests is acknowledged.

Object of the Evaluation: The above issues are compounded when the *evaluand* is not clearly described.²³ As a minimum a description of the object or subject of the evaluation would be expected, a statement of what was trying to be achieved, the scope and/or focus (e.g. definition and scope in terms of population—who and how, big or small) and some concept of the size of the investment in terms of resources. While time frames were generally clear, only a minority of ToRs (and subsequent reports) commented on these issues. For a majority of evaluations, the underlying rationale for the intervention and selected approach was also not fully described. Only one of the evaluations provided an adequate contextual background to the intervention under review and none included a satisfactory description of their theory

²³ Evaluand : the ‘thing’ (e.g. program) being evaluated

of change and/or associated assumptions. Where evaluations are expected to examine the *relevance* of their approach and understand reasons for *effectiveness* as well as quantify *results*, this could certainly be highlighted as an area for improvement or attention in the planning stages.

Evaluation Plan: For the most part, the proposed methodologies, evaluation questions and consultations proposed in the ToRs were mirrored in the resulting evaluation report narrative, to varying degrees. The preferred broad methodology or approach in almost all cases proposed a process of document review followed by key informant interviews (n=8) and/or focus group discussion (n=5) concurrent with field visits to project sites. Implicit in most, three of the ToRs explicitly stated a requirement for a participatory and/or 'appreciative' approach. One evaluation was to be based substantively around a quantitative survey and one based on a pilot workshop model. What was not strongly evident in reports was how the evaluator had interpreted the ToRs and how they intended to apply (or had in fact applied) the various methodologies in order to respond to the objectives or questions raised. That is, in eight out of the nine examples, there was no evidence of an evaluation plan. An evaluation plan can present an opportunity to test the evaluability of an intervention, confirm a shared understanding of (and priority of) the questions, challenge the scope and resources required and, importantly, ensure an adequate match of methods to the information sought. In very small, simple evaluations this may be an unnecessary step; however, in a majority of more complicated (if not complex) programs, an evaluation plan can be an invaluable tool to focus the assignment and make a considered assessment regarding feasibility and evaluability.²⁴

ANGOs could more actively promote the accepted 'good practice' of inclusion of an Evaluation Plan as a standard step in the evaluation of more complicated and complex interventions. Generic standards exist which have broad applicability or these could be adapted for use by NGOs.²⁵

Recommendation: ANCP NGOs should demonstrate familiarity with and reference to Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation

²⁴ For a discussion and definition of simple, complicated and complex projects, see Sue Funnell and Patricia Rogers (2011), *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective use of theories of change and logic models*, Wiley and Sons, San Francisco, or Patricia Rogers (2008), *Using Programme Theory to Evaluate Complicated and Complex Aspects of Interventions*, Evaluation, vol 14 91): 29-48 (online at http://www.rismes.it/pdf/rogers_complex.pdf)

²⁵ Introduction of M&E Standards in the absence of some concurrent training or Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) program would however be of limited utility.

Implementation:

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
	5	4	

Criteria for assessing the quality of the implementation included assessment of the make-up of the evaluation team, their efficiency in undertaking the task and the range and depth of consultation undertaken, relative to the objectives of the study. Key questions included whether the activity was adequately resourced and managed. As with the planning and design, the ToRs were the key source of information, supplemented by background information in the introduction to the report.

Evaluation Expertise: It needs to be noted here that less than half of the ToRs contained any detail on the person description and the required range of skills for undertaking the evaluation task. It was, however, positive to note that, of all those that did contain the required range of skills, a majority stipulated the need for an external or independent evaluator. While conclusions are difficult to draw, it was noted that, where included, the key person specifications generally related to required technical skill—e.g. community based rehabilitation or integrated community development—rather than expertise in evaluation. While an understanding of the context and technical area is no doubt of significant benefit, there is increasing recognition of evaluation as an area of technical expertise in itself. This perhaps overreliance on evaluations by technical experts rather than evaluation experts may well account for some of the challenges faced in producing high-quality, defensible evaluation reports. Sourcing consultants with high-level evaluation skills (for the remuneration levels and overall budget available) in partner countries may be part of this challenge. Where these challenges are identified, it perhaps raises the question of the role and responsibility of the ANGO in contributing to the quality and integrity of the evaluation process. Australian NGOs increasingly have high-level in-house evaluation expertise, policy and guidance on evaluation (as tested in accreditation).

Efficiency: Based on the information available, it was not possible to assess the efficiency of the team and whether the evaluation team was able to complete in time and on budget. Tight time frames were however noted for a significant number of the evaluations, most notably the time allocated for report writing. Just one day was allowed for report writing for one of these evaluations, which perhaps not surprisingly did not result in a strong report. This consideration of the time needed for *both* analysis and report writing could again be an indicator of the challenges faced by authors of these evaluation reports and a factor in their resulting quality and readability.

Stakeholder Consultation: The scope of the stakeholder consultations for the evaluations reviewed was a clear area of strength in all of these evaluations. All evaluation reports reviewed included clear descriptions of the full range of stakeholders and their mode of engagement with them, whether it be focus group discussions (FGDs) or key informant interviews. All reports demonstrated efforts to balance consultation with institutional partners (other NGOs or government) and

beneficiaries. Particular efforts were noted to ensure adequate inclusion of children, women or people with disabilities, as appropriate and relevant to the intervention. Innovative methodologies for engaging with these target groups were noted in a number of evaluations. This serves as a reminder of the importance of community in these evaluations, and the role of evaluations in providing information for their understanding and decision-making – in addition to donor country agencies.

One of the reports reviewed described a ‘thematic evaluation’ involving all key regional partners working toward shared goals based around a designated theme. That review was innovative, informative and clearly consultative with a focus on learning for the ANGO and its partners. However, as recognised in that report, it could perhaps have benefited from a better representation of evidence and ‘voice’ from programs and beneficiaries.

Reporting of Findings:

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
1	4	4	

This criterion included an assessment of not only the readability of the report and accessibility of information but also the demonstration of methodological rigour and plausibility of the analysis relating to the subsequent conclusions and recommendations. This reflects skill in analysis and report writing, both subject to the aforementioned constraints of time and consultant skill set. Key questions included how well the evaluation questions were addressed and whether recommendations and conclusions made were clearly presented and supported by the data. Overall, reports presented evaluation data (i.e. ‘raw findings’) adequately, but only a few demonstrated a strong capacity for analysis of the findings and the links to conclusions and recommendations made in the reports.

Clarity of Reports: As some reports were written by either authors with English as a second language or authors more capable in a technical field, it was often time consuming and complex to extract key findings and messages from some of the reports, particularly those that were ‘data dense’. Two factors appeared to facilitate readability of the reports. First was the inclusion of a succinct executive summary, which highlighted key findings and recommendations. Two of these evaluations did not contain an executive summary at all and some that did made claims well beyond the demonstrated findings of the actual evaluation (and could perhaps have benefited from an edit by the Team Leader). That said, four out of the nine reports contained a more than adequate summary that synthesised the key information for readers of the report. The second factor influencing readability was report structure and presentation of findings. Naturally, with a diverse range of objectives and programs, reports were structured relative to the needs of the evaluation process and/or perhaps in deference to NGO standard templates for reporting.

It was noted that frequently where reports contained a section on 'findings', this section merely contained facts and raw data—without any synthesis or narrative to explain what these data may mean. This section was followed by conclusions and recommendations, often without a clear reference to the 'missing middle' about how these were linked. Numerous other formats were noted, including the more 'traditional' donor style report, reporting progress against each objective, but once again without the demonstration of overt analysis before or in the conclusions. The net result was that it was quite difficult to extract or conclude how a number of these reports were responding to the stated evaluation objectives or questions. While noted elsewhere that these objectives and questions were often a little ambitious or too numerous, some cross-reference or explicit mention in the final report would have been expected. This complexity was no doubt compounded by the non-inclusion of any form of evaluation plan for eight out of the nine evaluations.

Use of data and analysis: On the whole, these evaluation reports provided an adequate section detailing the data that had been collected, although in some cases reports were very 'data dense' and greater use of summary tables (i.e. some synthesis or further manipulation of data) might have improved readability and an understanding of the meaning of results. Indeed, frequently 'results' were presented without any explanation of the 'so what does it mean' narrative to accompany them (i.e. was this good or poor progress for that activity). There also appeared to have been significant scope for reports to present a triangulation of data, using qualitative findings to explain possible reasons for some of the quantitative findings. There was also the persistent issue (across more than half of these evaluations) of no basis for comparison or baseline. Very few of these evaluation reports were able to provide a baseline (or indeed expected target) against which they were measuring progress, thus rendering meaningless some of the findings in some instances.

All of the evaluation reports generated recommendations. Only one evaluation demonstrably linked its recommendations to its narrative and/or findings. An issue noted here was that there was no sense of priority or importance of the recommendations. With some reports tabling dozens of recommendations, it often remained unclear if these were just suggestions or a minimum requirement for the continuation of programming. There was one exception to this, where one consultant not only provided prioritisation in terms of time frame (e.g. within one month/year) but also allocated responsibility for the recommendations (e.g. which stakeholder (ANGO, local government et cetera)). This was recognised as 'good' practice.

It was only after a review of the completed evaluation reports that it was possible to track back to the ToRs and realise that the cause of a number of the difficulties faced by the evaluation authors was, in many cases, a weakly formulated ToR. Commonly, questions were not well framed or inferred measurement of 'impact' when progress to date and data available rendered that unfeasible. Yet others demanded an assessment of effectiveness but in a context where neither baseline nor indicators of change were available.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- i. *'Good enough'*: While the terminology might not suit all stakeholders, in the final analysis almost all of the evaluations were assessed as 'good enough'. That is, despite noted weaknesses in ToRs, unclear analysis and at times poorly constructed reports, almost all of the reports were able to deliver useful information on the project's activities to the commissioning organisation (and or to participating communities).
- ii. *Consultative*: These evaluations provided testament to NGOs' commitment to ensure maximum consultation with relevant stakeholders. Consultation not only provides a benefit to the ultimate quality and rigour of the data but has an inherent benefit to those participating in the evaluation process. That is, consultation contributes to a sense of ownership or value at inclusion and provides additional opportunities for sharing of information about the project or program ideas as well as its results. Also, what is perceived here is a commitment to a genuine building up of capacities and opportunities for communities to raise voice and critically engage with projects operating within their space. That is, genuine ownership (agency) which ensures that evaluations are perceived as useful for communities, as well organisations. Consultation also has an accountability function. At times the number of consultations undertaken appeared to indicate an erring toward quantity rather than quality (and thus depth) of consultation. An excess of consultations may conversely diminish the value of the consultation as responses become lost or diffused in the volume of data. This is particularly so where time for analysis is limited.
- iii. *Appropriate and innovative methods*: The ANCP evaluations demonstrated use of a broad range of evaluation tools and of the need for multiple methods to verify findings. While a range of quantitative tools were used in these evaluations (e.g. one evaluation included a household survey), almost all demonstrated an understanding and practice of using a wide range of qualitative tools. While predominantly relying on the 'usual suspects' ²⁶ of document review and some form of semi-structured interview and/or focus group discussion, there were numerous examples of applying these tools innovatively, particularly for specific target (vulnerable) groups such as children and low literacy groups (e.g. ten seeds ranking, role plays et cetera). These techniques, when done well, are time consuming and require significant investment in the training of evaluation team members—not always feasible in the short time frames available for these project reviews. Analysis and synthesis also takes considerable time and skill. While 'stories of change' were mentioned in many of the ToRs, only one of the reports used these stories effectively in the report narrative to demonstrate or support a purported finding. Given the number of end of project activities, and an increasing dialogue toward considerations of 'impact' it was surprising that not more of these

²⁶ see Better Evaluation http://betterevaluation.org/blog/describe_activities_results_context

tools or stories of change were noted.²⁷ While small-scale project evaluations may not be able to fully assess impact, they certainly present an opportunity to collect data which could be used toward that end in a broader study. This may merely be reflective of the small sample reviewed.

- iv. *Independent evaluator*: At least eight of the nine used an independent evaluator or sought advice on tools or model from an independent source. The sample reviewed in the 2006 ANCP meta-evaluation indicated a lower uptake of external consultants.²⁸

Weaknesses

- i. *Black Box Evaluations*:²⁹ A majority of the evaluations strove to describe what was done by the program and what the end results of these activities were, with only limited attention to why and how these processes of change might have occurred. That is, only a small number provided any clear understanding of their intervention logic or program theory ('theory of change'). While these processes of change and their underlying assumptions are no doubt documented in the program design documents and well understood by implementing partners, their exclusion from the evaluation processes perhaps presents as a missed opportunity to test the validity and effectiveness of many of the NGOs' strategies and approaches. While in some cases reference was made to the existence of a broader M&E framework and intermediate outcomes, few included detail of these in their discussion and analysis. Some may argue that this level of sophistication is not necessary, due to the simplicity or small budget of these NGO projects. Where these smaller partner projects present an element of a larger programmatic approach, perhaps these small project evaluations are not the place to test the veracity of 'theory'. In those cases it may be more appropriate to make additional investments in more rigorous evaluation of approaches (e.g. under the banner of thematic or regional evaluations) as was demonstrated to be occurring in some instances.
- ii. *Inadequate description of broader M&E system*: In general (there were exceptions), these evaluations were not situated within a demonstrable, broader monitoring and evaluation framework or process. A surprising number of evaluations lamented the lack of baseline data against which to measure change and progress or failed to include expected outcomes or 'targets' against which they were evaluating progress. A reported finding of '14 committees formed', or 'ten women earning income through pig breeding' thus becomes a tad meaningless in the

²⁷ An intention to assess impact is frequently mentioned in ToRs for these evaluative processes, <http://www.interaction.org/document/guidance-note-2-linking-monitoring-and-evaluation-impact-evaluation> provides a good description of how routine M&E can support meaningful and valid impact evaluation.

²⁸ Colin Reynolds (2006) *A metaevaluation of NGO evaluations conducted under the ANCP*, http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/ngo_eval.pdf

²⁹ Also referred to as *mystery box* designs, see Funnell and Rogers *Purposeful Program Theory*, op. cit.

absence of the additional information. It would have been useful to document how many committees the project had assumed might be necessary to achieve the objective and what degree of operability would be required (i.e. indicators) for effective functioning of these committees. While a number of reports made reference to an existing M&E framework, only one report actually contained indicators (mainly at the output level) and none annexed the M&E plan for the project or program under review, which may have provided useful reference (for this process at least).

- iii. *Analysis of 'evidence' and presentation of conclusions and recommendations:* Evidence was not systematically presented, utilised and integrated into the analysis. Given the numerous constraints, it is not surprising that few evaluations were able to provide strong evidence of analysis of their findings, and thus provide a strong argument or rationale as a basis for their conclusions and recommendations. All of the evaluation reports reviewed included recommendations in some shape or form. Recommendations were, however, on the whole, listed as unconnected statements at the end of the report, not anchored to clear evidence. While undoubtedly valid, and clear in the mind of the evaluator, it was frequently unclear as to what finding or from what evidence the recommendation had been made. With the exception of one report, recommendations were also made fairly generically, without attributing responsibility (e.g. 'the ANGO should/could' et cetera) or any sense of timing or priority (e.g. 'within the first year of phase two, x or y should be established'). While, conceivably, these steps in attributing responsibility and priority occur post evaluation, for a number of these evaluations it would have been valuable to clearly state who should ideally be responsible and with what priority the recommendation needed to be considered.

Quality Factors

There were three key quality factors highlighted in this meta-evaluation: first, the quality and evidence of an underlying M&E framework (inclusive of baseline); second, the formulation of a clear ToR; and, third, the accessibility of evaluation expertise for implementation and management of the task.

Project/Program Design: As noted elsewhere, this review was based solely on the appraisal of the evaluation report and could only make inferences about the quality of the project design or any underlying monitoring and evaluation framework. As described above, the clarity of the project rationale, approach and intervention logic were frequently not clear in the ToRs or the evaluation report. This limited the scope of the evaluations to describing accomplishments or activity completion (outputs)—and perhaps missed opportunities for investigating the underlying 'theories of change' and associated assumptions. The non-inclusion of detail on the monitoring and evaluation framework (most notably indicators and/or expected outcomes) combined with an apparent absence of useful baseline data may also indicate a greater need for upfront attention to these issues.

Recommendation: ANCP NGOs need to improve the consideration and demonstration of broader M&E processes in evaluation reports and, as necessary, across the project cycle—most notably, ensuring the availability of baseline data and intended outcomes against which to report.

Evaluation Planning: While there were exceptions, on the whole ToRs for these evaluative activities rated as just adequate. Only four out of the nine were rated as ‘good’, indicating that they met the minimum standards for ToRs. There were clear links between the quality of the ToRs and the resulting quality of the evaluation report. Given that the ToRs are a clear area for the ANGO to have input and influence, it should be possible for these starting points in the evaluation process to *all* rate as good (or indeed very good) overall. There would appear to be scope both in terms of building partner capacity in developing ToRs through closer ‘quality control’ and capacity building inputs to partners, but also potentially in the provision of some agreed minimum standards. The standards would ensure the inclusion of the minimum level of information (i.e. content), and the quality monitoring from expert eyes in the ANGO could improve the evaluability. Developing ToRs for an evaluation does require a high degree of skill and assumes some expertise in evaluation in order to construct coherent and realistic evaluation questions and propose appropriate methodologies and time frames in which to undertake the task.

Recommendation: ANCP NGOs need to strive to improve the quality of ToRs and planning for the evaluation of ANCP activities. Familiarity with and reference to Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation would facilitate this.³⁰

The quality of ToRs has a direct bearing on the quality of the evaluation process and subsequent report. This could in part be achieved through closer reference and use of evaluation standards and guidelines. It also implies scope and role for greater direct engagement by the ANGO in the planning stages of in-country partner NGO evaluation activities.

Implementation and reporting: Indeed, discrete skills in evaluation are also required for undertaking the task. While ideally advocating for the inclusion of a team member with demonstrated skill in evaluation, this is not always possible or feasible considering contexts and/or budgets. Thus, While having a ‘team’ of consultants might not always be feasible to cover the multiple needs for technical or contextual expertise as well as evaluation skill, the ANGOs could perhaps better consider how they might ‘value add’ to the evaluation process. That might involve some level of mentoring of key in-country partner staff in reviewing evaluation plans, or providing more inputs during the evaluation planning and implementation or being accessible to give constructive and formative critique and feedback on draft reports. Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) is currently popular in the sector with numerous proponents, including DFAT.

³⁰ Standards already exist in a significant number of larger ANCP NGOs. Other organisations might usefully reference the DFAT standards – which have broad applicability

This increasingly accepted approach works to build a whole of organisation evaluation ‘culture’ as well as addressing capabilities. Well documented in both peer review (e.g. American Journal of Evaluation) and the grey literature, ECB approaches could have relevance to both ANCP NGOs and their partners.³¹ While many might argue, on the ‘good enough’ rule, that these project evaluations are adequate for purpose, to genuinely extract meaning from much of the rich data collected there is still significant scope for improvement.

Recommendation: ANCP NGOs should ensure adequate inputs of evaluation expertise to the evaluation process.

This could be achieved either by advocating for the inclusion of a consultant on the evaluation who has demonstrated evaluation expertise or, where that is neither feasible nor appropriate, by considering how the ANGO might better provide timely inputs, using its demonstrated in-house evaluation expertise to improve the implementation and reporting of the partner evaluation.

NGO evaluation quality over time: It is worthy of note that this is not the first evaluation of ANCP evaluation quality. In 2006, a similar meta-evaluation³² (of 20 ANCP evaluations) was commissioned by the former AusAID which identified and explored eight key quality issues and identified those with significant shortcomings.

Table 3: 2006 Meta-evaluation

	Quality Issue	% Shortcomings
1	Level to which evaluation provides a balance of accountability and continuous Improvement	25%
2	Level to which assertions made are supported in a defensible and methodologically sound manner	50%
3	The drawing out of lessons learned	50%
4	Clarity and conciseness of presentation	50%
5	Independence of evaluators	25%
6	Level to which M&E issues are raised	50%
7	Attempting to move beyond output level analysis	50%
8	Use of participatory techniques – quality of analysis	100%

While a direct comparison of findings is not possible, it is possible to make some general observations. Evaluations being undertaken in 2011–12 were notably stronger in their intentions toward learning and continuous improvement, demonstrated

³¹ Lennie, J., Tacchi, J. & Wilmore, M. (2010). *Critical reflections on the use of participatory methodologies to build evaluation capacities in international development organisations*, Participatory Action Research and Action Learning, World Congress 2010, Melbourne, Australia (may be a useful reference) <http://wc2010.alara.net.au/Formatted%20Papers/1.3.5.ICD.2.pdf>

³² Colin Reynolds (2006), A Met evaluation of NGO Evaluations, op. cit.

concrete evidence of their efforts to move beyond output level assessment and analysis and had responded almost universally to suggestions regarding independent review. The bulk of the key issues remaining relate to the poor quality of the analysis and presentation of the evaluations evidence and findings; the findings from 2006 are not dissimilar to those found in this sample.

The key recommendation from the 2006 meta-evaluation was to ensure that ACFID and the ANCP NGOs be made aware of this list (and provided with a copy of the meta-evaluation report) in order to highlight shortcomings and increase awareness. It did not go so far as to suggest tools (e.g. better formulated ToRs and/or reference to standards) or processes (e.g. ANGO mentoring) which are perhaps required to take partner evaluations to the next level.

2.2 Evaluation Effectiveness

How effective are the evaluations at examining the value of the particular project/program approach?

Effectiveness of the evaluations is in essence a consideration of their quality. As such, the assessment provided in the preceding section of most being ‘good enough’ still stands. Considering the constraints of the data availability, that is probably the best assessment possible; therefore, a ratings table has not been included for this section. On the whole, evaluations collected information on project or program activities and assessed the degree to which objectives had been achieved. However, that assessment was of the overall quality of the evaluation and not specific to examination of the project or program ‘approach’. In an endeavour to more directly consider this question, a series of sub questions were formulated during the planning stage of this meta-evaluation (see Evaluation Plan Annex 2, Table 1). These included:

- *How well are the object/objectives and intervention logic described?*
- *What is being evaluated? Is this clear? What is the ‘approach’?*
- *Did the method choice match the needs of the evaluation?*
- *Do the reports explain how the intervention contributed to the results?*

It has already been described in the previous section that, on the whole, these evaluation reports were economical with their descriptions of the object or objectives of the intervention being reviewed, and only one case adequately described the underlying program logic (not including the thematic review). At a minimum, it would be expected that evaluation ToRs and associated reports should contain a clear description of the *evaluand*—that is, the thing (project, person, process) under evaluation—including a clear indication of what the intervention had been endeavouring to achieve (i.e. what success might look like). Only half of these evaluations satisfactorily described this. In some instances it is feasible to consider that ‘theories of change’ had not been formulated, as interventions were based on broader sectoral ‘understandings’ and demonstrated practice, and as such not subject to any necessary ‘testing’ through evaluative processes. In others, these were no doubt

described in associated project and program documentation (e.g. designs) and merely not available for this meta-evaluation.

This inclusion of the *evaluand* and description of the intervention logic is of particular importance in an evaluation and for an understanding of what is being evaluated and why. While only two of the evaluation TORs explicitly described an evaluation of the project's strategy or approach, many of the others may have been endeavouring to do the same thing. For example, where an evaluation objective was to examine local government participation in committees, this could well have been the key approach employed for effective delivery and sustainability of programs, or merely a recognition of the involvement of local stakeholders. In ideal circumstances, an experienced evaluator would (re) construct this for the purposes of the evaluation, showing the assumed or actual intermediate steps in goal achievement.

In light of the issues just described, it was often difficult to make judgements about method choice. However, for this range of smaller scale, less complex interventions, the range of methods used appeared appropriate to the requirements of the evaluation (including budget and scope), particularly where the objective of the evaluation was to review achievements—that is, to document outputs (and to an extent outcomes). What can be said about method is that the methodological approach proposed in TORs often appeared to have been implemented uncritically. That is, there was minimal inclusion in the reports as to the particular rationale or purpose of the various methods and almost no mention of any of the limitations or threats to the validity and reliability of data collected using these methods.

It did, however, appear that where more strategic reviews were required (i.e. to better understand 'approach'), both different methods and perhaps budgetary allocations need to be considered. One example from this sample highlighted this through the addition of a thematic review, over and above routine and standard evaluation processes, in order to examine specific aspects of approach (as well as contribute more comprehensively to learning). As discussed in a later section, an average (median) spend of around \$7,000 for an evaluation does not have great purchasing power in terms of both inputs and resulting outputs.

In conclusion, these evaluations adequately describe the progress of activities and to some extent achievements in terms of outcomes. They are in general not conceived, nor adequately resourced, to consider broader issues of project or program approach. Examples in this sample demonstrated the utility of conducting complementary, additional evaluation activities more specifically targeted at (and resourced) to fulfil that aim.

2.3 Cross-Cutting Issues

How do the evaluations consider gender equality, age and disability? And do the evaluations provide disaggregated data (if relevant)?

Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
5	3	1	

This subset of evaluations was grouped under and selected from those considered to be aligned to the strategic goal of *promoting opportunities for all* with the objective of:

- enabling more children, particularly girls, to attend school
- empowering women to participate in the economy, leadership and education
- enhancing the lives of people with disability.

While this ‘alignment’ was retrospective, it was interesting to note that few of these evaluations explicitly addressed the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and disability in evaluation planning, design and reporting. More than half did not address any cross-cutting issues at all, or did so inadequately. Only one out of the sample of nine evaluations was assessed as providing sufficient attention and analysis to these issues. It is difficult to group cross-cutting issues, as there is a great diversity in projects and indeed degree of relevance of the highlighted key issues of gender equality and disability.

Gender Equality: gender equality is currently identified by DFAT as a critical cross-cutting theme across the aid program. The ANCP guidelines remind ANGOs that NGO activities need to consider the involvement of men and women in development and refer grant recipients to Australian Government policy. The relevant policy guidance for this group of projects would have been *Gender equality in Australia’s aid program – why and how (2007)*.³³ One of its key objectives was to “collect and analyse information to improve gender equality results”. It was therefore surprising to note minimal mention in ToRs and reports on assessing gender issues, and even less presentation of data which was disaggregated by sex. Even where disaggregated data was presented, there was no obvious analysis as to the meaning and/or implication of the ‘numbers’. On the whole, it was assessed that the issue of gender (during this time frame) had dropped from view, with the exception, of course, of the small number of explicitly gender focused programs. As with other issues, this may well be defined in the design or operational or M&E plans, but even where there may have been a significant focus in a project, the evidence in these evaluations was scant.

Disability: This sample of nine evaluations contained two projects with an explicit focus on disability and people with disabilities. These projects contained disability focused objectives and, to varying extents, data which was disaggregated around disability

³³ *Gender equality in Australia’s aid program why and how (2007)*,
http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/gender_summary.pdf

issues. Of the remaining seven projects, none made mention of disability at all nor contained any data pertaining to people with disabilities.

Current policy on disability is guided by *Development for All: Towards a disability-inclusive Australian aid program 2009–2014*.³⁴ Firstly, it is concluded that disability is seen by many as an issue of social exclusion, requiring a rights framework, and that best results are from mainstreaming disability through development programs. At the same time, the strategy suggests that best results may result emerge from disability specific projects—noting that these “may have best effect when integrated into a comprehensive program strategy”. Some general lessons for effective programming are listed, including the need to:

- involve people with disability at all stages, from policy development, program planning through design, implementation and evaluation
- design programs for identified barriers to participation
- develop a knowledge base on disability to support and inform policy development and program design, implementation and evaluation
- incorporate gender issues into disability program design (and disability issues into gender program design).
-

These lessons provide a useful guideline for ANGOs in receipt of ANCP funds. A consideration of these, plus more general reference to the *Development for All* policy, is suggested, with additional ongoing efforts to increase partners’ awareness of these issues. Australia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This means that the needs of persons with disabilities must be considered in all DFAT funded programs.

Age: The terms of reference for this meta-evaluation included ‘age’ under the heading of cross-cutting issues. Only two reports contained any mention of age disaggregated data, one of those pertaining mainly to the age of children in school. The second report collected potentially valuable data on age of participants and beneficiaries; however, the data was not well analysed. As with gender disaggregated data, this is often of limited usefulness without some element of analysis.

Accredited ANGOs are assessed for the completeness of their policy guides and capacity to operationalise and share with in-country partners a range of cross-cutting issues, including gender and disability. Gender and the empowerment of women has been a longstanding development priority and ANGOs need to take notice of the apparent ‘fall off’ in attention to gender in evaluation reports (and potentially in project designs and M&E frameworks). The evidence of explicit attention to people with a disability (in non-disability specific projects) was extremely low (in fact, non-existent) in these evaluations. This issue was mirrored in the 2011 *ANCP Thematic Review*, which described weak evidence of explicit strategies designed to include people with disabilities While acknowledging that their importance was “recognised by

³⁴ *Development for All Towards a disability-inclusive Australian aid program 2009–2014*, <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/dev-for-all.pdf>

ANGOs as critical” (pg. 3). To some extent this may be explained by temporality, with a number of these projects being designed and substantively implemented prior to the adoption of the *Development for All* policy. Cross-cutting issues will require particular attention in any subsequent meta-evaluation.

Recommendation: ANCP NGOs to ensure explicit attention in ANCP reporting to cross-cutting issues, most notably gender and disability.

This entails consideration through the entire project cycle, ensuring adequate analysis, documentation and availability of data for evaluation and review. Explicit attention to cross-cutting issues should be included in all evaluation ToRs and reports.

2.4 Lessons Learnt

What are the main lessons learnt? What works and why?

Effectively capturing and applying lessons learned is key to the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) partnership as described in the CSEF. Indeed, almost all of the evaluations reviewed in the meta-evaluation stated identifying lessons learnt as a key objective of the evaluation. There is therefore a certain irony that almost none of the evaluation reports actually included an *explicit* section or discussion on lessons learnt. This finding is consistent with the 2006 ANCP meta-evaluation.³⁵

The ANGOs in this sample are all demonstrably ‘learning organisations’—committed to processes of ‘continuous improvement’—as attested to in the rigorous accreditation process. Drawing on lessons learnt from project and program evaluations can provide a valuable contribution to this. Lessons learned are, however, notoriously difficult to formulate and are frequently presented as blatantly obvious or too broad ‘motherhood’ statements, of little utility to anyone. Alternatively, (and evident in this sample) ‘lessons’ are extremely narrow and applicable only to this partner and/or project in a defined time frame. What appears to be occurring is a conflation or confusion of findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) generalise this difficulty and proffers definitions to guide its staff and consultants.³⁶ IFAD presents the following definitions:

- a *finding* is a “factual statement” (such as “the repayment rate was 95%”)
- a *conclusion* is a synthesis of “factual statements” corresponding to a specific circumstance (e.g. policy x failed to achieve its objectives)
- a *recommendation* is a prescription on what should be done in a specific circumstance (e.g. in order to increase the repayment rate in project x)
- a *lesson learnt* is a generalisation which does not refer to a specific circumstance but to a class of situations (e.g. credit projects for the rural poor). It points out

³⁵ Colin Reynolds (2006), A Metaevaluation of NGO Evaluations, op. cit.

³⁶ see http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/lle/lle.htm

what is very likely to happen and/or what should be done in order that something will take place (or to prevent it).

A more broadly accepted definitions of lessons learnt can be found in the OECD Glossary of Key Terms, which describes lessons learnt as:

*Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact.*³⁷

The UNICEF Program Policy and Procedures manual defines them as:

*Conclusions that can be generalized beyond the specific case ... lessons that are of relevance more broadly within the country situation or globally, to an organisation or the broader international community*³⁸

It was the assessment of the meta-evaluation not that these evaluation reports were not rich in lessons learnt but rather that lessons were embedded within the narrative, or implied through the suggestions made in recommendations. The lessons below were therefore largely extrapolated from the evaluation reports by the meta-evaluation consultant. Some may have been explicitly expressed, or implied through a recommendation; others have been intuited through a reading of the narrative.

While some lessons may have applicability to a narrower range of interventions, almost all made reference to the importance and benefits of targeted and purposeful partnering with other organisations (particularly NGOs) with complementary skill sets. As discussed further in section 2.6, almost all evaluations described and acknowledged the importance and complexity of engaging with government and local authorities, to ensure both effectiveness and sustainability of program activities.

- i. **Partnership:** Selectively partnering with other organisations can provide significant efficiencies to NGO programming. The evaluations reviewed included numerous positive and innovative examples of targeted NGO partnering. These included programmatic collaborations or consortiums to harness strengths from different types of organisations. For example, one organisation had demonstrated capacity in project management and another in a technical area (e.g. in education or in accessing volunteer resources). A significant number of organisations (and their in-country partners) acknowledged and actioned a need for niche or targeted technical input into programming. A common example was where local partners had demonstrated capacity in community development but lacked specific skill in a niche area such as micro-finance. A number of NGOs had sought targeted inputs from organisations known for their capacity in this area. It was also broadly acknowledged that Cambodia is an “NGO rich” environment that is perhaps not

³⁷ OECD (2011) Glossary <http://www.oecd.org/development/peer-reviews/2754804.pdf>

³⁸ <http://www.unicef.org/tdad/unicefpppmanualfeb07.pdf>

always capitalised on and that cooperation and collaboration need not be limited to other NGO players but could include multilaterals such as UNICEF.

- ii. **Working with government:** Genuine cooperation with government and local authorities was a feature of almost all NGO projects and programs in Cambodia. This was described as both a prerequisite to program success and an assurance toward sustainability. While not explicitly stated, this no doubt reflects upon the specific context at play in Cambodia today, indicating both the political maturity (and at times uncertainty) and status of NGOs at this moment in time. It was, however, also acknowledged that this engagement with government is not without complexity and requires particular skills in diplomacy, relationship building and communication, significant flexibility and considerations of time. A range of NGOs also acknowledged the need for engagement beyond their 'line Ministry'. That was noted to be of particular importance when engaging with district and/or commune level organisation and funding, where there is a need for engagement and influence beyond technical ministries, particularly with impending district reforms.
- iii. **Community Participation:** While 'participation' is vital, this does not always equate with 'volunteerism'. Engaging communities in all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation of activities is a core component to most NGO programs in Cambodia. This engagement ensures a voice for the marginalised and enhances ownership and effectiveness. However, engagement by many beneficiaries incurs a significant opportunity cost and, for many projects described, can only be guaranteed by providing compensation or some form of per diem (or reimbursement of costs, such as for transport). This 'cost' for volunteerism is reportedly mirrored, and thus is perpetuating the current practices of some government programs. Withdrawal of external NGO support and financing thus presents a threat to the sustainability of such participation and 'volunteering'. Despite a number of pilot programs described in these evaluations (e.g. community 'pots', and some potential for future support through Commune Councils), no clear solutions were described. Also noted was that, of those 'volunteering', a majority were from an older demographic, with few organisations successfully engaging with younger Cambodians, who were otherwise too busy pursuing income and/or education to engage in NGO programs. It could be of potential value for NGOs working in Cambodia to share their experiences and successes in these areas of successful withdrawal from supplementing volunteer payments and engaging youth. Without stating the obvious, these reports yet again emphasised the importance of relationships and building trust and the time and commitment this takes.
- iv. **Reaching the poorest:** Reaching the 'poorest of the poor' is often not feasible or requires different/adjunct strategies and additional resources. NGO programs in Cambodia are effectively reaching poor and marginalised people and providing strategies to improve livelihoods. Those benefiting from NGO programs are, however, on the whole, the 'less poor' and not the poorest of the poor—who

remain engaged in a battle for daily survival, without the resources to enable participation. This was particularly noted for savings and credit schemes. It was not possible to discern from the evaluation reports if this was purposeful targeting to those most likely to succeed (i.e. the less poor) or a shortcoming in the project or program strategy and approach which had intended to reach the poorest. On the whole, more specific articulation of intended target groups and beneficiaries might provide the answer to that question. As an addendum, it was also noted that, when working with people with disabilities, these are often the poorest and most vulnerable, whose fundamental needs and/or income earning capacity (or access to savings and loans) needs to be addressed concurrently with other community based rehabilitation programs.

- v. **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** In order to understand how well you have achieved your objectives, it is vital to have a clear and accessible set of baseline information against which to gauge success. Ideally, partners should participate actively in the development of M&E tools, frameworks and baselines or at least have a discernible *stake* in information collection and analysis. It is equally important to conceive of, and collect information relevant to, the measure of impact from the outset. Numerous organisations could have benefited from more explicit presentation of their qualitative interview findings, perhaps in the form of stories of change, to better demonstrate the impact or influence that interventions had made to people's lives.

Recommendations:

ANCP NGOs should clarify processes and definitions, and provide clear direction for the capture and documentation of lessons learned from project level evaluations.

2.5 Trends

Are there any trends or patterns regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristics of evaluated projects?

As noted in the MELF, DFAT now requires all evaluations to give attention to the OECD DAC criteria for quality evaluations³⁹ That is to consider the project/program relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. This section briefly reviews issues emergent in this sample of evaluations under those headings.

Relevance considers the appropriateness of an intervention to meet its objectives in that context and whether the activity was tailored to meet local (and donor) needs and

³⁹ NB: A majority of these evaluations pre-dated the MELF and as such did not explicitly consider these issues (DAC Criteria only overtly considered in two out of the nine evaluations). Issues discussed above have therefore been extrapolated from the narratives. As such they are subject to the interpretation of the meta-evaluation author.

priorities. Attention to relevance is often reflective of having undertaken adequate situational analysis and understanding of the context. On the whole, this sample of evaluations described relevant and well-considered interventions. That is, these activities were based on sound knowledge of the population, perhaps through previous projects, or demonstrated clear consideration to both assessed need (by the NGO) and expressed need (as desired by the community). Overall, there appeared to have been good attention to undertaking situational and needs analyses, perhaps facilitated by maintaining engagement and relationships in the same geographical area or population group. This phasing of interventions appeared to facilitate both identifying and reaching target groups (e.g. the poor and most vulnerable or marginalised) and building the knowledge base of the implementing NGO around cultural and contextual issues. Key in the 'new era' of NGO programming in Cambodia, this continuation also allows for the building and cementing of relationships with local institutions (e.g. local government). Sustained presence and continued activities further add to the perceptions of trust and legitimacy of an NGO. This legitimacy is enhanced by the employment of highly consultative approaches by almost all NGO partners—approaches which reportedly enabled NGOs to make clear and relatively rapid progress.

A small number of the projects went well beyond talking of 'participation' and consultation, however, with clear agendas for empowerment, both as a means and as an end in itself. It was refreshing to see renewed consideration of approaches to empowerment, with one project piloting a model based on Paulo Freire's theories and methods of change and 'empowerment'.⁴⁰ Overall, the consideration of rights, justice, inclusion, giving a voice to the voiceless and generally enabling citizens to engage in their own futures was strongly evident in this sample of ANCP project evaluations.

Impressively, NGOs in Cambodia seemed to have a high awareness of the policy context and tailored their programs effectively to either provide synergies or challenge the status quo as appropriate. This related not only to national policy but, in a number of cases, to global initiatives and policies (e.g. as pertaining to violence against women, trafficking and/or child protection). While not assessed explicitly, the meta-evaluation author cannot, however, recall any mention of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in these evaluations.

The NGOs' approaches of capacity building and/or institutional strengthening appeared to be highly appropriate for the context; capacity building was evident as a central theme across almost all projects. Positively, a majority of those working on capacity building approaches showed themselves to be using 'systems' thinking and not working in isolation. As noted elsewhere, there remain some issues for improved capacity analysis, most notably where in-country partner NGOs have traditionally relied heavily on the provision of training. Partners continue to need support to analyse the range of constraints or incentives faced by individuals and institutions and to facilitate the translation of knowledge gained through putting training into action.

⁴⁰ Paulo Freire (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York

Also reflective of a good understanding of the context and population was the acknowledgement in these projects of the importance and success of savings schemes and micro-credit schemes. The use of these schemes, almost as an adjunct activity, to other agricultural or farming programs—or disability awareness and rights programs—acknowledged the realities of the poor.

It is also acknowledged that working with and through local NGO partners is a requirement of the ANCP grant. Local partners bring immeasurable inputs to projects in terms of their 'local knowledge' – this has significant impacts on the relevance of interventions.

Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its purpose and objectives. Implicit in this is an examination of the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, While many of these evaluations reported well against their activities completed and achievements, a full description of the intended outputs and expected outcomes was not always clearly described in the reports. Furthermore, a common lament from many of the evaluators was the absence or weakness of baseline data against which to gauge progress or change. Thus, While progress was clearly made, it was often difficult from the position of the meta-evaluation to verify the extent to which objectives had been achieved. In order to adequately report against effectiveness, these issues need to be addressed by NGOs.

Given the nature of many of these projects and programs, if effectiveness equates with 'participation', then more than moderate successes were achieved. And, certainly, active participation appears to be a requisite feature of effectiveness in many of these community development initiatives. A question needs to be raised here, though, about whether participation equates with empowerment—which was the stated objective of a number of these initiatives. Working towards empowerment, using less tangible indicators such as 'confidence' provides challenges for monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, participation and the requisite building of relationships and trust was shown to be enhanced by conducting projects and programs in areas or with populations with whom the NGOs had a long history of engagement.

Capacity of local implementing partner NGOs appeared to be a key factor influencing effectiveness, both positively and negatively. Capacity of partners not only included strengths in activity and project management but implied a significant level of technical skill in many instances. On a number of occasions it had been 'missed' that a local partner did not have the adequate technical knowledge or skill to fully implement the full range of activities (e.g. around micro-credit). ANGOS have demonstrated strengths in partner capacity assessment in terms of their organisational and administrative capacity. Perhaps, however, additional emphasis is required at the point of project appraisal to review the project specific (i.e. technical) capacity partners require—and to consider any role that the ANGO may have in enhancing/ensuring this within the project cycle.

Perhaps obviously, effectiveness was shown to be higher for activities directly under the control of the local NGO partner. But once voluntary boards or committees, government or other institutions became involved, the rate of effectiveness diminished. This may reflect the maturity of the local partners and their past experience of working largely independently of government bodies and formal institutions. Cambodian NGOs have a long history of independence and service provision. As almost all of these projects/programs contained some element of working with government, NGO partners need perhaps to be more realistic about what can be achieved within fixed time frames, when additional levels of uncertainty are introduced. As noted elsewhere, working outside of civil society groups introduces new challenges—most notably challenges in understanding and addressing incentives and barriers to participation and change.

Efficiency considers whether the resources were appropriate and contributed to achieving the intended outputs and whether the intervention was cost effective and achieved on time. Seven out of the nine evaluations made no reference at all to issues of efficiency. Only one evaluation acknowledged the importance of efficiency, then noted that it had not been addressed but was certainly a consideration for the future. The project in question described an intervention targeting just 200 families but requiring the inputs of more than 30 staff. A discussion of cost effectiveness would have been of value, if only to highlight the inherent cost and resource intensive nature of these sorts of interventions.

None of the evaluation reports made explicit reference to Value for Money (VfM). There is clear scope for improvement—although, once again, the issue of policy temporality may be at play, with these activities and evaluations preceding much of the policy change referred to above.

Recommendations:

ANCP NGOs need to require and more explicitly demonstrate considerations of efficiency, inclusive of value for money (VfM), through the full project cycle.

DFAT should provide clarity and guidance to ANCP NGOs on expectations and or frameworks for considering value for money (VfM).

Impact⁴¹ considers the wider effects of what happened as a result of the project (social, economic, environmental) to individuals, communities and institutions—what was the real difference to people’s lives and how many people were affected. Impact assesses both positive and negative, and intended and unintended results. On the whole, these ‘project evaluations’ did not and perhaps should not be striving to consider ‘impact’. At least two endeavoured to address impact to some extent but in

⁴¹ See <http://www.ode.dfat.gov.au/publications/impact-evaluation.html> for a useful discussion paper on impact evaluation

the end had neither the data, the time nor the appropriate methodology. The expectations of ANCP project evaluations with respect to impact perhaps need to be explicit—a process which requires a level of skill and resourcing well beyond that available for a small-scale project evaluation. That said, NGOs can and should continue to consider impact at the design stage, and in their development of any subsequent M&E framework and baseline data collection. Systematic data collection, including the recording of ‘stories of change’, can be invaluable for broader processes of impact assessment.

2.6 Capacity Building/Sustainability

What evidence is there that the ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals?

Sustainability is highlighted as one of the key objectives of the CSEF, where:

The Australian government seeks a sustainable approach to overcoming poverty within developing countries by building service delivery capacity, improving governance and strengthening local systems.⁴²

In this sample of evaluations, there was significant demonstrated evidence of consideration of both the issues of capacity building and sustainability and the links between the two. Capacity building was explicit as a project objective in a number of initiatives evaluated, and indeed was stated as an objective of one the evaluation processes itself. The model of capacity building outlined in a majority of these evaluations could be described as a ‘systems approach’, with explicit strategies employed to strengthen the capacity of partner NGOs, participants and/or beneficiaries and local government institutions with a stake in or impact upon the programming area. There was definite evidence of greater sophistication of activity design in terms of timing and synergy, particularly vis-a-vis the policy environment—most notably with regard to gender and disability in Cambodia.

Indeed, working with (and strengthening) government was a strong theme through a majority of these projects and programs, often describing engagement at multiple levels of government, with a focus on skills building at a local level and broader ‘influence’ or advocacy (e.g. toward legislative change) at a national level. Specific to the current context and reforms underway in Cambodia, numerous agents were also advocating at a district and/or commune level for recognition and funding of a range of community based activities; these efforts being directly related to the ongoing viability and sustainability of a number of initiatives. Indeed, efforts to engage with government seemed to be targeted and focused on supporting into the future the core community development activities of the NGO programs.

ANCP projects and programs are equally—if not principally—engaged with the capacity building of individuals and communities. A significant proportion of these

⁴² CSEF: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/civil-society-engagement-framework.aspx>

activities focused on skill building for individuals (e.g. specific agricultural techniques) or community mechanisms (e.g. micro-credit and savings schemes). It was also positive to note that more than half of these evaluations (and thus the projects/programs that they were reviewing) made explicit mention of empowerment and the role of the local NGO partner in facilitating (the marginalised) targeted communities to have a 'voice'. The role of NGOs in raising awareness about rights was strongly evident in these evaluations. While important for governance, these evaluations gave particular focus to the right to safety and security (e.g. of women and children) and access to services (e.g. for people with disabilities).

That said, around one-third of the sample still appeared to approach many aspects of capacity building from a training or 'knowledge gap' perspective, without analysing broader constraints or incentives. It is acknowledged that this may be as much about the capacity of the evaluator as the ANGO and its in-country partner. However, it is difficult in this process to separate the two. What was noted in the evaluation reports was that capacity building or a lack of capacity was frequently presented as the reason for poor results or progress, and the oft proffered solution was more training or refresher training. It was not apparent whether a broader 'capacity analysis' had been undertaken to see if capacity was the issue—or indeed what aspect of capacity was lacking. This was particularly evident when discussing local government capacity and participation, which is likely to be influenced by a broad spectrum of barriers and constraints—not merely information to be gleaned from (yet) more training. Proffering these perhaps easier solutions also meant that evaluators did not question whether the overall approach or some underlying assumptions were actually valid. Capacity analysis would appear to require a much more critical approach.

ANCP funding is therefore demonstrably being used toward building the capacity of individuals and/organisations within beneficiary communities, inclusive of both civil society and formal government structures. What this process relies on is the capacity of the ANGOs' in-country NGO partner to capably manage and deliver the projects and programs—and of the ANGO to monitor that capability. As accredited NGOs, the ANGOs have demonstrated systems and processes for monitoring partner capacity, and at least one of these programs (and two associated evaluation-learning processes) were specifically targeted at maintaining and continuing to build that capacity. There were, however, some gaps evident. For example, in one of the longer projects, an end of project review revealed that one of the key reasons for low community knowledge and capacity on a particular issue was in fact primarily due to low knowledge and capacity of the responsible local NGO. While good solutions were put in place for the future (including some NGO pairing), it could and should be asked why the ANGO was not aware of these capacity gaps well before the end of project evaluation. This may be an isolated incident, but where ANGOs are so reliant on the skills and capacity of local in-country partners, they need to remain vigilant in their monitoring of not only their partners' project management and reporting skills but also their technical knowledge and capacity.

Recommendation: ANGOs to ensure adequate assessment and monitoring of partners' technical capabilities.

This would include explicit attention to in-country partner skills and experience at project appraisal and through field monitoring, where the ANGO could capitalise on networks to facilitate greater linking and targeted partnering. This would also increase the impact of evaluations on future projects.

3. Discussion

This section reviews a number of additional issues emerging through the previous sections, most notably expenditure on ANCP evaluations, the role of ANGOs in ANCP evaluations and the scope for using ANCP funds for more strategic evaluations.

Purchasing power of ANCP NGOs

Evaluation is a potentially costly activity—and particularly expensive in relation to the often relatively small investments. On an analysis of this sample of projects, the average annual (median) project spend was \$150 000 (\$450 000 over three years). A ten per cent allocation of ANCP funds would provide \$45 000 for evaluative activities (potentially including aspects of design, baseline, learning and review) and the standard five per cent end of project evaluation spend would be in the vicinity of \$20 000. It is therefore an interesting observation that, on average, these projects and programs expended somewhere in the vicinity of \$6,825 (median spend) or *less than two per cent* of overall spend (on final evaluations). This raises a number of questions.

First, what can you conceivably ‘buy’ in evaluation terms for around \$7,000, and how much are ANGOs investing in evaluation processes overall—and is it enough?

Consider first the buying power of an average spend of \$7,000. If average daily rates for independent consultants are around \$750 (referencing the Advisor remuneration framework), after costs, an NGO could probably purchase a maximum of five consultant days, if using an international (Australian) consultant. If sourcing in country, this could buy up to 20 person days—but potentially recruiting from a much smaller pool of skilled evaluators. The conclusion here is that current expenditure levels would be compromised in purchasing high-level evaluation expertise. A doubling of current expenditure levels would significantly increase the scope for obtaining higher level consultants, for a greater number of days, and still be below the suggested ‘five per cent’ spend on end of project evaluation processes.

From the information available at the time of this meta-evaluation, it was not possible to assess the total spend by NGOs on evaluation related processes—particularly where moneys from this ‘pot’ of ten per cent were expended elsewhere in the project (or broader program). The *ANCP Guiding Principles* (2012) state that these moneys are available to “assist the NGO to conduct feasibility studies, baseline surveys and evaluation studies of similar activities”.⁴³ It would perhaps be a useful exercise to map expenditure under this ten per cent allocation to better understand how it is being applied or expended across the project cycle. This would be of particular insight, considering the issues highlighted in these evaluations around the lack of baseline

⁴³ <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/ancp-guiding-principles-dec2012.aspx> pg. 6

data. It would also be useful to clarify the status of these *ANCP Guiding Principles*, which contain a number of clear directives vis-a-vis expenditure on evaluation (stating a cap of \$10 000 or five per cent of the DFAT funding of the activity). The principles also contain some statements contradictory to the MELF—stating, for example, that “evaluation of small projects costing up to \$100 000 per annum would be unwarranted”, in contrast to the requirement in the MELF for evaluation of *all* projects and programs funded under ANCP at least once every three years of that activity.

It is suggested therefore that subsequent meta-evaluations undertake a more thorough financial analysis of project or program expenditure on ‘evaluative’ activities across the project cycle. This could involve project specific analyses and/or a review and breakdown of how selected ANGOs have expended their ten per cent ANCP allocation on a range of evaluation related activities. Ideally, having that information in the short term would improve the quality and focus of any new advice or guidelines to ANCP NGOs.

Recommendations

DFAT to undertake a review of the average expenditure on evaluative activities for ANCP.

DFAT to provide improved guidance and advice to ANCP NGOs regarding the utilisation of the ten per cent ANCP funding allocation for evaluative activities.

Implicit in this is a clarification of the status of current guidance—for example, the *ANCP Guiding Principles*—and stronger oversight to ensure consistency as new systems and frameworks (e.g. MELF and CSEF) are mainstreamed into practice.

Roles and Responsibilities of Accredited ANGOs

As per the *ANCP Accreditation Guidance Manual*,⁴⁴ ANGOs have been assessed as having both demonstrated capacity in M&E and systems and processes to monitor the capacities of their in-country partners. The guidelines state that the NGO must demonstrate that it has sufficient capacity to assess the outcomes and impacts of its activities, and that this capacity is reflected in the quality of analysis undertaken by the organisation in response to progress, monitoring and evaluation reports. There is specific mention of the need to read and critique partner evaluation reports—that is, demonstrate an active engagement in the evaluation process.

While activities and evaluations may have been undertaken by partner NGOs, the ANGOs are the ‘commissioning agents’ of these evaluations and thus hold responsibility for the quality and focus of the ToRs, consultant selection and overall report quality—indeed, all aspects of the process. As per accreditation, ANGOs may well have assessed their local partner as having adequate capacity in these processes and/or provided explicit capacity building inputs to that end. Yet a review of these documents in the meta-evaluation demonstrates scope for additional elements of monitoring or management. Where a number of the ANGOs have significant in-house evaluation expertise, is it not incumbent upon the ANGOs to provide a stronger mentoring and ‘supervisory’ role in this regard? As previously mentioned, there may also be scope for increased reference to ‘standards’ for monitoring and evaluation and support from ANGO partners for in-country NGOs to use these to guide evaluative processes.

Use of strategic evaluation (for impact and learning)

These smaller scale, less complicated projects are being adequately evaluated to demonstrate progress and project specific ‘learning’. It would appear, however, that, in order to contribute to greater understandings around approaches, impact and learning, ANGOs may need to think and invest increasingly in higher level or thematic evaluations. That is, more sophisticated, rigorous and resource intensive evaluations. While each of these investments might only represent an average \$150 000 per annum spend, where ANGOs are supporting dozens of overseas partners, they need to consider how and where they can make the big evaluation investments. This is noted to be occurring within a number of ANGOs as standard practice—but not explicit to the ANCP program.

Jargon

The NGO and development sector is renowned for its jargon and acronyms, and for many this is confusing, even in a first language. However, when use of this ‘development speak’ crosses cultures and languages, additional efforts are required to ensure not only clear translation but also definition of these often ambiguous terms. Ideally, we would avoid ‘jargon’, but even simple terms such as ‘impact’ or ‘lessons learnt’ were shown to have multiple interpretations in these evaluations. So where

⁴⁴ http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/9090_1951_4966_7154_5042.aspx pg. 41

simple English is not possible and multiple parties are involved, it is suggested that extra efforts are made to explain what is meant by key terms used in an evaluation.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This meta-evaluation aimed to provide an understanding of quality in ANCP evaluation as well as a better understanding of how NGOs are drawing learning from these processes. The bulk of the evaluations reviewed were end of project evaluations or reviews, largely undertaken by independent consultants under the facilitation of the in-country partner NGO. While employing the ‘usual suspects’ in terms of methodology—that is, document review plus key informant interviews and focus group discussions—these methods were applied in innovative ways, tailored to specific target populations for maximum effect. Across the board, evaluations were highly consultative and, where possible, applied participatory approaches to the full evaluation process.

While a number of quality issues were highlighted in the meta-evaluation, the sample of reports was on the whole assessed as being of adequate quality to inform stakeholders about their progress and project specific learning. These assessments were based on both the size of the overall investment and the ‘purchasing power’ for the evaluation process itself—that is, you get what you pay for. There may well be an indication for greater investment by ANGOs in project and program evaluation.

What these (predominantly) project level evaluations were not able to provide was a process for assessing impact, or contributing significantly to broader ‘learning’. This is, however, presented as not a shortcoming of the evaluations but more a reality in terms of the limited scope, budgets and often capacity of in-country partners (or consultants) to examine these issues within the constraints of a targeted ‘project evaluation’. There were examples within this sample of where ANCP funds had been used for additional or adjunct reviews, which provided a more directed and fruitful contribution to this end. These were in addition to more routine project or program monitoring and evaluation processes. These additional evaluative processes are certainly an area for attention under the ANCP—where such processes undoubtedly require more sophisticated (and costly) methodology and expertise.

In summary, NGOs were shown to be performing best against two key issues examined in this meta-evaluation: demonstrated capacity building for sustainability and adequate quality of evaluation processes. The meta-evaluation found that four areas would benefit from greater attention in future evaluations, as follows:

- inclusion of broader M&E information
- the need for a strong evidence base for recommendations
- adequate description of lessons learned
- increased consideration of cross-cutting issues.

These areas were assessed as having a direct link to the quality of the ToRs for the evaluation activity and the quality of evaluation expertise provided for the process. It was concluded that a more active role by the ANGO could have significant impact on a number of these areas, by either provision of guiding ‘standards’ for evaluation and/or closer mentoring or ‘governance’ of evaluation processes. Given the significant in-house expertise in most ANGOs, there appeared definite scope for increased engagement with in-country partners in the evaluation of ANCP activities.

It is however of importance to reiterate key limitations of this meta-evaluation. The evaluation process had access to just nine ANCP NGO evaluations, and was limited to a desk review of the evaluation report documents – not the broader process and outcomes of the evaluation. While using a tested methodology and sound evaluative process, these limitations constrain a fuller understanding of ANCP NGO evaluation process and outcomes.

Recommendations to ANCP ANGOS:

The MELF provides a sound framework for monitoring and evaluation of the ANCP. This is, however, based upon assumptions of quality in the evaluative processes of ANCP NGOs. While this meta-evaluation considered only a small sub-set of evaluations, there were some common quality issues prevailing. The following recommendations are for the ANCP NGOs to consider:

- i. *Ensure explicit attention in evaluation reporting to cross-cutting issues, including gender and disability.*
- ii. *Require and demonstrate more explicit consideration of efficiency, inclusive of value for money (VfM), throughout the full project cycle.*
- iii. *Ensure adequate evaluation expertise throughout evaluation processes.*
- iv. *Clarify processes and definitions, and provide clear direction for the capturing and documenting of lessons learned from project level evaluations.*
- v. *Demonstrate stronger attention to M&E structures and frameworks for measuring across the full project cycle, including baseline data, a theory of change and intended outcomes against which to report.*
- vi. *Improve the quality of ToRs and planning for the evaluation of activities including through familiarity with and reference to Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation.*
- vii. *Ensure adequate assessment and ongoing monitoring of partners' technical capabilities.*

Recommendations to DFAT/ANCP:

Given the commitment to shared learning by DFAT, this meta-evaluation paid explicit attention to identifying lesson learned as expressed by ANCP NGOs' in-country partners in these evaluation reports. Despite having explicit objectives to generate lessons learned, these evaluations reports, on the whole, only presented project specific recommendations. To some extent that is seen as a limitation—what is possible in the scope of a project based evaluation—and that additional or adjunct processes should be encouraged. However, it is also considered that this could equally be an issue of consultant or in-country NGO capacity or indeed a definitional issue. This is certainly one of a number of areas for potential inputs or additional direction from DFAT.

The following recommendations are for DFAT/ANCP:

- i. Provide clarity and guidance to ANCP NGOs on expectations and or frameworks for considering value for money (VfM).*
- ii. Review average expenditure on evaluation activities for ANCP and if indicated, provide improved guidance and advice to ANCP NGOs regarding the use of up to ten per cent ANCP funding allocation for evaluative activities.*

As envisaged in the MELF, meta-evaluations are to be repeated every two years. Some obvious suggestions are anticipated in feedback regarding future sampling methods and sampling size. There may also be scope in future meta-evaluations to:

- Consider allowing for an interactive component to enable some level of assessment of the dissemination and follow-up of findings and learning. It may be of value to include a questionnaire to the NGOs or conduct a semi-structured interview with the relevant ANGO duty bearer regarding follow-up and/or dissemination of the evaluation report and application of learning. Taking a more explicit ‘strengths based approach’ may glean the most useful results for this analysis.
- Allow for a more thorough financial analysis of project or program expenditure on ‘evaluative’ activities across the project cycle. This could involve project specific analyses and/or a review and breakdown of how selected ANGOs have expended their ten per cent ANCP allocation on a range of evaluation related activities.
- More explicitly address donor policy alignment. The development sector, donor policy and NGO sector is dynamic. Given the significant changes in policy context in the past three years, it was not possible to assess these evaluations and the projects and programs which they were evaluating for their alignment to donor policy. This could be more explicit in future meta-evaluations.
- Utilise a consistent sampling frame, accessing an average of ten per cent of all evaluations undertaken during that two-year period.
- Given the general acceptance of the meta-evaluation tool by ANCP NGOs,⁴⁵ it is also suggested that the assessment matrix be a starting point for the next meta-evaluation, allowing for comparisons over time and providing a focal point for discussions.

It should also be acknowledged what this report was not able to do, within its scope and terms of reference. That is to delve more deeply into the quality of outcomes of the ANCP program. Certainly thematic reviews are one way that this can be done, but perhaps dialogue needs to continue to explore other mechanisms for better capturing this information.

⁴⁵ Feedback included comment “ the matrix usefully provides a streamlined summary of DFAT evaluation expectation, DAC evaluation criteria and good practice in meta-evaluation as articulated in recognized evaluative literature”

Annex One

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Australian NGO Cooperation Program

2013 Meta-evaluation

1. Objectives

The 2013 Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) meta-evaluation will be an independent review of a selection of program and project evaluations carried out by non-government organisations (NGOs) funded under the ANCP. The meta-evaluation will:

- Provide insight into the way in which NGOs are assessing their program/project approaches and learning from their experiences and those of their in-country partners.
- Identify opportunities for shared learning on what does or does not work in NGO program/project design and evaluation.

Through the collaboration and shared learning generated by this appraisal, DFAT seeks to instil a process of continuous improvement to build on the effectiveness and sustainability of aid delivered under the ANCP.

2. Background

Working with non-government organisations is an integral part of Australia's approach to achieving the strategic goals of the aid program. The Civil Society Engagement Framework (CSEF) sets out how Australia will work more effectively with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Australia and overseas to increase the impact of aid for the world's poorest⁴⁶. Effective engagement between the Australian Government and CSOs is guided by 10 principles, including mutual accountability for results, shared learning and collaboration, and building local capacity to ensure sustainability.

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)⁴⁷ is the Australian Government's largest and longest running NGO aid program. It supports 43 Australian NGOs to undertake community-based development work in over 50 countries.

The ANCP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF)⁴⁸, launched in 2012, is providing the evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ANCP in achieving results in poverty reduction. The MELF draws from NGO reporting systems and facilitates the tracking and evaluation of ANCP results on reducing poverty and achieving value for money.

⁴⁶ CSEF: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/civil-society-engagement-framework.aspx>

⁴⁷ Australian NGO Cooperation Program: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Pages/home.aspx>

⁴⁸ Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Documents/ancp-monit-eval-and-learning-framework.pdf>

Evaluations are central to aid effectiveness and the results agenda in driving ongoing learning which informs the direction, design and management of the ANCP. ANCP guidelines require all NGOs to undertake an evaluation of ANCP projects and programs periodically and provide for up to 10% of ANCP funds to be allocated to design, monitoring and evaluation. These evaluations allow NGOs to measure outcome and impact, and to assess their strategies and approaches in a way that complements results based reporting. Ongoing evaluative activities are a useful source of data, providing additional information to meet the MELF objectives of accountability, outcome information, and learning.

Under the MELF, the former AusAID committed to carrying out a biennial meta-evaluation of NGO evaluations of ANCP funded projects. The intent is to capture the more in-depth and detailed assessments undertaken by NGOs to complement the summary data presented in the Annual Performance Reports. These meta-evaluations will provide an opportunity for NGOs to share learning and outcome information within DFAT, and with other NGOs and interested stakeholders.

3. Scope

The CSEF recognises the strength that diversity brings to the delivery of effective aid. The broad range of NGOs funded under the ANCP provides an excellent opportunity to examine how different approaches, procedures and contexts contribute to reducing poverty.

In 2012 NGOs were asked to include in their Performance Report a list of evaluations they had undertaken in the last financial year. They were asked to note the country in which the project was based, summarising the purpose, key findings and how the findings were used. NGOs were also asked to provide data on the total evaluation cost, including the DFAT subsidy amount. In addition, NGOs listed their evaluations undertaken in the past three to five years, providing only the project name, evaluation title and country details.

DFAT compiled the evaluation data and, based on the information supplied by NGOs, aligned each evaluation to the strategic goals of the Australian aid program at the time of the meta-evaluation.⁴⁹

The five strategic goals used were:

- saving lives
- promoting opportunities for all
- sustainable economic development
- effective governance
- humanitarian and disaster response

⁴⁹ *Helping the World's Poor Through Effective Aid: Australia's Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework to 2015–16:* <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/about/Documents/capf.pdf>

There were a total of 378 evaluations during the period 2007 to 2012, spread across 57 countries. The table below shows the evaluations reported by NGOs by the top five countries and matched against strategic goals.

STRATEGIC GOAL	CAMBODIA	TIMOR-LESTE	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	BANGLADESH	PAPUA NEW GUINEA	Total
Promoting opportunities for all	15	5	9	12	7	48
Sustainable economic development	17	8	8	6	6	45
Saving lives	4	14	9	6	8	41
Effective governance	8	3	3	2	3	19
Humanitarian and DR	1			1		2
Total	45	30	29	27	24	155

The highest number of evaluations of ANCP NGO activities over the last three to five years were carried out in Cambodia. Of these, a significant number were carried out on activities which aligned to the following two strategic goals: *sustainable economic development* and *promoting opportunities for all*.

The 2013 meta-evaluation will examine ANCP NGO evaluations carried out between 2007 and 2012 in Cambodia that align with *promoting opportunities for all* and the development objectives of:

- Enabling more children, particularly girls, to attend school.
- Empowering women to participate in the economy, leadership and education.
- Enhancing the lives of people with disabilities.

4. Focus Questions

Given the diverse range of approaches used by ANCP NGOs, the Department is mindful of the need to keep the focus of the meta-evaluation broad. It is not the intention of the meta-evaluation to compare evaluations or NGOs. The aim is to examine and report on lessons learned and overall quality and range of outcomes for ANCP.

The main areas of inquiry for this meta-evaluation are:

- What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the NGO evaluations and what are the factors that contribute to their quality?
- How effective are the evaluations at examining the value⁵⁰ of the particular project/program approach?
- How do the evaluations consider gender, age and disability? And do the evaluations provide disaggregated data (if relevant)?
- What are the main lessons learnt? What works and why?

⁵⁰ 'Value' is used in the broadest sense—that is, as articulated by the NGO undertaking the project/program.

- Are there any trends or patterns regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristics of evaluated projects?
- What evidence is there that the ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals?

5. Approach

The meta-evaluation will be an assessment of NGO evaluations of ANCP funded projects. It will take the form of a document review of a selection of ANCP NGO evaluation reports. Additional relevant information will be sourced from Annual Performance Reports submitted to DFAT.

The focus will be on NGO evaluation reports for ANCP projects in Cambodia, over the last three to five years, which align with the strategic goal of *promoting opportunities for all*.

An independent consultant will be engaged by the Department to carry out the meta-evaluation. The consultant will have expertise in the appraisal of monitoring and evaluation strategies, as well as familiarity with the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

The meta-evaluation will be overseen by DFAT, through the NGO and Business Branch, and an ANCP reference group comprising representatives from ANCP NGOs and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

6. Outputs

The key output will be a final report presenting the findings of the meta-evaluation. The report should be a Word document of up to 30 pages. The report should summarise the evidence collected, present analysis and findings against the focus questions and make recommendations where appropriate. A shorter version of the report, of up to five pages and containing an expanded executive summary and recommendations, is also required.

The primary audience for the report will be DFAT and ANCP NGOs, but the final report will also be available to a wider audience via the DFAT website⁵¹. The language used should be clear and concise and avoid jargon. Any acronyms should be spelled out when first used.

⁵¹ DFAT acknowledges that some evaluations may contain sensitive material. If so, DFAT will consult with the relevant NGO and any content considered confidential will not be published.

7. Time Frame

The anticipated time frame for the meta-evaluation is:

Activity	Estimated time taken	Proposed dates
Review evaluation reports	Up to 15 days	27 May to 17 June
Prepare draft report	Up to 5 days	Between 17 and 28 June
Draft report to AusAID		By 2 July
<i>AusAID to review draft report and seek feedback from ANCP NGOs</i>		<i>2 to 19 July</i>
Finalise report	Up to 2 days	Between 22 and 30 July
Final report to AusAID		By 31 July
Present report findings to AusAID and ANCP NGOs	1 day	Date in August TBC

8. Limitations

The meta-evaluation will be a desk-based document review. The reviewer will work only with the NGO evaluation reports collected by AusAID and other relevant information supplied to AusAID in Annual Performance Reports. Visits to projects will not be included in the meta-evaluation and additional information will not be sought. Assessment may be limited by the information available in the evaluation reports.

The projects being evaluated may have concluded or been redesigned since the evaluation was carried out by the NGO. Therefore, any lessons learned for future project design or suggestions for changes to ANCP strategy may have already been superseded.

The meta-evaluation will look at evaluation reports from a number of different NGOs. There may be difficulties in accommodating the different agency structures and resources. There may be challenges in comparing the various methodologies, objectives and contexts, given the diverse range of approaches used by ANCP NGOs.

Annex Two

Consultant's Working Draft ⁵² Australian NGO Cooperation Program 2013 Meta-evaluation

Introduction

This brief document reiterates the background to undertaking the Meta-evaluation, restates the key aims and evaluation questions, and describes an approach and guiding framework for undertaking the task.

Background

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) is Australian Government's largest and longest running aid program. It supports 43 Australian NGOs (ANGOs) to undertake community-based development work in over 50 countries.⁵³

Working with non-government organisations is an integral part of Australia's approach to achieving the strategic goals of the aid program. The Civil Society Engagement Framework (CSEF) sets out how Australia will work more effectively with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Australia and overseas to increase the impact of aid for the world's poorest. Effective engagement between the Australian Government and CSOs is guided by 10 principles, including mutual accountability for results, shared learning and collaboration, and building local capacity to ensure sustainability.⁵⁴

The ANCP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF), launched in 2012, is providing the evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ANCP in achieving results in poverty reduction. The MELF draws from NGO reporting systems and facilitates the tracking and evaluation of ANCP results on reducing poverty and achieving value for money.⁵⁵ Results achieved by ANCP funded NGOs contribute directly to the assessment of progress against the Australian aid program Results Framework and the Annual Review of Aid Effectiveness.

Evaluations are central to aid effectiveness and the results agenda in driving ongoing learning which informs the direction, design and management of the ANCP. The Australian NGO Cooperation Program guidelines require all NGOs to undertake an evaluation of ANCP projects and programs periodically and provide for up to 10% of ANCP funds to be allocated to design, monitoring and evaluation. These evaluations allow NGOs to measure outcome and impact, and to assess their strategies and approaches in a way that complements results based reporting. Ongoing evaluative

⁵² This Evaluation Plan was developed as a work plan for the consultant's own planning and progress and was not a required output for this piece of work – included here for transparency

⁵³ Australian NGO Cooperation Program: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Pages/home.aspx>

⁵⁴ CSEF: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/civil-society-engagement-framework.aspx>

⁵⁵ Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework: <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/ngos/ancp/Documents/ancp-monit-eval-and-learning-framework.pdf>

activities are a useful source of data, providing additional information to meet the MELF objectives of accountability, outcome information, and learning.

Under the MELF, the former AusAID has committed to carrying out a biennial meta-evaluation of NGO evaluations of ANCP funded projects. The intent is to capture the more in-depth and detailed assessments undertaken by NGOs to complement the summary data presented in the Annual Performance Reports. It is the intention and assumption that these meta-evaluations will provide an opportunity for NGOs to share learning and outcome information within DFAT, and with other NGOs and interested stakeholders.

The MELF process and the subsequent development of the ToRs for this task have been highly consultative, seeking regular input from the NGO sector in the form of a MELF reference group. Through this consultation process, the reference group highlighted a perceived shift in the purpose of the meta-evaluation. Originally stated as “to examine and report on lessons learnt and overall quality and range of outcomes for ANCP”⁵⁶, this has now shifted to also include a substantive focus on the quality of the NGO evaluations themselves. These concerns are noted and will need to be considered at all stages through the reporting and feedback process. This shift in focus also requires an altered approach and methodology.

Framing of the evaluation (Purpose)

Framing an evaluation involves being clear about the boundaries of the evaluation. Why is the evaluation being done? Who are the primary users? What are the broad evaluation questions it is trying to answer? What would success look like?

This meta-evaluation is a set and complimentary component of a comprehensive framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning, the MELF; a framework that is responsive to findings and user feedback, where users are ANCP funded ANGOs. While there is certainly an element of accountability and contribution to broader donor goals, the stated intent of this evaluation is to “instill a process of continuous improvement to build on the effectiveness and sustainability of aid delivered under the ANCP”.⁵⁷ The key users will be the commissioning agency, DFAT, and the ANCP NGOs.

While the evaluation will consider the evaluation reports of nine identified Agencies, their involvement is to an extent considered to be instrumental in the process of broader learning. The key focus is thus not to compare evaluations and/or NGOs but to examine and report on lessons learned and overall quality and range of outcomes for ANCP. Success will be measured by the degree to which these can be extracted and distilled in an accessible format for the intended audience. The evaluation should “provide more detailed information that will assist DFAT and NGOs to explore the

⁵⁶ Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, pg. 5

⁵⁷ ANCP 2013 Meta-evaluation Terms of Reference, pg. 1

nature and shape of ANCP as a whole and make decisions about how to extend or improve the program”.⁵⁸

The stated aims of the evaluation are to:

- Provide Insight into the way in which NGOs are assessing their program/ project approaches and learning from their experiences and those of their in-country partners
- Identify opportunities for shared learning on what does or does not work in NGO project / program design and evaluation

Evaluation (‘focus’) Questions (specific objectives)

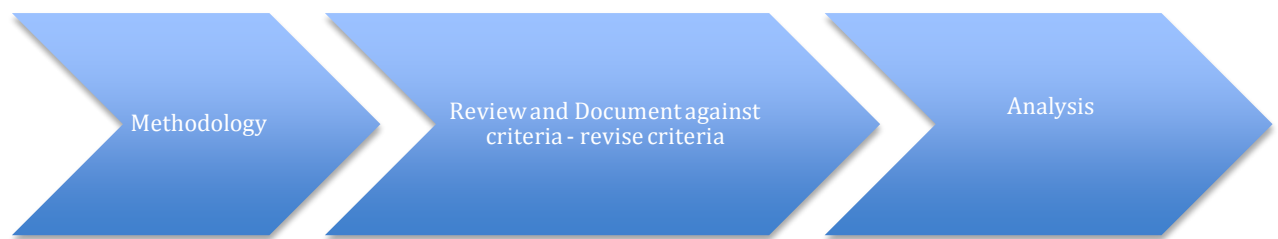
Given the diverse range of approaches, to both implementation and evaluation, DFAT is mindful of the need to keep the focus of the meta-evaluation broad. The main area of inquiry identified (developed and edited by DFAT in consultation with the MELF reference group) are reflected in the key focus questions:

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the NGO evaluations?
2. What are the factors that contribute to their quality?
3. How effective are the evaluations at examining the value of the particular project/program approach?
4. How do the evaluations consider gender, age and disability? And do the evaluations provide disaggregated data (if relevant)?
5. What are the main lessons learnt? What works and why?
6. Are there any trends or patterns regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristics of evaluated projects?
7. What evidence is there that the ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals?

Meta-evaluation process

It is imperative to both frame the evaluation and establish a methodology before embarking on data collection. Necessarily this process commenced with a process of document review and methodology development before assessment of NGO evaluation reports. Once data has been collected (and methodology iteratively developed and redesigned), a further stage of analysis will be required before reporting on findings can commence. This process will take place spread over a four week period commencing end May 2013. Once a report has been drafted, it will be submitted for both DFAT and MELF reference group for comment before finalisation end July. A subsequent feedback session by the Consultant to interested stakeholders will be arranged for late August.

⁵⁸ DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (2012), pg. 10



Evaluation methodology and approach

This is to be a desk based, meta-evaluation of nine selected ANCP NGO evaluations. Meta-evaluation is a methodology proposed by Michael Scriven in 1969 to describe his plan to evaluate educational products; now acknowledged as an independent category of evaluation in the Program Evaluation Standards.⁵⁹ In essence, meta-evaluation is a systematic and formal assessment of evaluations against a set of critically recognised evaluation standards, adapted for purpose. Meta-evaluation has been widely used in international development, most notably by UNICEF⁶⁰, DFID, SIDA⁶¹ and the Active Learning Network in Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)⁶².

This meta-evaluation reviewed a range of evaluation standards and meta-evaluation methodologies to construct a relevant framework for undertaking this evaluation, and ultimately generating data which would contribute to meeting the objectives and providing data to contribute to answering some of the key focus questions. The resulting framework is annexed at Appendix 1 and was developed with strong reference to 2010 *DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation*⁶³ and the 2005 *ALNAP Quality Proforma*.⁶⁴ By its very definition, meta-evaluation asks the following questions “Was the evaluation done well?, Is it worth using?, Did the evaluation meet professional standards and principles?”.⁶⁵ There is a clear and strong quality element to the approach.

The evaluation task is situated within a broader consultative “utilization” focused process and as such is loosely informed and guided by Michael Patton’s Development and Utilization focused evaluation approaches. In practice this implies constant reference to the end users of the evaluation and situates the process within a context of development ‘uncertainty’.

⁵⁹ Michael Scriven (2009), *Meta-evaluation revisited*, Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation, http://journals.sfu.ca/jmde/index.php/jmde_1/article/view/220/215

⁶⁰ see <http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/GEROSfinalreport2011.pdf>

⁶¹ see <http://www.oecd.org/derec/sweden/41390724.pdf>

⁶² see <http://www.alnap.org/resources/evaluation/quality.aspx>

⁶³ see <http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/36596604.pdf>

⁶⁴ see <http://www.alnap.org/pdfs/QualityProforma05.pdf>

⁶⁵ Michael Quinn Patton (1997), *Utilization Focused Evaluation*, 3rd Ed, Sage, California (pg. 193)

Scope and sampling

The CSEF recognises the strength that diversity brings to the delivery of effective aid. As such, the sampling for this meta-evaluation endeavoured to capture evaluative processes from a reasonably representative cross section of organisations. A brief desk analysis by DFAT showed that the highest number of evaluations of ANCP activities over the past five years had occurred in Cambodia (n=45). The desk analysis further grouped these evaluations against the five strategic goals of the Australian aid program at the time of the meta-evaluation. A significant number (greater than 30 per cent) of these evaluations were aligned with the goal of *promoting opportunities for all*; this subset of evaluations from Cambodia thus provided the pool from which the subsequent nine NGO evaluations were selected for inclusion in this meta-evaluation. Evaluations have therefore been selected opportunistically from a single geographical and thematic focus area. All evaluations are from Cambodia and have been assessed as falling under the strategic Goal of *promoting opportunities for all*.

The meta-evaluation will be limited to a desk review of the nine NGO evaluations without additional reference material or engagement with NGOs. Where necessary, NGOs will only be contacted to provide associated terms of reference (ToRs) for their evaluations and/or relevant evaluation costs.

The meta-evaluation tools and process will endeavour to capture a balance between assessing the quality and integrity of the evaluation and broader learnings about the approaches and strategies and how these influence outcomes/ outcomes. That is the first aspect will deal with understanding the approaches taken by the NGOs to their own evaluations to confirm rigor, approach and validity of findings (quality, strengths, weaknesses and factors effecting) and the second aspect to be dealt with will be the content of their findings to look for trends, common lessons and outcomes. As required in the ToRs for this task, particular attention will be paid to cross cutting issues, capacity building for sustainability and cross reference to standard evaluation good practice DAC criteria e.g. relevance, effectiveness and impact.

Ethical issues

The NGO consultation process revealed concerns from some participating NGOs about the publication of any material considered as 'sensitive'. This was understood to include information regarding project location and/or the inclusion of critical judgements of evaluations or programs which may be detrimental to partner relationships. These concerns were noted and will be balanced against commitments as stated in the *Transparency Charter*.⁶⁶ As previously stated, the intent of the Meta-evaluation is not to compare evaluations or NGOs but to use these evaluation documents to draw out broader lessons learned.

⁶⁶ <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/about/Documents/ausaid-transparency-charter.pdf>

Criteria and method to address the evaluation questions

The task will consist of in depth review of each of the evaluation reports against the Quality Framework, guided by the criteria table included below. Once comprehensive notes have been collected, each question will be reviewed and processes of thematic and content analysis will be undertaken to identify common themes and priority issues for highlighting in the report.

Table 1: Linking method to questions and sub-questions

Evaluation Question	Sub-questions/Criteria	Methodology
1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the NGO evaluations <i>and</i> what factors contributed to their quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the Evaluation well planned to ensure clarity of task / ToRs available & well formulated? • Did the evaluation reflect good practice for evaluation (to ensure rigour, validity etc.) • Was the process consultative? • Was the proposed methodology (described clearly) and appropriate to the evaluation purpose? • Was the evaluation adequately resourced & managed? • Did the evaluations address the evaluation questions and is evidence presented? • Were clear and targeted recommendations made and are they supported by the data? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and rate ToRs and reports against sections 1-4 of the Quality framework • Document observed strengths and weaknesses (Section 10 Qual F-work) • Analysis of results
2. How effective are the evaluations at examining the value of the particular project / program approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well is the object / objectives and intervention logic described? • What is being evaluated – is this clear? • Do the reports explain how intervention contributed to results? • Did the method choice match the needs of the evaluation? • What was the quality of analysis? • Was it possible to extract data against the 5 key DAC criteria or relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 3 • Section 5 NGO Outcomes of the Quality Framework
3. How do evaluations consider gender, age and disability ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were cross-cutting issues subject of objective? • Were these issues/target groups discussed/mentioned in report? • Was disaggregated data collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 6 of the Quality Framework
4. What are the main lessons learnt? What works and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there implicit or explicit learnings stated in the reports? • Are there common themes? • Identify statements / common areas of 'learning'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record against section 8 of the QF • Document or extrapolate from recommendations • Collate Lessons

		learned and extract common learnings
5. Are there any trends or patterns regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristic of evaluated projects?	Document key findings against : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Effectiveness • Impact • Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document in work book as reviewing reports / Review for common themes
6. What evidence is there that ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify presence of Capacity Building a strategy or sub-strategy • Identify where empowerment / 'voice' has been highlighted as an approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 8 of the Quality Framework • Work book notes analysis

Limitations

As with any review process, there are inherent limitations. Those noted include:

- i. Small sample: This meta-evaluation will review only nine evaluation reports. The total number of 'evaluation activities' noted for ANCP activities over the past five years was in excess of 300, including approximately 45 evaluations in Cambodia. Depending upon the quantity and quality of data elicited from this meta-evaluation, it may be of value to review the sampling approach for subsequent evaluations to ensure representativeness and/or scope for sampling to a point of saturation.
- ii. Self-selection for inclusion: It was noted that only nine out of a possible 15 evaluations identified under the goal of *promoting opportunities for all* were submitted by the by the NGOs. This may be an issue of definition of evaluation (and a reluctance to provide informal overviews) – but may also indicate a reluctance by NGOs to provide weaker or less successful evaluation reports for these shared learning processes. This should be clarified for future processes.
- iii. Diversity: As emphasised in NGO Reference Group feedback, the Australian NGOs are celebrated for their diversity. This diversity extends to the size, complexity and sophistication of engagement, development and partnership approaches as well as varying methods and mindsets relating to evaluation and learning. While not necessarily a 'limitation' – the Consultant will need to be mindful of this.
- iv. Evaluation Standards: The ANCP does not stipulate any firm guidelines or quality standards for evaluation and the evaluator will need to be mindful of this.
- v. Policy Temporality: This meta-evaluation will consider nine NGO evaluations undertaken through 2011 and 2012. These evaluations relate to a range of activities, predominantly 'end of project' evaluations for activities which commenced between three and six years previously. That is, almost all of these evaluations are of activities which were conceived, designed and indeed implemented well in advance of the current set of policy documents and frameworks. This includes the Aid Policy Framework, the Civil Society

Framework and indeed the MELF itself. Seeking retrospective alignment would therefore be a fruitless exercise.

- vi. Scope: Any assessment or conclusions from a meta-evaluation exercise can be based solely on the content of the evaluation report itself. The quality of any evaluation is truly measured by its planning and implementation, and subsequent interpretation, application and dissemination etc. – the actual report can only hold a mirror to this.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ UNICEF (2004), UNICEF Evaluation Report Standards, Evaluation Office, NYHQ,
http://www.unicef.org/azerbaijan/evaluation_report.pdf

APPENDIX 1

FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION REVIEW FOR NGO META-EVALUATION⁶⁸

AREA OF ENQUIRY	KEY ASPECTS TO REVIEW	COMMENTS	RATING
1. Purpose, Planning and Design (ToRs or main report)	<p>Following should be described:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rationale, purpose and intended use of the evaluation are clearly stated, addressing why the evaluation is being undertaken at this particular point in time, why and for whom it is undertaken and how the evaluation is to be used for learning and/or accountability functions. 2. Specific Objectives – what the evaluation intends to find out 3. Evaluation object and scope – intervention being evaluated is clearly described including a description of the intervention logic (or theory) 4. Evaluability – feasibility is considered 5. Stakeholder involvement – involvement in evaluation design 6. Desired report framework 7. Reference to evaluation good practice (e.g. DAC criteria etc.) 8. Selection of approach and methodology justified 9. Adequate resourcing: time, funds, staff 10. Governance of the evaluation 		
2. Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Team make-up – balance of evaluative and thematic expertise / Gender / local professionals included / independence. 2. Stakeholders consulted – donor, partner, 		

⁶⁸ Informed by the following Sources:

- i. DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (February 2010) - provide a guide to good practice in development evaluation. They are intended to improve the quality of evaluation processes and products and to facilitate collaboration. Built through international consensus, the Standards outline the key quality dimensions for each phase of a typical evaluation process: defining purpose, planning, designing, implementing, reporting, and learning from and using evaluation results.
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/qualitystandardsfordevelopmentevaluation.htm>
- ii. ALNAP quality Proforma (2005), developed as a tool for assessing the quality of evaluation reports in ALNAP's Evaluation Quality Review (meta-evaluation).
<http://www.alnap.org/resources/guides/evaluation/qualityproforma.aspx>
- iii. DFAT Performance Management and Evaluation Policy (2012): This policy sets out the minimum expectations for performance management to support this commitment across the aid program
<http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/performance-policy.aspx>
- iv. DFAT IET and Pacific Branches, Evaluation Capacity Building Program : Monitoring and Evaluation Standards, Susan Dawson, ECB Facilitator (unpublished) – Now formally available as DFAT Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation (published June 2013) ,
<http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/monitoring-evaluation-standards.aspx>

AREA OF ENQUIRY	KEY ASPECTS TO REVIEW	COMMENTS	RATING
	<p>beneficiary as relevant, respecting anonymity where appropriate</p> <p>3. Ultimately whether was carried out in time and on budget</p>		
3. Reporting	<p>1. Report is clear and in accessible language and format</p> <p>2. an executive summary highlighting main findings and recommendations</p> <p>3. Context of the intervention described – including policy (agency and donors or partners), socio-economic and political etc.</p> <p>4. Intervention logic is described</p> <p>5. Validity and reliability of data – including cross validation/ critical assessment reliability (complete lists of interviewees included)</p> <p>6. Explanation of methodology used – describes the methodology and justifies choice. Techniques for data collection described and limitations detailed</p> <p>7. Clear analysis provided – findings flow logically from the data showing clear line of evidence</p> <p>8. Evaluation questions are answered</p>		
4. Follow up and Dissemination	<p>1. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned are clear, relevant, actionable</p> <p>2. Systematic dissemination (planned), storage is ensured to ensure access and maximise learning benefits</p>		
5. NGO Outcomes (Are there any trends regarding the effectiveness, relevance, impact, outcomes, system or other characteristic of evaluated projects?)	<p>Review narratives against the DFAT / DAC criteria⁶⁹ :</p> <p>Relevance – strategy was the most appropriate way to meet the objectives – coherent ToC / in line with local needs/priority (and donor policy)</p> <p>Effectiveness – to what extent were objectives achieved? What factors influenced achievement (or non-achievement)?</p> <p>Efficiency – resources were appropriate and contributed to achieving intended outputs – cost effective/ achieved on time?</p> <p>Sustainability – Benefits will endure after contribution ceases – factors influencing</p> <p>Impact – assessment of positive or negative changes (intended and unintended) produced as a result. What has happened as a result of the project / what real</p>		

⁶⁹ DAC criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance;
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

AREA OF ENQUIRY	KEY ASPECTS TO REVIEW	COMMENTS	RATING
	difference to people / how many people affected ?		
6. Cross Cutting Issues (How do the evaluations consider gender, age and disability)	Review narrative or analysis pertaining to - Gender - Disability - Age noting targeted enquiry / Disaggregation of data		
7. Capacity Building (What evidence is there that the ANCP is contributing to sustainability through in-country capacity building of organisations and individuals?)	Explicit objectives for capacity building Capacity Building as an explicit strategy or approach Capacity building approach defined / focus Involvement of partners in evaluation process Sustainability- concerned with measuring whether an activity or an impact is likely to continue after donor funding + Attention to power structures mentioned – increasing voice / empowerment		
8. Lessons Learned (What are the Key Lessons Learned?)	Clearly articulated (or embedded within recommendations) – may be useful to enumerate, summarise and allocate /% referring to project management / technical approach etc. Identify Key Themes (review as proceed) <i>Definition: Conclusions that can be generalized beyond the specific case ... lessons that are of relevance more broadly within the country situation or globally, to an organisation or the broader international community” (Program Policy and Procedures manual, UNICEF, May 2003 in ALNAP 2006)</i>		
9. Other Comments /challenges			

Rating

- Very Good
- Good: Demonstrating evidence of good practice across more than 50% of (key) standard criteria.
- Satisfactory: Adequate or just ‘good enough’. Meeting the key standards to the minimum requirement.
- Poor: Unsatisfactory. Failing to meet the minimum standards.

Annex Three

Lessons Learned—Evaluator's notes

Report #	Lessons Learned – Extrapolated from NGO Evaluation Reports
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All projects need to have some baseline data against which to measure progress. • Partners need to share in the development of M&E frameworks and/or have independent M&E frameworks for their activities in which <i>they</i> have a stake in the development and tracking. • When working with partners it is important to keep documentation as uncomplicated as possible (minimise jargon, include definitions). • Partners are vulnerable to delayed funding payments and as such delays need to be kept to a minimum.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of building trust with key stakeholders and that this takes considerable time. This needs to be acknowledged and planned for. Where there are delays in project start-up, this may compromise trust building and should be adjusted for in scheduling. • Need for greater engagement with local government stakeholders, particularly to ensure support of the 'method' after phase-out. In this project, there was a delayed acknowledgement of this need for formal government engagement, which compromised outcomes and sustainability. A key issue noted was the need for supporting the development of formal linkages between community and local government structures. This requires greater attention in projects. • Important to consider context (e.g. seasons) in terms of timing for project withdrawal. This project was scheduled to end during rice harvest, which was deemed unfortunate as all 'project' activities would cease during this time with no framework to re-energise. The set "three year" time frame was questioned—this requires flexibility from NGOs (and donors). • Project type/length. Acknowledged that a minimum of five years is required for a project to actually achieve behaviour change. • Activities like developing savings groups require specialist technical knowledge/support (i.e. not from generalist development people). Definitely useful to seek alliances (e.g. WV) for such technical know-how. • Transport costs (supported during the life of the project) cannot be sustained post project. Where continued mobility/transport is required post project, this threatens sustainability (<i>this was noted as a common issue across at least three evaluations in this sample</i>). • There is a need/role for Cambodian partner to learn and share experiences of using 'the model'. <i>Uncertain if this extends more broadly to the 'ownership' and responsibility for broader M&E.</i> • Broader concept of volunteerism may need more attention, particularly within a Cambodian context. Where volunteers have been paid a stipend by both NGO and/or Govt. for 'volunteer' or community role, this sets up an expectation and issues for sustainability without some continued financing mechanism. This issue of context and expectations but may benefit from more analysis and/or sharing experiences.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-finance services need to be professionally managed. This requires a specific skill set. • It is important to balance out livelihoods skills training with loan/savings access. These are complementary activities which create synergies. • In this context, savings schemes appear to be effective for the <i>less poor</i> (i.e. not the poorest, who are too busy to engage i.e. alternative strategies needed for the poorest). • Technical and management skills transfer leads to increased capacity of community based groups (syndicates), which has the potential to boost in rural democracy (i.e. voice?). • Chickens are riskier than pigs for livelihoods programs as less resistant to disease.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers tend to be older (> 40) and illiterate. In these communities it is difficult to attract young people who rarely volunteer, rather looking for wage opportunities. • Accurate figures relating to women's involvement in Cambodia may be compromised by the practice of needing to register the husband's name (on behalf of the family) not the woman's name. Also noted apparent drop-outs when women pressured to register. • 'Empowerment' (of women) is a nebulous or difficult to describe and measure concept. Particularly when working across cultures and classes, this requires definition and clear indicators for field staff (requires in-house training). Within one organisation, cannot assume a shared understanding of the concept.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of interventions: While at times it is imperative to act because of an absence of government policy, there are also arguments for ensuring that support is provided to follow, support and reinforce changes in government policy (e.g. in Cambodia vis-a-vis Education for all and Disability laws). That is, there is value in the synergies of working to support policy. • Integration of mechanisms within commune council/local structures is an effective strategy for enhancing sustainability (as opposed to parallel or independent structures). • Increased attention to Rights (e.g. within disability) and the positive outcomes of enabling and empowering PWD and their advocates—however needs stronger acknowledgment that this cannot be delivered like a technical skills program or a vaccination program. These types of initiatives require long vision/specialist skills and processes. • There are difficulties in engaging with the poorest of the poor who frequently get missed as struggling with survival. Often no scope to engage, although could better engage if incorporate programming to address some primary needs of the poorest and most vulnerable (i.e. address these needs first). • Specialist (niche) NGOs are often not capable of addressing poverty and development needs as well as their specialist area. They need to facilitate cross linking, otherwise their programs may be in vain! • Need to take opportunities for sharing lessons learned (in Community Based Rehab). Shared learning needs to be documented and fed back into programming. • Successful projects need healthy relationships and networks with a range of stakeholders, including government, private business and other NGOs, through communication/sharing events and meetings.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of working with government for sustainability when establishing community structures. • Need to consider strategies for economic viability in the long term for 'volunteer' structures which service on NGO support during the establishment phase. • Need a broader or more explicit strategy for engagement at Ministry level—beyond 'line Ministry' (e.g. MoSVY in this instance) to include other Ministry (e.g. Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for Commune Councils) and considerations of impending changes with decentralisation etc.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key lessons learned described related to the use of a new methodology and the need to spend more time to discuss purpose/objectives of the process. • Need to invest in capacity assessment and support of partners. • Ensure that participants have adequately pre-prepared data to contribute to learning processes. • Allow time to connect thematic reviews to MELF, including a review of theory.

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are distinct benefits from ‘partnering’ and building on strengths/resources e.g. Partner X for project management and capacity building/Partner Y for education and volunteers. Very good synergies (<i>efficiencies and effectiveness</i>) can be achieved when selective partnering. • Again re partnering: greater to need to be aware of, acknowledge and build on the capacities and opportunities presented by an “NGO rich” environment. Are many opportunities for synergies perhaps not always capitalised upon. • Need to clearly articulate assumptions in projects, including identify ‘killer assumptions’ and have a plan B. For example if relying on another NGO or agency to support with one key element of a program, need to keep in mind that their future is not assured (or at least assess critically). More broadly, how well are they assessing Risk? • Bureaucratic processes (e.g. local NGO creation and registration) take much time. • Board membership and volunteerism. Again assumptions were made about commitment of the Board in terms of fundraising etc. but results had not materialised as perhaps Board see position as token/figurehead? <i>Are there different cultural meanings to ‘Board’ membership in other country contexts ?</i> (relates to expectations). • Value of a mid-term review of progress for learning or improved monitoring to track areas of slow progress. This would save reaching the end of a three-year project with 0% achievement on some objectives—particularly where those outcomes key to sustainability (and exit). • NGOs can achieve good results where activities and outcomes are wholly within their control. Where things can fall down is when relying on external bodies/linkages or individuals. NGOs need to acknowledge this and invest in these relationships, an understanding of incentives to engage and some system for monitoring progress (i.e. not wait until summative realisation that key milestones not yet achieved!). • Methods for assessing impact. <i>A number of programs could have benefited from some additional collection of ‘stories’ e.g. MSC type approach to evaluate the impact of the program on the families i.e. go beyond outputs and immediate outcomes.</i>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a balance of indicators for measuring outcomes and impacts as well as activity level in LFA or similar M&E guide. • Ensure a clearly articulated implementation or action plan for following up the recommendations stated in a mid-term review of an activity. • These initiatives can achieve results but are very resource intensive (particularly human resources) apparent ratio of around (around 30 staff: 200 families = 1:6).
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to have demonstrated buy-in of national Government/Ministry and where is flagging it should be identified early and responded to. • Need for high levels of internal communication and coordination where one agency is working on multiple projects and engaging with government to avoid duplication/maximise capacity for harmonisation. • Are efficiencies and benefit from improved collaboration/cooperation with other development players and partners including multilaterals e.g. UNICEF.