

**AUSTRALIA-AFRICA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEME
(AACES)
MID TERM REVIEW
May 2014**

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List of abbreviations

AACES	Australia-Africa Community Engagement Scheme
ACBF	Africa Capacity Building Foundation
AFAP	Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific
ANCP	Australia NGO Cooperation Program
ANGO	Australian NGO
AOA	Anglican Overseas Aid
CTDT	Community Technology Development Trust (Zimbabwe)
DALY	Disability Adjusted Life Year
DAR	Development Awareness Raising
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MSC	Most Significant Change
MSI	Marie Stopes International
PSC	Program Steering Committee
PWD	People living with disability
RF	Resource Facility
SROI	Social Return on Investment
VfM	Value for Money

Executive summary

The Australia-Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) is an innovative partnership between DFAT, ten Australian NGOs and their African partners. It is aimed at developing, demonstrating and disseminating ways to work with marginalised communities in Africa, other civil society organisations, and public and private sector service providers to bring about sustainable change in the lives of people in targeted communities.

The program is supporting a diverse set of well-targeted interventions. There is good evidence that activities are making a difference at household and community level. All projects have elements of strengthening voice and mobilising communities to link to service providers, and of project engagement with service providers. It was aligned to Australian priority sectors at the time of its design (food security, water and sanitation, and maternal and child health); but the basic approaches of understanding needs, helping people to access new technologies where appropriate, mobilising community assets and voice and promoting understanding of rights and duties run across the program and are not sector specific. The program remains highly relevant to Australia's interests in Africa, both in its capacity to provide understanding of contexts of extreme poverty and its ability to generate lessons about how to include the most marginalised people, including women and people with disability, in the benefits of economic growth and improved governance.

Effective, sustainable change

The underlying approach to sustainable change in the program assumes that NGO partnerships will work progressively on

- Supporting marginalised communities to have their basic needs met – often with a view to supporting them to form groups and take collective action;
- Increasing the awareness and voice of marginalised groups to hold service providers and other responsible people to account; and
- Supporting public and private service providers.

Taken together these lines of action should help to ensure that service delivery is sustainable rather than depending on continued aid-financed provision. The mid-term reviews carried out by each of the NGO partnerships, on which this program review is largely based, show that all have made a good start on one or more of these elements, using different approaches suited to the context and to the strengths and philosophies of the NGO groupings. There is good evidence of change having been brought about at household level in food security (including in areas previously dependent on food aid), incomes, access to water and sanitation and gender relations; of mobilising community assets in the form of collective activity and volunteers; and of the formation of groups to identify needs, promote access to services and engage with service providers.

Two key successes have been the way that the program has focused on women and people with disability. There is strong evidence not only that activities have targeted women and girls but also that women and girls are benefiting from direct intervention. Five of the AACES projects target women and young girls. All of the other NGO partnerships endeavour to ensure that their interventions include women and that women benefit at least proportionally from project activities. Documented benefits for women and girls include increased access to and use of sexual and reproductive health services; improved school toilets; time saving from improved access to water; and increased incomes and diversity of food intake. Across AACES, projects are making headway in influencing power relations within communities, benefiting women in terms of reduced gender based violence, more equal decision-making over use of assets and family planning adoption, ability to generate an income, respect from men and leadership positions in community structures. Work to raise awareness of service providers on the rights of women is also in its early stages, and in some cases is central to the discussions that are had with local power structures.

The majority of NGO partnerships have taken on the disability agenda, often exploring for the first time how to mainstream access for people with disability into their work. In doing so, many partnerships have joined with disability organisations. The incorporation of a disability consciousness within the provision of services to people with disability has strongly influenced AACES programs, encouraging them to provide specific services and model good practice, to provide and promote disability-appropriate facilities, to support public services to be disability-friendly and to promote the status of people with disability by giving them first access to inputs and to encourage their participation in community structures. There is also some evidence of initial work to influence communities and service providers about the rights of people with disability. Community sensitisation, however, is slow and local government steps are, as yet, small. There is an opportunity to capitalise on the gains to date in conjunction with disability organisations.

Each of the AACES projects is attempting to engage in countries where state services are weak, where money flows unevenly to services, and where there are many factors compromising the ability of the state to provide basic services, and so sustainability of efforts to link communities with them. It was evident in the in-depth investigations carried out for a small sample of activities that there was more understanding by NGOs of long term strategy, and the way that activities were taking account of the realities of their context, than was apparent in the individual NGO reviews. This suggests that high quality locally adapted approaches are being developed, but need to be better documented. In the remaining program period more attention needs to be given to the way in which NGO partnerships conceive of sustainability and track progress, taking account of the political power relationships and incentives in the countries of operation, and to generating learning about how civil society works with communities and service providers to broker solutions.

The AACES design drew on experience of previous NGO programs to develop a set of innovative features whose success was examined as part of the review. These included specific objectives with small financial allocations for the then AusAID to learn from AACES experience for the wider Australian aid program, and for development awareness raising in Australia; the deliberate adoption by AusAID of a partnership rather than a contract management approach to its funding role; and a commitment to learning, exchange and collaboration among partners to promote dissemination of lessons and good practice and contribute to continuous improvement.

Improving policies and programs

Work on objective 2 (related to strengthening AusAID policies and programs in Africa), has in practice been heavily balanced towards supporting learning and exchange within AACES to strengthen activity delivery. While good work was undertaken in Africa, overall the program has struggled to implement the policy-influencing aspect of the objective. Even taking into account that it was intended to begin slowly, the intention to provide structures and priorities for input into Australian policies and programs from NGOs was only partially realised. The context of a restricted Africa budget means that the motivation for DFAT to engage with this objective has reduced, although it can and should continue to learn from AACES experience. The objective needs to be reformulated to take account of current practice.

Informing the Australian public

Development awareness raising was embraced with enthusiasm by a number of Australian NGOs and their African partners. The activities carried out under the objective were overall an efficient use of funds; the costs were relatively low and the numbers of people reached were high. There were also good examples of innovation and collaboration. Initiatives under objective 3 have been carefully targeted and monitored. The limited outcomes have been met. However, the restrictions around fundraising and advocacy made firm judgements about impact difficult, and NGOs found it difficult to say what the added value of the considerable investment of time and effort had been. During the course of the review DFAT announced the end of development awareness raising financing from 2014/15. The end of this stream in AACES will not make a fundamental difference to its basic aims, although it will put an end to some well-managed and imaginative activity. One strand of experience does, however, deserve to be maintained: the promotion of African voices telling their own stories, whether through blogging by African staff or communities' demonstration of what they have been able to achieve for themselves. Capacity building for communications is already a part of Australian NGO support for African partners and need not depend on development awareness raising funding. It has significant potential to develop the capacity of African organisations to shape development policy and practice.

Partnerships, learning and the AACES architecture

Successive partnership surveys, and a survey carried out for this review, suggest that the partnership elements of AACES are highly valued. Partners feel that the principles of mutual respect and trust are both important and well-practised, and back this up in statements of what has helped AACES to work: promotion of cooperation, not competition, building relationships and trust, and a sense that DFAT wants to make the approach work. The flexibility of AACES, which allows NGOs to learn and adjust within a five year commitment, has allowed activities to respond to changing circumstances. Responses on the role of DFAT confirmed that its role as funder and partner had been well balanced, that it had communicated changes in policy and that it had been flexible and responsive.

There has been an unprecedented amount of learning, exchange and collaboration across AACES¹. The mechanisms set up to support it have been successful in varying degrees. Among the most successful in the establishment period have been thematic workshops (a disability workshop held early in the life of AACES is credited with having raised the profile of disability in NGO operations), field visits arranged in conjunction with annual workshops, and in-country and cross sector coordination among AACES partners. The on-line sharing resource (Yammer) has a growing number of subscribers and is appreciated particularly by African partners. The Annual Report, intended in the design to be a catalyst for analysing overall areas of success and challenge in the program, has in practice been more a communications tool, albeit a useful and well-regarded one.

The Program Steering Committee has been an important element in underlining the equality of partnership and involving all partners in program administration. It has evolved as a forum for reaching agreement on key shared activities and to some extent for reviewing aspects of the program, but it has not yet taken on ownership of the overall analysis and lesson learning from the program. This is partly because current reporting and lesson learning between NGOs, although comprehensive and demonstrably useful in individual operations, has not attempted to analyse overall progress against the key question of whether AACES is succeeding in finding sustainable solutions for service delivery. The original design intended that the Resource Facility, which now provides valued logistical backup and communications services for AACES, should also be a source of advice on monitoring, evaluation and research, and should coordinate the production of strategic

¹ The review survey indicates that nearly all Australian partners (90%) and three quarters of African partners had collaborated often or occasionally with another AACES organisation in a way they did not plan in their original design; that 80% of Australian partners and 70% of African partners had shared resources with another AACES organisation in a way they did not plan in their design; and that around half of both groups had changed something often or occasionally as a result of what they had learned.

learning material. In the event the market did not produce the desired capacity, and AACES has had to work within the capacity of the contracted organisation. The review report recommends that AACES should maximise the return on investment so far in partnership behaviours and structures by bringing in an additional Africa-based resource to assist with action research, capturing lessons, promoting more strategic learning and making links to sources of innovation within African civil society.

Value for money

AACES has developed over the course of implementation a strong focus on value for money, in parallel to the emerging thinking on value for money in by DFAT as a whole. A value for money framework was developed collaboratively by AACES partners in early 2013. It was guided by the core principles of balancing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in ways that are both equitable and ethical. It is not prescriptive about methodology or approach and recognises that in line with the innovative and experimental nature of AACES, multiple assessment tools will be tested. The activity mid-term reviews accordingly adopted a variety of approaches to analysing value for money, including quantitative and qualitative methods. Some took a disappointingly limited approach in the light of the emphasis placed on the issues over the preceding months. Overall, where there were attempts to relate costs to outcomes the case for value for money was made; an examination of costs as well as outcomes for each set of NGO activities would have enabled a more complete case to be made. There was evidence that NGOs manage for value for money, that is, that they have procurement and implementation processes aimed at value, and in some cases costs were compared to external benchmarks. The reports recognised the value of the equity of outcomes as an important element of value for money, for instance by highlighting the outcomes of benefit to people with disabilities or the most marginalised. There are also some attempts, consistent with the AACES principle of accountability to communities, to incorporate community views into the value for money assessments.

It will be important by the end of the AACES period that all NGO partnerships have further developed their value for money methodologies, taking account of all the elements that might demonstrate managing for value and making more effort to relate costs to outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation in AACES is responding to a number of different imperatives. It must provide the numbers and case studies for communications purposes; feed operational decisions; help NGO partnerships explain whether their theory of change is being borne out; promote accountability to communities; and provide a basis for tracking value for money. Current monitoring and evaluation systems are doing the first consistently, because that is the function for which there is the strongest program-wide demand. However, there is sufficient evidence in the mid-term reviews of monitoring and evaluation systems struggling to meet the full range of demands. The mid-term point is an appropriate time for partners

to undertake a stocktake of whether the NGO level monitoring systems set up in the early period of AACES have been implemented and whether they are still fit for purpose and simple enough to operate.

Recommendations

1. That all NGO partnerships continue to examine how their theory of change remains relevant in their contexts and make it clear in annual plans and annual reports how they are working with communities and other civil society organisations and networks to navigate the realities of power and politics to broker sustainable solutions.
2. That objective 2 be reworded to read “AACES projects are strengthened through learning, collaboration and exchange between AACES partners”; and that DFAT prioritise and communicate its own requirements for learning from AACES in the emerging policy context.
3. That objective 3 be removed in the light of the DFAT policy directive ending funding for development awareness raising activities, but that NGO partnerships seek to integrate into existing capacity building activities the capacity of African partners and the communities with whom they work the ability to generate their own communications products and to tell their own stories.
4. That AACES partners identify a resource, preferably in Africa, who can develop a learning strategy, facilitate exchange on strategic issues, help with learning products, and link AACES with other development practitioners in Africa.
5. That all NGO partners further develop their approach on assessing value for money in the remainder of the AACES period and demonstrate that their monitoring and evaluation systems are set up to give the information required to make the assessment.
6. That all NGO partnerships review their monitoring and evaluation systems to check their fitness for purpose by the end of 2014 and report findings and actions, if any, to the PSC.

1. Introduction

The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme is a partnership between ten Australian NGOs (ANGOs)², their African partners and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The program is being implemented over five years (2011-16) with a budget of up to \$90 million. It operates in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The program focuses on the (then) AusAID³ priority sectors in Africa at the time of design: food security, water and sanitation, and maternal and child health. However, alongside the sectoral focus in the design, and underpinning its innovative nature, was an intent to promote approaches to ensuring sustainable change in the lives of marginalised people in Africa. The features of the AACES concept which distinguished it from NGO funding programs at the time were:

- A movement away from contractual agreements between funder and NGO to a more exploratory arrangement that allowed for learning and adjustment
- An intent to model ways for civil society to catalyse engagement between communities and service providers rather than provide services
- AusAID assuming a role of equal partner with implementing NGOs and participating equally in learning
- A support system to allow regular meeting, communication and exchange of ideas.

The intention of AACES is to *“enable Australian NGOs and their partners to contribute to the [Australian] strategy for Africa, through a partnership program focused on community-based interventions across the sectors of water and sanitation, food security and maternal and child health”*⁴.

Within the overall program Australian and African NGO partnerships⁵ manage their own set of activities in one or more countries and have access to and contribute to formal and informal learning opportunities and cooperation with other AACES partners, to meet the three objectives of AACES:

- Marginalised people have sustainable access to the services they require (Objective 1)

² Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) (which in turn has a collaborative arrangement with the Nossal Institute for Global Health and Australian Volunteers International), the Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific (AFAP), Caritas and the Australian branches of World Vision, CARE, Action Aid, Marie Stopes International (MSI), Oxfam, Water Aid, and Plan International

³ References to AusAID, which was merged with DFAT in November 2013, are historical.

⁴ Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme, Program Design Document June 2011 p.16. Design document emphasis.

⁵ The term “NGO partnerships” is used throughout this report to acknowledge Australian NGOs working with their primary African partners and through them with other NGOs and community based organisations. Where activities are ascribed to specific NGOs the Australian NGO’s name is used as a convenient label only.

- AusAID policies and programs in Africa are strengthened, particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalised people (Objective 2)
- The Australian public are more informed about development issues in Africa (Objective 3)

Around 90% of the program is allocated to the first objective.⁶ The second and third, although taking a much smaller share of expenditure, were seen as part of a package in which learning from objective 1 would feed both Australian Government policy and development awareness raising in Australia.

As part of the support system mentioned above, AACES has a Program Steering Committee (PSC) meeting every six months on which the ten NGO partnerships have a seat, together with DFAT; and a Resource Facility (RF) based in Nairobi which organises regular reflection and thematic workshops in Africa, provides a communication platform and some media services, and compiles periodic newsletters and the AACES Annual Report.

About this report

This is the report of the Mid Term Review process undertaken between October 2013 and April 2014. It consisted of two parts

- An NGO level review, in which each NGO partnership was responsible for undertaking a Mid Term Review of its own set of activities, based on a set of common evaluation questions which were supplemented or adapted by the NGOs as required (TOR at annex 1).
- A program level review undertaken by an independent team (the MTR team)⁷ to draw out the main themes from the NGO reviews and to assess the operation of the overall design.

The remainder of this section sets out the methodology for the program level review. Section 2 summarises financial information. Sections 3 and 4 consider respectively the continuing relevance of AACES in a changed Australian policy environment and the effectiveness and sustainability of activities carried out with communities in pursuit of objective 1. Sections 5 and 6 assess evidence of effectiveness under objectives 2 and 3. Section 7 considers the effectiveness of partnerships, learning and the AACES architecture. Section 8 describes the approaches taken to demonstrating value for money within the NGO level MTRs and the evidence for value for money of the AACES structures. Sections 9 and 10 cover monitoring and evaluation and some reflections on the MTR process. A final section contains conclusions and recommendations.

⁶ Including a share of monitoring and administration expenses.

⁷ John Winter, Team Leader; Rosalind David, Civil Society Specialist; Anna Roche and Chris Roche, Value for Money Specialists.

Methodology

This program level review does not attempt to summarise the rich information from the NGO MTR reports. In line with the evaluation plan, the review team proposed an outline theory of change for objective 1 which appeared to cover the directions in which most of the NGO activities were evolving; mapped the reported outcomes from the MTRs against the outline; and compared the results to the implied aspirations of the design. Three activities (Action Aid Kenya's food security project, Community Technology Development Trust's (CTDT) community development project supported by AFAP in Zimbabwe, and Oxfam Zambia's partnerships on water and sanitation) were subject to further investigation with country implementation teams to understand how the MTR conclusions related to those teams' experience and the outcomes they valued. These activities were purposively sampled to get coverage of the three AACES sectors (CTDT covers but is not limited to maternal and child health), three countries and a small, medium and large Australian NGO.

For objectives 2 and 3 the team compared assessments of success and challenges and developed propositions, set out in this report, about the relative value and sustainability of different outcomes. To assess value for money at the NGO level the team compared the approaches used to a framework based on the AACES value for money framework and analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted. At program level, the team administered a questionnaire to ANGOS and their African partners to compare what participants valued from AACES with their actual experience (Annex 2).

The team carried out semi-structured interviews with each Australian member of the PSC together with colleagues and Australian consortium partners; interviewed DFAT staff in Nairobi, Canberra and Pretoria; and examined periodic reporting at NGO and program level and the outcomes of PSC meetings and learning events.

A separate review of the Resource Facility was carried out in October 2013; it is summarised in this report and attached as Annex 4.

A first draft of the report was shared with AACES partners and the findings presented and discussed at the AACES reflection workshop in May. This version takes account of discussion at the workshop, notably in respect of objective 2, and of subsequent comments and corrections by AACES partners.

The MTR team would like to thank all who generously provided their time and insights for this report.

Limitations

The bulk of the information available to the MTR team was in the NGO MTR reports, which, although they mainly attempted to deal with the evaluation questions in the overall terms of reference, did so unevenly. There was a strong focus on changes at household level (increased food production, access to water, gender relations) but less on following through a theory of change to assess what was working and what more needed to be done to

strengthen community institutions and their relationships with service providers. In the three in-depth studies, it was evident that implementing staff had a clearer view of the change they were seeking to bring about, and their sustainability strategy, than was reflected in the report. Equally, they were able to provide a more compelling view than their report did of how they represent value for money. The MTR team is aware that some of the judgements made in the course of the program level review may simply reflect a lack of information in the reports for which the supplementary data gathering could not compensate.

The dependency on the quality and focus of the NGO reports would be more of a problem if the overall MTR was intended to be a summative view of effectiveness to date. However, the evaluation plan set out “not so much to validate individual results as to develop an understanding of how the whole program is working to deliver value to AusAID and its partners”. There are sufficient common trends in the reporting and the supplementary information to be able to make some relatively well-based propositions about priorities for the second half of the program period. Nevertheless, constructing the overall MTR in the way it was constructed ran the risk, partially realised, that key questions relating to the implementation of the original AACES concept might not be consistently and comprehensively covered. This has implications, developed at the end of the report, for the end of program review.

The review has taken a broad look at the workings of the partnership principles on which AACES is based. Some evidence was gathered from ANGOs about what they offered to their African partners, and some conclusions have been drawn about ways in which African partners could be better integrated into AACES decision-making. However, for reasons of time, apart from the opportunity to respond to the survey and to participate in the in-depth visits, the views of African partners have not been reflected to the extent the team would have liked.

2. Expenditure

The bulk of expenditure under AACES is through financing agreements with the Australian NGOs. The contract for the resource facility (\$2.01 million) and smaller amounts for monitoring and evaluation are managed directly by DFAT.

Expenditure by objective by the NGOs for the first two and a half years is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Expenditure by functional reporting categories 2011-2013

	2011-12	2012-13	2013 (Jul-Dec)	Total
Objective 1	9,543,936	12,120,264	5,944,158	\$27,607,269
Objective 2	307,546	594,141	250,840	\$1,239,923
Objective 3	274,960	335,741	202,329	\$796,604
M&E	1,068,603	1,218,013	791,637	\$3,069,806
Administration	1,318,958	1,499,153	758,529	\$3,588,611
Program support	587,415	797,732	431,843	\$1,819,824
Total	13,101,418	16,565,044	8,379,336	\$38,122,037

The provision for administration costs relates to the 10% of program expenditure allowable under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) guidelines for a list of specified personnel, office and operating costs, and is standard for DFAT/NGO agreements. The additional cost of participating in AACES compared to a normal grants program (defined in the financial reporting template as the direct management of the AACES project, for example attending coordination meetings, report preparation, communications and field office costs) is represented by the “Program support” line, set at an additional 5% of program expenditure. In reality, taking into account the collaborative design process, early investment in M&E frameworks and the commitment to sharing learning and participating in AACES forums, it is likely that the additional costs to NGOs are higher than this figure suggests. Australian NGO respondents identified their own time, which is to some degree included in the objectives lines in the table above, as the main additional cost.

Allowing for some slippage against the 2013-14 budget, overall expenditure will be about half the total provision by the end of year 3.

3. Relevance

Program level

The design suggests three main motivations for AusAID in approving AACES. First, it wanted to model a different way of working with NGOs that used their comparative advantage of knowledge of the context, innovation and flexibility better than the contractual model did. Second, it wanted a system that would short-circuit the usual learning cycles and provide practical learning on reaching the most marginalised people that would be relevant to designing a growing Australian aid program in Africa. Third, it hoped to make a significant contribution through this modality to results in its focus sectors, including by encouraging NGOs to use the AACES activity to join with other civil society in the countries of operation to influence policy and practice at local and national level.

Australian aid policy under the new Government elected in September 2013 is still evolving. However, the growth in the Africa aid program has been significantly reversed. In future the program will concentrate on a smaller number of countries in East and Southern Africa, focusing on investments in the extractives and agriculture sectors. The sectoral focus of AACES, corresponding to the third motivation above, will no longer be so relevant to Australian government policy, but as noted earlier this was not its essential purpose. For the first two motivations:

- If, as confirmed in interviews with DFAT staff, working with NGOs continues to be an important part of public diplomacy and maintaining Australia’s presence on the ground in Africa, then AACES will continue to generate evidence for a collaborative and consultative way of working which is seen among AACES partners, including DFAT, as potentially leading to better outcomes than the alternatives. The AACES experience is already influencing the design of other government funded NGO programs.

- AACES is generating learning for its partners and their networks, and can be made more effective in doing so (some ideas on this are set out later in this report). DFAT may no longer need the same kind of information as was envisaged at design but there is no reason why it should not shape the learning so that it also gets learning that contributes appropriately to policy development. It is beyond the scope of this review to propose ways in which AACES might converge with official policy development for Africa, but there is, for example, potential in AACES work on women's economic empowerment and in the place of community and civil society organisations in better governance on which links could be built.

Project level

The test for relevance at the project level was whether it was still relevant to the needs of target groups, and whether the activity was being used as a basis for legitimising or expanding the role of civil society in the country. On the first point, there was strong evidence in the MTR reports of careful targeting and good rationale for interventions, and some evidence of adaptation to changing circumstances. On the second, there was implied evidence of using the role of civil society to press for policy or budget changes, and expanding it through capacity development and encouragement of organisation at community level. One emerging theme is the extent to which externally funded activities change the way local officials, in particular, view civil society. The common perception is that NGOs are sources of money to do things that governments would do if only they had the resources. Promising approaches in AACES to influence this perception include:

- Training and advising public sector officials (and so being seen as a source of technical expertise)
- Preparing and facilitating encounters between officials and communities (and so being seen as brokers)
- Showing officials positive change in communities, giving them a reason to visit on their own initiative and to begin to own the community's success (becoming encouragers and mentors).

4. Effective and sustainable change

Objective 1 focuses on ANGOs and their partners working with marginalised people and service providers to increase access to services in ways that can be sustained beyond the life of the program. The underlying assumption is that there will be a change in the provision of services, especially those provided by national governments, as well as changes in the capacity of communities and marginalised groups to require and utilise services. The outcomes from this objective are:

- Marginalised people, particularly women, have greater voice and engagement with decision makers and duty bearers;
- Policy formulation and implementation by duty bearers is more informed by local issues and evidence;

- There is an increase in the capacity and focus of duty bearers to deliver inclusive and sustainable services;
- There is an increase in the demand for services by marginalised people, in particular women;
- There is an increase in marginalised people, particularly women, utilising and benefiting from services;
- Information is available from marginalised people, particularly women, about how access to services has contributed or not to their wellbeing and development⁸.

The AACES design in practice

Although the AACES design was premised on a rights based approach, attempts during the MTR to line up progress against the outcome areas above proved difficult. The MTR team found that, in the spirit of AACES, the NGO partnerships had taken diverse approaches to delivering sustainable services to marginalised communities in the eleven countries in which they work. The individual MTR reports indicate that progress cannot easily be charted against the six outcome areas. Rather, each of the partnerships is exploring, in its own way, how to support sustained change in the income, health and nutritional status of marginalised people in the communities in which they work.

In the MTR process, a conceptual framework was developed which attempts to make sense of the diversity of approaches with a view to a) assessing AACES progress towards stimulating sustainable service delivery in different contexts and b) promoting discussion on the sustainability of the NGO partnership programs. Three elements of work are common to NGO approaches:

- Supporting marginalised communities to have their basic needs met – often with a view to supporting them to form into groups and then take collective action;
- Increasing the awareness and voice of marginalised groups to hold duty bearers to account; and
- Supporting duty bearers (local, regional and national – formal and informal) and, in some cases, the private sector to enable them to provide services to marginalised communities.

These three approaches are presented in the theoretical framework below.

⁸ Program Design Document, p.17

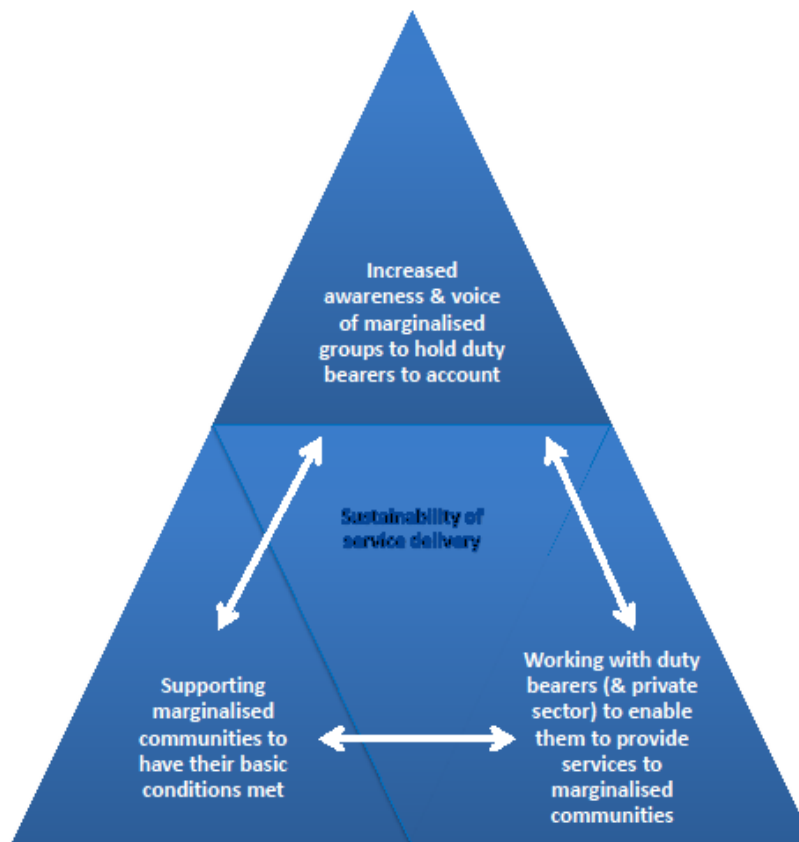


Figure 1: Focus of work of the AACES NGOs in attempting to provide sustainable services to marginalised communities

The implications of this theoretical model are that NGO partnerships may start at any point, or points, of the triangle, with the aim of increasing the probability of sustainability by moving to cover (or working with others to cover) all three points of the triangle. Those partnerships which would locate themselves initially in the left hand corner of the triangle have focused their early work on supporting the delivery of services to marginalised communities; those who would locate themselves in the right hand side of the triangle have focused early work on strengthening duty bearers (and/or the private sector) to provide services to marginalised communities; and those who would locate their work in the top corner of the triangle have focused early work on increasing awareness and empowering rights holders to hold duty bearers to account. Positioning between the corners implies working on all three areas, alone or in collaboration with other partners, with the potential to increase sustainability of services. The remainder of this chapter discusses progress against elements of this model and how the NGO partnerships have addressed gender and disability as cross cutting themes throughout their interventions. It summarises how projects have:

- Supported marginalised communities to have basic conditions met
- Increased awareness/voice of marginalised groups to hold duty bearers to account
- Supported duty bearers to provide services to marginalised communities
- Attempted to incorporate gender and disability as cross cutting themes; and
- Addressed the underlying question of AACES which is how to ensure the sustainable delivery of services to marginalised people.

Support to marginalised communities to have their basic conditions met

If the focus of AACES activities, and early outcomes, were to be plotted on the triangle, most activities would be concentrated in the left hand corner. A number of the NGO partnerships' theories of change are predicated on initially supporting marginalised groups to have their basic conditions met so they have the strength and well-being to mobilise and engage collectively with service providers to access, demand or claim their rights.

Action Aid advocates a rights based model aimed at supporting chronically food insecure small holder farmers (mainly women farmers) to meet their basic needs before supporting awareness-raising and advocacy in Kenya and Uganda. AOA uses a strengths based approach to address service gaps and improve living conditions which are responsible for poor health status of pastoral communities in Kenya and Ethiopia. AFAP's strategy is to empower existing community based organisations to implement sustainable poverty alleviation programs and effectively link with decentralised service structures. CARE's theory of change starts with building the agency of chronically food insecure rural women to have increased household productive assets and control over these. Oxfam's theory of change is founded on a rights-based, participatory and capacity building approach that aims to support social change led by community groups. Water Aid's theory of change aims to improve water, sanitation and hygiene in under-served communities so that communities and community based organisations (CBOs) can participate in, manage and monitor water points, hygiene and sanitation services. MSI's theory of change is to engender readiness, willingness and the ability of actors and stakeholders to take action. It provides sexual and reproductive health services to marginalised communities and engages the private sector as well as duty bearers to provide necessary services.

The individual MTR reports from the NGO partnerships collectively demonstrate strong early gains in food production, access to water and sanitation and improved health. While the numbers of households affected by these interventions are not necessarily high, in many cases the interventions are transformative in terms of the approach taken which attempts to ensure sustainability. A summary analysis of key achievements in these three sectors is provided below.

Achieving increased food security for marginalised communities

The introduction of drought resistant crops, training in agronomics and water harvesting, and access to extension and other services is showing strong results for Action Aid in Kenya and Uganda. Small holder farmers have shown increased results in food production despite prolonged dry spells. In marginalised rural communities, hitherto dependent on food aid,

access to food has increased. During the initial baseline survey in Uganda, 71% of families in project areas said they ate only one meal a day. A repeat survey two years later revealed families dependent on only one meal had fallen to 16%.

CARE's projects in Malawi and Ethiopia are similarly improving program participants' food security and resilience. Women's participation in village savings and loans associations enables them to embark on economic and social empowerment. Establishing savings and loans associations has introduced a culture of savings, enhancing households' ability to invest in agricultural inputs, economic enterprises, or their children's education. In Tanzania, progress is visible in terms of women's improved agency and skills relative to sesame production and access to savings and credit.

AACES Food security in numbers

In 2012-13, AACES helped improve the food security of over 33,000 people.

More than:

- 26,000 households received farm inputs such as tools, seeds & livestock
- 30,000 households adopted new and improved agricultural technologies that will increase agricultural productivity
- 14,000 farmers joined farmer associations, which provided technical support, information & knowledge sharing
- 31,000 farmers accessed new or improved agricultural services
- 32,000 people learned about their rights to land, food and access to government agricultural services.

Achieving improved access to water and sanitation for marginalised communities

In Tanzania, Water Aid's MTR indicated that the program had improved toilet facilities for 15,900 primary school students all of which were designed to cater for disabled children and the specific needs of girls. In Malawi, Water Aid activities had enabled 1,350 people access to water and 1,200 to sanitation. By 2013, Water Aid Malawi reported a further 5,340 school sanitation users and over 16,000 household latrine users with over 1,000 hand washing installations. Eight villages have been officially declared defecation free. In Ghana, Water Aid constructed boreholes, water kiosks and iron removal plants serving 6,100 and built a school latrine block. By 2013 a further 9,000 people were provided with water and 1,600 with sanitation facilities and two communities were declared free of open defecation.

AACES WASH services in numbers

AACES programs provided safe WASH services to more than 60,000 people in 2012-13.

An additional:

- 64,000 people accessed safe and sustainable water
- 47,000 people now have appropriate sanitation
- 50,000 people learned about safe hygiene practices.

Oxfam uses WASH programs as an entry point to its rights based participatory programs in South Africa and Zambia. The aim of the program is community capacity building and

support to social change organisations to improve their communities' health and quality of life. In this model, sustainability is integral as communities and beneficiaries are engaged in all aspects of the program cycle. Evidence from the midterm review indicates program effectiveness across most spheres of the program approach including changed beliefs, awareness, knowledge and capacity (for example, about hygiene/health behaviour, water harvesting, leading to reduced diarrhoea and diseases); increased access to WASH services (pit latrines, water pumps, rainwater harvesting); reduced inequalities in WASH (access for PWDs, awareness of differential needs, gender roles) and strengthened WASH governance⁹.

Achieving maternal and child health for marginalised communities

MSI's MTR illustrated significantly increased awareness of sexual and reproductive health and family planning amongst marginalised groups as a result of AACES. In Kenya the number of family planning adopters among women, youth and people with disabilities (PWDs) has increased 470% between 2011 and 2013. Adoption of youth focused outreach in Tanzania has seen an increase in the proportion of young people serviced in AACES project areas from 37% (2011) to 41% (2013). On average, MS Kenya is reaching approximately 11,050 young people per month with information about sexual reproductive health and family planning.

AACES Mother & Child Health Impact in numbers

In 2012-13, AACES maternal and child health programs reached more than 80,000 people. More than:

- 23,500 children received life-saving vaccines
- 47,300 people accessed a modern family planning method
- 10,000 babies were delivered through clean & safe practices
- 897 community health workers were trained.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, AOA's program has expanded the reach of the Afar People's Development Association to remote marginalised communities. The training of additional health workers, women extension workers, traditional birth attendants and HIV scouts was shown to have improved services. Community education about harmful traditional practices and hygiene, the provision of delivery kits, solar lamps and waiting houses for pregnant women are contributing to improvements in maternal and child services.

AFAP's integrated initiatives in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were shown by their MTR to have significantly improved marginalised groups' access to food, water and sanitation and improved health. The project has reached 45,953 households in these three countries. AFAP's support has increased availability, access and utilisation of food at the household level in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. For example, in Malawi household

⁹ Oxfam's work in Zambia and South Africa uses Rao and Kelleher's 'Integral framework' which suggests that for long term sustainable change the social systems and institutions that determine the distribution of power and goods must be transformed (refer to Oxfam's design document).

food availability increased from an average annual maize harvest of 287kg in 2011 to 546kg in 2013. The MTR also indicates increased access to sustainable and inclusive community management of safe water and sanitation facilities while women and children now have improved access to MCH services in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Increased awareness/voice of marginalised groups to hold duty bearers to account

Two and a half years into AACES some NGOs have focused significant attention on stimulating 'voice' of citizens. The NGO MTRs revealed that often this strand of work builds on individuals being formed into groups or associations. For Action Aid this is 'farmer field schools' and Reflect farmer groups, for CARE this is 'village savings and loans associations', for Oxfam and Water Aid this is WASH clubs, or operation and maintenance committees, for AOA this is community development committees, for AFAP this is community based organisations and so on. Once formed into groups, citizens are then supported by NGO partnerships with empowerment/awareness raising processes and with support to engage with service providers about access to, or the improvement of, basic services (see box).

The work of Caritas and Plan stands out from the MTRs as being strong in supporting the development of voice. The focused attention to citizen voice is clear in their theories of change. Plan's theory of change maintains that in order to achieve change you have to work in a multipronged way - supporting the voice of rights holders to enable them to engage with duty bearers and supporting duty bearers to overcome barriers to service provision. Caritas' theory of change is to bring about sustainable development through supporting community owned and sustained change building on community strengths, followed by community led development through a strong focus on advocacy. A summary of some key achievements, in the terms of empowering voice, is provided below.

Plan's work in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya specifically targets marginalised women and marginalised youth. Its

MTR provides strong evidence of increased awareness of knowledge and rights and of marginalised people claiming their rights especially in relation to gender based violence, inheritance rights and health. There is also evidence of greater inclusion (and reduced stigma) of marginalised people in community structures and social networks leading to

Examples of AACES work stimulating community voice

In Uganda, ActionAid's work has supported Katakwi women farmers to advocate for the inclusion of women in the national extension program as commercial farmers. As a result the district promised to involve 30% of women farmers.

In Malawi, AFAP's support to a community advocacy committee enabled them to engage with the road authority in Blantyre, which has since repaired a washed away bridge.

WaterAid supports citizen's action around the right to water & health in rural Malawi. As a result of citizen's engagement with duty bearers in Nkhonkhotakota the government provided a resident nurse and bicycle ambulance and improved teachers housing in the local area. In Ghana, the introduction of scorecards facilitates feedback from citizens to service providers. This has led to increased demand for transparency around finances.

empowerment. Women and people with disabilities (PWDs) are more included in family and community decision making and are being elected into leadership positions in project areas in Zimbabwe and Kenya.

Community awareness sessions, run by community volunteers¹⁰, are a key element in Plan's approach. Across the three project countries, nearly 20,000 people were reached (approximately 60% women) through community awareness sessions. Community volunteers also, make up an integral part of the service system by filling gaps in services.

As a result of Plan's program, marginalised people in the project areas are seeing increased service provision by both community volunteers and duty bearers, especially through mobile clinics, outreach and mediation. Rights awareness and the presence of community volunteers has contributed significantly to women and children claiming rights to live without fear of violence in all project locations.

Caritas' programs in Malawi and Tanzania are equally strong in supporting raised awareness and community voice. Caritas' work uses a strengths based approach which focuses on augmenting the strengths and assets that exist within communities and supporting collaborative engagement with service providers of all kinds. Caritas' MTR explains how communities agree a collective community vision, assess their own assets and strengths, then develop action plans to achieve their vision which are monitored through regular public meetings. In addition to mobilising their own resources communities look upon government as a resource they need to mobilise for achieving their vision.

Through this collaborative approach, Caritas has managed to stimulate service provision. The midterm review finds that "there is no doubt that collectively the project has significantly improved marginal communities' access to clean water and sanitation facilities, changed hygiene behaviour and provided at least the means to greater food security through better farming practices and post-harvest handling and marketing". The review finds that 60% of those surveyed recorded 'excellent satisfaction' with the provision of water and irrigation; 73% recorded 'excellent satisfaction' with sanitation services; 54% recorded 'excellent satisfaction' with modern farming practices and 100% of those surveyed stated excellent satisfaction with services provided to people living with disabilities.

Supporting duty bearers to provide services to marginalised communities

The third area of engagement in the theoretical framework (Figure 1) is supporting duty bearers and/or the private sector to provide sustainable services to marginalised communities. As explained earlier, many of the NGO partnerships have focused initial project attention on supporting marginalised communities to meet their needs, capacity building or increasing awareness/voice of marginal groups. Thus to-date most NGO engagement with duty bearers has concentrated on influencing policy and/or raising duty bearers' awareness of the paucity of services to marginal groups (see text box for examples). However, a few AACES programs have explicitly engaged with supporting duty

¹⁰ A total of 557 people were trained as community volunteers (51% women) over 2 years.

bearers to enable them to provide support to marginalised communities. Some examples of this work are:

- In Tanzania and Kenya MSI is supporting private enterprises and government to provide services to marginalised groups including youth and PWDs, through training, meetings and informal discussions. MSI has established a formal social franchise network as part of its project in Kenya. This works by grouping existing small-scale private service providers under a shared brand to form a network of practitioners offering standardised, high quality and affordable services.
- Similarly, Caritas' work in Tanzania and Malawi is engaging in a supportive way with duty bearers. Local government informants talked about the project "providing a model approach for what the government needs to do" and "helping the government become more engaged with isolated communities in key development areas".
- Plan's work in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya explicitly engages with duty bearers. A total of 559 duty bearers including government officials, village heads, traditional/cultural leaders, council and village secretaries, nurses, teachers and police officers have been trained by Plan. This has led to significant improvements in duty bearers' understanding of matters such as law and procedures, mediation and limits of jurisdiction, resulting in more informed and improved services for rural communities.

Examples of local/national level influencing of duty bearers

- In Tanzania Water Aid has influenced the national government to incorporate both girls' and boys' urinals into national school WASH guidelines and toolkits.
- In Kenya, Action Aid has sensitized local teachers, opinion leaders & local government in gender awareness and gender violence.
- The food security and nutrition bill was primarily pushed by AACES partners in Kenya.
- In Mozambique the government has allowed 33 PWDs to join vocational training courses as a result of AFAP partners' engagement.

While many of the NGO partnerships have examples of how they tangentially engage with duty bearers, World Vision's entry point to supporting sustainable services is primarily through the right hand corner of the triangle, that is, through focusing on supporting duty bearers to provide sustainable services to marginalised communities. World Vision's theory of change starts with strengthening maternal, new born and child health services through training and support to government workers, aligning with national strategies and policy frameworks and then training Community Health Volunteers in marginalised communities in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The approach to service provision aims to maximise community access to MCH services through utilising and bolstering structures provided by government and working with individuals and communities to adopt positive health behaviours and to use available services.

World Vision's strategy is not an easy one to implement in a climate where government health provision in East and Central Africa is typically under-funded and under-staffed. Nevertheless, initial gains are promising. World Vision's MTR indicated that progress has

been made towards child health targets while gains in maternal health will take longer. Overall, strides have been made towards equitable provision of maternal, new born and child health services including the promotion of male partner involvement in services and the provision of services friendly (though somewhat limited in places) to persons with disabilities.

Gender and Disability as cross cutting issues

Both gender and disability awareness cross-cut throughout most AACES activities. Many NGO representatives interviewed for the MTR process talked of AACES 'raising the bar' in terms of encouraging programs not only to ensure AACES directly benefits women and people with disability (PWDs), but also to address underlying power issues that perpetuate women and PWDs' marginalisation and inequality. The following provides a summary of the extent to which NGO partnerships have collectively risen to design expectations and some of the challenges which remain.

Mainstreaming disability within AACES

One of the distinctive elements of the AACES program is its engagement with people with disability. The majority of NGO partnerships have taken on the disability agenda, often exploring for the first time how to mainstream access for PWDs into their work. In doing so, many partnerships have joined with disability organisations which have supported them in engaging not only with issues of access but also with policy debates. The incorporation of a disability consciousness about the provision of services to groups with disability has strongly influenced AACES programs. This has manifested itself in different ways. For example:

- *Providing specific services and modelling good practice:* MSI work on sexual and reproductive health has adopted a strong emphasis on working with youth and PWDs. This entails challenging the prejudice that PWDs are sexually inactive. MS Tanzania's disability report conducted in 2013 indicated that 91% of interviewed PWDs had heard about family planning only as a result of AACES activities.
- *Ensuring facilities are disability-appropriate & modelling good practice:* Oxfam's work in South Africa and Zambia and Water Aid's work in Ghana, Tanzania and Malawi have also embraced the disability agenda. The Oxfam MTR provides evidence of 'significant achievements' in integrating and mainstreaming the rights of people with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS into its WASH and community development initiatives.
- *Directly supporting government services to be disability friendly:* World Vision's work with government health services was found to have

One PWD was quoted as saying "...We used to pay medical fees whenever we visited the health facility. World Vision educated us on our rights to free treatment. We complained to the facility authorities about this and the medical fees were removed. We are now treated for free." (PWD, Women group, World Vision MTR)

made strides towards the provision of equitable MCH services to people with disability. Though this work has been very difficult, due to inbuilt prejudices, there are examples of change (see text box right).

- *Centring the program on vulnerable groups:* Caritas' strengths based approach in Malawi and Tanzania specifically centres on the vulnerable in communities – those with disabilities, women heads of household, those living with HIV/AIDS etc. The most vulnerable households are singled out by the community for priority support and attempts made to ensure they benefit first from inputs (eg livestock in revolving schemes), are involved in decision making about activities (the location of boreholes, tap stands etc.) and the design of appropriate facilities (eg disability-appropriate sanitation facilities). As a result of the program, there is growing community sensitivity to the most marginalised and the importance of including them in decision making.

Throughout the MTRs there is some evidence of initial work to influence duty bearers of the rights of those living with disability. Oxfam Zambia's engagement on the rights of PWDs and child rights was said to have stimulated strong community discussion. MSI's work in Tanzania and Kenya was found to be stimulating wider community reflection on attitudes towards disability and Caritas' work was found to have influenced government extension services including health care, sanitation and household wellbeing focused on the most marginalised. Community sensitisation however is slow and local government steps are, as yet, small. There is work to be done to capitalise on the gains to date and further engage with disability rights organisations to provide awareness raising and support the rights of this most marginalised group.

Mainstreaming gender

Individual AACES MTRs provide strong evidence not only that the programs have targeted women and girls but also that women and girls are benefiting from direct intervention. Five of the AACES projects directly target women and young girls: Plan's projects actively seek to engage marginalised women and youth; World Vision and AOA specifically engage with women on maternal and child health; MSI's work on sexual and reproductive health specifically targets women and youth; and CARE aims to directly support chronically food insecure women to increase household productivity. In these cases women are the direct subject of interventions and explicit attempts are made to incorporate men into program activities. For example, MSI's MTR shows initial evidence of involving men in discussions of sexual reproductive health; World Vision's sensitization work had led to some men accompanying their partners to antenatal clinics; CARE's work in Malawi engages with male motivator clubs and youth drama groups that raise awareness of women's rights and harmful cultural practices; and AOA's work explicitly engages with male hierarchies in pastoralist communities in order to gain their acceptance and ownership of project activities.

All of the other NGO partnerships endeavour, with varying degrees of success, to ensure that their interventions include women and that women benefit at least proportionally from project activities. For example:

- Action Aid Kenya's work very strongly targets women. Female farmers comprise 70% of the sustainable community livelihoods groups and form the majority of Farmer Field Schools. The MTR found that women are benefiting from project interventions. Women farmers were found to have higher incomes across the project sites than their male counterparts, reversing the position at the start of the project.
- In Tanzania and Malawi, Caritas' MTR illustrated that women were strongly benefiting from interventions. Women reported benefiting from time saving changes and from participation in activities which increased their economic independence.
- Water Aid and Oxfam work to ensure that women and girls' needs are reflected throughout their AACES programs – both by ensuring that the provision of utilities (e.g. water and sanitation facilities) are appropriate to women and girls and that women are involved in the management of ongoing project initiatives.

Across AACES there is evidence that some projects are making headway in influencing power relations within communities. For example Action Aid's MTR provides testimonies from men and women about how interventions are initially benefiting women in terms of decision making in the household, ability to generate an income, respect from men ('women's right not to be misused') and women's leadership positions in farmer cooperatives; Plan's MTR suggests that women are attending meetings and being elected to leadership roles and provides evidence of increased awareness of rights as well as women claiming their rights; and Caritas' MTR states that "...in regard to gender equality, many women reported that they were sharing cooking, cleaning and child minding duties with their husbands and participating in senior positions in functional and management committees.."

AACES work to raise awareness of local duty bearers on the rights of women is also in its early stages. For example, Plan has developed the capacity of local government to understand the rights of women and Action Aid provides training for teachers, opinion leaders and local duty bearers in women's rights in Kenya and Uganda. For NGO partnerships which are actively engaged in supporting discussions over issues of women's/girls' rights which challenge power and cultural norms there is inevitable resistance. Plans' MTR notes "the journey to rights awareness and empowerment of women is not trouble free and has resulted in resistance from men... Finding ways to work with men to overcome resistance is an ongoing challenge..." The discussion of resistance and how to include men in promoting gender equity across different cultural barriers is one that needs to be had across the program as it moves to the next stage of engagement on gender issues.

Is AACES achieving sustainable service delivery?

The AACES design sets out to promote the *sustainable delivery of services* to marginalised communities. It underlines the importance of avoiding dependence upon NGOs for services beyond the life of the program and states that 'one of the significant areas for monitoring under this objective (objective 1) will be the degree to which local organisations, duty bearers and communities themselves are able to manage, provide and/or demand services'.¹¹

¹¹ AACES Design document. P.17

Given this emphasis, it is a weakness of the NGO MTRs that they generally do not focus on their individual theories of change and whether or not *the strategy is likely to promote sustainable service provision*. Where sustainability is discussed, the MTRs often cast doubt on the sustainability of individual interventions rather than discuss success of the strategy as a whole. Indeed, while many reports concentrate on sector achievements, less attention is given to strategy – what is working, what isn't working and, in particular, a strong analysis of the socio-political context in which the NGO partnerships are attempting to stimulate sustainable change.

Given the AACES design, the big question has to be 'what are we learning about how civil society intervenes with marginalised communities and service providers to broker sustainable solutions?' and – as important for AACES – '*what are we learning about what is (and what isn't) working?*' Each of the AACES projects is attempting to engage in countries where state services are generally weak, where what money is available flows unevenly to services, and where unreliable political will, governance, incentives and accountability are among the many factors which can compromise the ability of the state to provide basic services to marginalised people.

Studies of social accountability show that in the absence of clearly defined reciprocal relationships between the citizen and the state, the process of ensuring equitable service provision is much harder. Strategies for promoting community access to services have frequently included arming communities with information about available services or about their rights; organising collective feedback on the quality of services; or increasing citizen 'demand' through advocacy. But the success of these strategies depends on the environment, and in particular the nature of relations between citizen and state, and they rarely work on their own.

A five year study of Africa power and politics¹² describes reform interventions frequently dividing between addressing the 'supply side' of better governance and the 'demand side' of citizen action. The assumption in much of this work is that governments want and need help to deliver services honestly and effectively and that citizens have a definite and uncomplicated interest in holding governments to account. Reforms should therefore be about supporting this 'demand'. What emerges from practice is that the provision of public services almost always involves effective relationships between actors on both sides of the divide between 'government' and 'citizens', as well as on occasions the private sector. However, this has often been simply translated by practitioners into messages about 'joining up demand and supply sides' of governance reform and as a consequence the importance of the dynamics of political relationships, 'local problem solving' and 'practical hybrid solutions' are often under-appreciated.

It would be an over-simplification to suggest that AACES projects are relying on single strategies. However, if they are to demonstrate sustainability there will need to be stronger

¹² The Africa Power and Politics Programme is a consortium research programme funded by the DFID and Irish Aid. APPP carried out research in seven research streams from 2007 to 2012 ranged across countries and issues. The focus of the research was which institutional patterns and governance arrangements work well, and which badly, in supporting the provision of public goods. Policy Brief 09, October 2012.

explanations of how they are navigating the obstacles to service provision in their context, and perhaps greater focus on the limitations of what can be realistically achieved in the time frame. AACES projects provide an ideal opportunity to look at locally driven hybrid solutions in different contexts across eleven African countries. Two and a half years into the program is a good time to take stock and examine how effective different strategies have been. Each NGO partnership has a different entry point into the theoretical framework: some concentrating initial attention on supporting marginalised groups to have basic needs met, some concentrating on engaging with marginal communities to support awareness/voice and some supporting the private sector and state duty bearers to provide services to marginalised communities – and some are working on two or more of these areas. Lessons about this level of sustainability are hard to draw from the MTRs as these reports give cursory attention to strategy. However, the following inferences can be made:

- *The link between community and service provider is important.* Plan's MTR argues that it is the dual effect of increased rights awareness among marginalised people combined with the duty bearer's fear of consequences that galvanises action. Furthermore, the role of community volunteers in linking the voice of communities to the service providers is central to this process. This finding concurs with research into social accountability which suggests that strategies which take explicit account of power relationships and incentives by organising communities to address power imbalances are more likely to succeed than those which rely on better information alone¹³. Other AACES NGOs are also providing this link: for example, World Vision and MSI's use of Community Health Volunteers to link communities with health services and AOA training volunteer community health workers to link pastoralist communities with service providers in Kenya.
- *It is important to understand the incentives and decision making logic of public and private service providers.* Plan's MTR suggests that 'success is enhanced where community volunteers have a positive relationship with duty bearers'. Similarly Caritas' work has achieved success through 'collaborative relationships between civil society, community organisations and government agencies'. Again, some of the wider literature endorses this view suggesting efforts to stimulate citizen's voice should be met with equal effort to understand incentives and the decision-making logic of public servants¹⁴.
- *Look for strong political leadership.* World Vision's work with government services seem to confirm the perspective that where national political leadership motivates and disciplines the service providers (e.g. Rwanda) creating bottom-up pressures for better services can impact on the quality of services, notwithstanding the view that this kind of political leadership is arguably also closing down civil society space more broadly.¹⁵ However, in the absence of politically-driven policy coherence, bottom up pressure is difficult and can be met with bottlenecks in public service (such as shortage of staff and medicines).
- *Create energy for change by building on strengths.* Caritas' program has focused on each of the three areas of the theoretical triangle. However, instead of emphasising the community looking out to service providers, the strengths based approach focuses

¹³ Social Accountability: What does the Evidence really Say? Jonathan Fox, School of International Service, American University. March 3, 2014.

¹⁴ Marta Foresti, 'What have we learnt on getting services to poor people', Duncan Green. From Poverty to Power blog.

¹⁵ APPP p.3

energy inwards at first establishing the strengths of what community groups can do for themselves. Community groups articulate their own vision and strengthen their capacity to achieve it and then look at how they can engage with outside actors – whether local service providers, NGOs or the private sector. The MTR states “the strong sense of ownership and ability to find solutions by better mobilising their own resources is a clear indication of good sustainability.”

These inferences are tentative and in no way imply a one-size-fits-all approach – in fact they demand local and contextualised responses. It is clear that there is exciting work going on in the AACES program that needs to be explored in more depth, particularly to look at how the NGO partnerships are varying their strategies in practice and reacting to the different political contexts in which they work. It is not yet clear enough how the partnerships are engaging with political context and looking outside the ‘project box’ for innovative, hybrid solutions to sustainability in different socio-political contexts, or linking with other organisations pioneering different forms of social accountability. This is particularly the case given that in East Africa some of the most innovative work in this area seems to be being done through initiatives such as Twaweza¹⁶ and Shujaa¹⁷. In the remainder of the program life, it will be important to investigate what works where and why, and to look at which strategies are managing to “trigger virtuous circles which embolden citizens to exercise voice and strategies which can trigger and empower reforms which, in turn, encourage more voice”¹⁸.

It is also implied in the MTRs that enhanced capacity for African NGOs, both the primary partners and the other (mainly smaller) organisations they support, is part of the sustainability strategy. Given that these organisations will be active for a long time to come, this is quite legitimate. Part of making sustainability strategies more explicit and more capable of being tracked is being clear about end of program objectives for capacity in partner organisations and how this might be built on through future partnerships.

5. Improving policy and programs

Objective 2 (AusAID policies and programs in Africa are strengthened particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalised people) was intended to formalise a process of information sharing between AusAID and the NGOs, and between the NGOs themselves, that would inform Australian aid policy in Africa. The underlying assumption was that “NGOs have particular expertise in targeting and working with marginalised people which they are able to communicate to [managers of the wider development program].”¹⁹ It was accepted that this was a new form of

AACES Objective 2 in numbers:

From 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2013:

- NGOs spent \$1.240 million
- This is 3.3% of total spend to date
- Budget is up to 5% of total spend.
- The proportion of budget spent in years 1 and 2 varies considerably between partners – from 19% to 90%.

¹⁶ www.twaweza.org

¹⁷ www.wts.co.ke

¹⁸ Social Accountability: What does the Evidence really Say? Jonathan Fox, School of International Service, American University. March 3, 2014.

¹⁹ Program Design Document, p18

collaboration between the parties and would need to be worked out in practice.

Learning, collaboration and the exploitation of synergies across AACES partners are basic principles of the design. It is implicit that they will guide the implementation of all activities, and the way that they have been successfully implemented in practice is covered in section 7 (Partnerships) below. The specific aim of objective 2 in the design was to explore ways of spreading that learning and collaboration to other Australian aid funded programs and exploring mutual advantage from linking AACES activities to the wider Australian aid presence in Africa.²⁰

Evidence from documents and interviews shows that the implementation of the objective in practice has run in two inter-related directions, one working on links between AACES partners and experience and wider Australian aid activities, and one treating learning and collaboration within AACES as legitimate ways of contributing to objective 2. On the one hand the majority of the information contained in the latest snapshot reports relates to contributions to learning and collaboration (and some participation in routine events) within AACES, suggesting that these are now widely accepted as a way of pursuing the objective. This is confirmed by DFAT activity managers, and also by discussion at the feedback workshop in Kampala. On the other hand, the activity log maintained by DFAT to monitor objective 2, the study commissioned by AusAID in May 2013²¹ on the workings of the objective, the NGO MTRs and all discussions during the review with ANGOs were assessments of or reflections on progress against the original design focus of the objective.

In the activity log activities tracked fall broadly into three categories: instances of AACES having influenced the design of other Australian-funded NGO programs, for which the evidence is in the models adopted by the other programs; instances of DFAT having invited NGO inputs into policies or new designs; and use of AACES partners as a ready-made consultation group for discussions in Nairobi with visiting officials (separate conversations also recorded the use of the same group for consultations on emergency food responses in northern Kenya). However, the log does not offer evidence that any of the outcomes expected from objective 2 as designed (processes for information exchange, action and improvement in Australian policies or programs) are being achieved.

The May 2013 objective 2 review focused on getting a common definition of objective 2. It suggested that learning and collaboration within AACES was squarely within the range of objective 2, but as part of an overall process of policy dialogue which had not been sufficiently clarified to set out expectations for all partners. It concluded that there was a need to settle ownership of the objective and to establish practical outcomes and processes for achieving the objective.

The evidence from the NGO MTRs and interviews with ANGOs and DFAT with regard to the original design objective is that:

²⁰ There are also references to information exchange between NGOs, but they do not undermine the direction of the objective.

²¹ N Solomon, AACES review of Objective 2, Report May 2013

- ANGOs remain interested in the opportunity for policy exchange with DFAT.
- AACES has been influential in shaping other Australian funded NGO mechanisms.
- NGOs responded to calls from AusAID to comment on designs and policies. However, there was little feedback or other means to measure whether the inputs had been useful.²² The one MTR which attempted to draw links between NGO inputs and final policies concluded that it was impossible to do so.
- Some NGOs with recognised technical capacity (for example MSIA, Water Aid) were invited to contribute to sector discussions. However, these contributions have been based on their expertise rather than on the learning they have generated within their AACES activities.
- Dialogue over water and sanitation appears to have been the most successful, with the lead DFAT advisers in Pretoria creating openings for NGO contributions and a major study by Oxfam in consultation with Water Aid and other AACES partners on Community Led Total Sanitation leading to structured discussion.
- Two NGOs (CARE and AOA) are concentrating their effort under this objective on research whose results are likely to be available towards the end of the AACES program period.
- NGOs which have been able to make use of entry points into policy processes are those with existing professional links and sector networks, in other words, those who might have been expected to make their policy contributions without objective 2.

To the extent that objective 2 in its original form is still regarded by AACES partners as part of what they are accountable for (and the sources above confirm that it is to a large extent), it remains a source of frustration. Most AACES partners, including DFAT, have found promoting and accounting for objective 2 time-consuming, and some are still unclear about what they are meant to do differently to pursue it. Its existence may have encouraged DFAT to value NGO technical expertise. But (even accepting that implementation was expected to take off later in the program period) it has not so far helped to set up recognised processes by which information on agreed topics and in useable forms can be provided to the Australian aid program. It has not been clear whether the NGO knowledge that is valued in DFAT is technical, or arising from experience of working with African communities generally, or arising from the specific learning of AACES; in practice those NGOs which have been most active in pursuing the objective were not concerned about the distinction and pursued opportunities for dialogue as they arose. The practice of agreeing priority areas annually for focus within the objective has not visibly concentrated efforts. The DFAT staff who manage AACES are committed to making it work, but they cannot deliver the interest of the whole agency which would be necessary to create the effective dialogue originally intended. With a shrinking program and restricted sector focus, the motivation for comprehensive mutual lesson learning has in any case significantly reduced.

On the other hand, the shift in interpretation to accepting that pursuit of learning and exchange within AACES is also part of objective 2 has provided a way out of the frustration for some partners. The results now being reported under objective 2 are related to AACES core values and operations. The revised interpretation has not been documented in PSC

²² The Oxfam MTR records Oxfam's inputs to the Africa Mining and Communities proposal, and the subsequent discovery that DFAT was disappointed that NGOs did not take up the opportunity for engagement on the issue.

minutes or elsewhere, but it is a pragmatic response to the lack of progress over the original intent.

The marginal results from attempts to put the original objective into operation lead to the conclusion that partners should now divest themselves of the burden of trying to make it work, especially in a policy context which is less conducive to success. One simple option canvassed by the MTR team would be to remove objective 2 from the program and to reallocate the funds to core AACES activities, including the promotion of learning and exchange. A second option is to reword the objective to align it with current dominant practice; this option was advocated by AACES partners as necessary to underline and encourage the commitment of partners to plan and account for contributions to learning and continuous improvement. A recommendation along the lines of the second option is made at the end of this report.

Neither of these options should prevent:

- DFAT from positioning itself to learn from the program, and to shape the research and learning agenda to extract what it needs for its new portfolio of programs in Africa; or
- those NGOs with the technical expertise and capacity to do so to continue their dialogue with DFAT on policy and operations in their areas of expertise.

6. Informing the Australian public

During the review period DFAT announced that funds for development awareness raising (DAR), which is the basis of objective 3, would no longer be available from the aid program with effect from the 2014/15 financial year. This decision was consistent with the MTR findings in respect of objective 3, although the value of much of the work carried out to date was recognised.

The intention of objective 3 (Australian public are more informed about development issues in Africa) was to better inform the Australian public about development issues and challenges in Africa and the way in which Australian aid was seeking to respond to these challenges. As with the rest of the program, it was conceived at a time of expansion in Australian aid to Africa. It was expected to draw on NGO expertise in communication with supporters and potential supporters.

There is a high degree of enthusiasm for the objective. In the review survey Australian and African partners thought it was important for DFAT to support the education of the Australian public (and African partners rated the objective more highly despite being less involved).

The activities reported are generally an efficient use of

AACES Objective 3 in numbers:

From 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2013:

- NGOs spent \$796,700
- This is 2.1% of spend to date overall
- Budget is up to 3% of total spend
- Reach is estimated at over 2 million people.

funds; the costs are relatively low and the numbers reached are high. There are good examples of innovation and collaboration under this objective, including:

- Caritas has used its links with Catholic educational institutions in Western Australia to feed experience from its AACES programs into tertiary development studies and schools curricula
- MSI and Care have joined together to promote awareness of the problems faced by women in Africa through social media, aimed at young women not normally exposed to information about development
- AOA, working with Australian Volunteers International, runs a blog with high quality pictures and has encouraged staff of its African partners to write about their work
- Action Aid and AFAP collaborated on promoting links between Australian and African women farmers through exchange visits and a photographic exhibition.

Although NGOs do have sophisticated communications capacity, it has not always been possible to harness it for objective 3 activities. Under the ANCP Development Awareness Raising (DAR) guidelines which regulate the expenditure, the communication with the public cannot be used for fundraising or advocacy. These are the core interests of NGO communications teams and the first call on resources. For the 7 ANGOS which have had significant objective 3 activity to date (defined as spending over \$50,000) the contributory factors have been one or more of:

- existing channels to reach target audiences (such as the Catholic education system)
- in house communications capacity willing to give time to what for them is non-core business
- contracting with a specialist partner NGO
- collaboration with another AACES NGO.

Among the quoted benefits of objective 3 activities, depending on how NGOs have chosen to spend the money, are the opportunity to understand another AACES partner in depth; having the space to experiment with different forms of communication, with potentially more sophisticated messaging; engagement with constituencies who would not normally have been targeted in fundraising and campaigning activities; creating links between Australian and African communications professionals; and influence on an agency's overall communications policies.

Initiatives under objective 3 have been carefully targeted in line with the expected outcome of reaching a wider audience or deepening understanding among target groups. They have been monitored and are able to show evidence of increased or deepened reach. The limited outcomes expected for this objective, which specified creating opportunities for the Australian public to be better informed and increased reach for information about African development issues, are being met. Because most communications activity by the ANGOS is centred on fundraising and advocacy, objective 3 activities are in the main genuinely additional to what would have been done without AACES.

There have, however, been challenges in the implementation of the objective which have been well-aired in discussions with DFAT. All emerged from every interview with ANGOS:

- The fact that objective 3 enabled ANGOs to do something different from their normal communications efforts was an advantage. But it also meant that they had to put a lot of creative effort into the design of activities, even if they were fortunate enough to obtain time from in-house staff.
- The guidelines which prohibited fundraising and advocacy themes meant that the public had no guidance on what they are meant to do with any new knowledge. They were “left hanging” (although an unknown number may find their way into supporter networks). Targeting students who are already in learning environments to some extent helped with this problem, but it remained with other groups.
- ANGOs had some intuitive measure of the value of awareness raising, but their normal means of valuing communications activities was the actions taken by those who receive the communication and was not applicable to awareness raising whose impact is largely unmeasurable.
- Although ANGOs were full of praise for the efficient and helpful way DFAT had dealt with the approvals process, the use of objective 3 money was tightly controlled. The interpretation of the guidelines and DFAT’s branding requirements were also time consuming for ANGO and DFAT staff (before the integration into DFAT one AusAID officer spent 25% of her time on objective 3).

Expecting immediate defined value from any given public awareness initiative may be unfair. Success is more likely to come from a portfolio of initiatives trying different things at different times, accepting that some may sink but one may make it. And a single initiative may take a long time to bear fruit. However, in the short term objective 3 activities are of less value to the main target group of AACES (marginalised people in Africa). When the whole Africa program is under pressure, it is difficult to justify spending money other than directly on project activities, and the wider decision no longer to provide funds for DAR will not harm the overall effectiveness of AACES.

The Caritas experience illustrates one feature of the implementation of this objective which is worth preserving and mainstreaming into the implementation of objective 1 (see box).

Communications and the strengths based approach

Caritas has adapted the strengths based approach to the production of training videos based on program activities. The emphasis in the material is on program participants demonstrating how they do things, not on what has been done for them. This approach has been shared with communications staff of Caritas’ African partners. It offers a way of transmitting authentic community voices direct to an Australian audience. Preparing communications products has the potential for becoming a capacity building theme in its own right for African partners, and for recognising the dignity and resourcefulness of communities.

There is already some capacity building of African NGOs in respect of communications (for example, media training provided by the Resource Facility and AOA’s encouragement of its African partners to contribute to the project blog). Expanding these efforts and linking African NGOs with others who are pioneering the use of social media for development in

Africa, could lead to more effective communications efforts and potentially to a source of Africa-generated communications materials for an international audience.

Treating communications within AACES as an in-Africa issue would reintegrate it with AACES partners' core communications business and do away with the need for the extensive administrative machinery which has in the past been necessary to ensure that objective 3 activities meet DFAT guidelines.

7. Partnerships, learning and the AACES architecture

For the purposes of this review, the way that AACES is working as a partnership has been considered in three parts: the intangible application of partnership principles; the working of the partnership support systems (the PSC and Resource Facility); and learning, collaboration and exchange processes and outcomes.

The review survey asked a number of questions about how partners rated the partnership principles and their observance. The number of respondents was small and the results are not definitive. However, the results for Australian respondents do correlate with the results of interviews. The principles of mutual respect and trust were highly rated for importance; they have been the basis for the design from the beginning and are well entrenched in the AACES concept.²³ Learning was rated lower for importance, despite appreciative references elsewhere to activities, particularly exchange visits, which may be thought to constitute learning. Consistent with the May 2013 partnership survey, generally all partners agree that the principles are well or very well practised, and those which are rated most highly for importance were also rated as being better practised. The finding that the partnership is well established on a basis of mutual respect and trust is backed by examples from the survey of what has helped AACES to work – promotion of cooperation, not competition, building relationships and trust, and a sense that DFAT wants to make the approach work. ANGOs invariably said in interviews that they valued the flexibility of AACES, by which they largely meant that they valued being entrusted with a five year rolling program and trusted to adjust their programs, informing but not being controlled by DFAT. African partners rated the practice of all principles higher than the Australian partners. Asked about a range of partnership behaviours around information sharing, respect, communications, and skills and networks development, African partners also mostly rated the importance and practice of these highly, and higher than Australian partners. Australian partners were less likely to agree that there was less bureaucracy involved in AACES than in similar funding programs or that AACES partners share good and bad news and discuss difficult issues. This is confirmed by interview responses suggesting that participation in AACES is seen as having high costs (but mostly high returns), and agreement with the review team's proposition that partners had yet to progress to asking each other difficult questions about progress.

A set of survey questions about the role of DFAT confirmed that its role as funder and partner had been well balanced, that it had communicated changes in policy and that it had been flexible and responsive. This is confirmed by consistent praise from ANGOs for the

²³ Of the AACES partnership principles, these and learning may be the easiest to conceptualise. Investigations into partnership in AACES have been hampered to date by the lack of definition about what constitutes good and bad behaviour against the partnership principles.

interest and responsiveness of DFAT staff directly managing AACES, and staff at African posts. Issues of concern were the turnover of DFAT staff (although in practice the commitment to the principles of AACES has been remarkably constant through changes in staffing) and value for money, where Australian partners were less likely than African partners to agree with the proposition that the DFAT approach to the issue has been helpful. This is discussed further in the section on value for money.

Program Steering Committee

The PSC has met every six months since December 2011. Meetings are timed where possible to coincide with reflection and thematic workshops to avoid additional expense, but at a day and a half they are time intensive. The PSC was intended as the guarantee that AusAID would not dominate the management of AACES, a move confirmed when it vacated the chair in 2012 in favour of a rotating chairmanship by NGOs. Since then the management of AACES business and supervision of the Resource Facility has been helped by monthly telephone meetings between the PSC chair, DFAT and the RF.

The terms of reference for the PSC cover a range of management and administrative functions. In practice analysis of the minutes shows that it has concentrated on

- Clarifying and negotiating DFAT requirements, eg on reporting and this MTR
- Clarifying areas of uncertainty, particularly value for money and objective 2
- Commissioning outputs from the RF, including the AACES annual report
- Monitoring partnerships
- Exchange of information

The second point in the PSC's terms of reference requires it to review program level monitoring information and make recommendations to improve program performance and outcomes. It has done so to some extent by considering the review of objective 2 and the two partnership surveys, but it does not yet monitor the whole program in the sense of testing emerging results against objectives and a theory of change. There are a number of reasons for this: it has required time and effort to shape the activities of AACES in ways that are appropriate to the partnership vision; there has been a need for a process of negotiation with and understanding of DFAT; and there has not been a body of information on progress that would allow it to analyse overall program effectiveness. It was argued by NGOs during the review that it would not have been possible before now to ask hard questions about progress in the PSC, but that there was now a sufficient level of trust among members to begin to do so; and alternatively, that the PSC had grown appropriately into forum for managing AACES business, and that strategic questions should be tackled in reflection workshops. Both may be true, but it remains the case that the PSC will need to develop a greater leadership role in ensuring that AACES rises to the potential of the design.

African partners have attended PSC meetings as observers, and procedures have been changed to allow them to contribute. All ANGOs recognised that African partners should take over their partnership's representation in the PSC over time, as intended in the design. Some ANGOs have made meaningful efforts to encourage a higher profile by African partners in AACES events, and in some cases to front the partnership at the PSC. But the

incentive for African partners to participate more actively will depend on the strategic (as opposed to administrative) content of discussions.

Resource Facility

The Resource Facility is provided under contract by the Africa Capacity Building Foundation. It consists of a manager, a communications officer and an administrative assistant. Its main functions are the coordination of the AACES annual report and other internal and external communications products, managing and promoting the Yammer communications platform and providing a logistics and secretariat service for AACES meetings. It has also carried out partnership surveys under the direction of the PSC. A separate review of the Resource Facility was carried out in October 2013 (see Annex 4). It concluded that the Resource Facility was a necessary part of the AACES design, providing dedicated resources to underpin the proposed partnerships. The option of contracting out the functions of the RF was calculated to be modestly more expensive than keeping the functions in AusAID, but to have been justified by its independence from AusAID and the consequent reinforcement of joint ownership by all partners.

The AACES design specified that the RF should be located in a development organisation in Africa to ensure it was well connected with key issues and development networks and understood how to work effectively across different African contexts. There was therefore an implicit trade-off in the procurement process between the lack of service provision experience and the advantage of African knowledge and networks. However, the expectation of the role of the RF in driving monitoring and learning was progressively lowered during procurement and contracting, and even then ACBF has not lived up to the intentions of the design or the potential it displayed in the tender process. Some of this was due to lack of initiative by ACBF and the slower than expected learning process around key services; some of it was due to a lack of clarity on the part of AusAID as to what it wanted, and lack of time to work this out with ACBF. AusAID had to invest heavily and not very efficiently in getting basic services right. The result is that the RF now provides a responsive secretariat service which meets partners' priority expectations in respect of keeping AACES mechanisms running, and is moving to provide added value in training and networking, particularly for African NGOs. But partners do not expect it in the remainder of the program period to have the resources for large scale introduction of new ideas from the African development environment or to catalyse learning on AACES progress against the principles set out in the design (although of course it could help with the latter through its contribution to learning events).

Budgets for the RF have been progressively lowered as expectations of what it could deliver were lowered. The most recent reduction to \$2.01 million continues this process. The review concluded that ACBF should be retained as providers of the RF for the remainder of the AACES period, particularly in view of the investment already made in capacity to provide basic services.

Learning, collaboration and exchange

AACES has developed a number of processes for pooling information, generating learning and contributing to a sense of collective endeavour. These are interchangeably labelled learning, exchange and collaboration. But all have to varying degrees the basic function of visibly expressing the partnership principles; cementing relationships within which

knowledge transfer can take place; transferring knowledge and experience which leads to changes in practice; and building up a picture of what AACES in its diverse forms is achieving. The processes are:

- *Reflection and thematic workshops:* Annual reflection workshops are an opportunity to consider issues arising in the course of AACES operations during the year. Thematic workshops focus on issues identified by the PSC as fundamental ones where all partners can benefit from spreading better practice. Because they are the one opportunity for all AACES partners to meet, they have helped to foster a common identity and have formed the basis for subsequent individual contact (including among ANGOs, whose opportunities for contact are limited in the normal course of operations). The disability workshop in 2012 is cited by many partners as an event that caused them actively to identify opportunities for working with people with disabilities. However, the costs of these events are high, further exacerbated by security considerations, and representation limited (usually representatives of the ANGO and of each of their African partners). They are written up, but as a record rather than in a format which would enable non-participants to share in the learning.
- *Field visits.* NGOs host field visits for partners in the margins of AACES meetings, and other visits have been arranged based on contacts made at the meetings. These provide an opportunity for practical learning and comparisons, including by the host organisations.
- *Joint planning and reflection events within NGO families.* Water Aid, Action Aid and Oxfam report that AACES processes have brought about contact between members of their federations that would not normally have happened, either because they are normally preoccupied with their own programs or because the federation structures favour other external relationships.
- *Joint implementation.* Apart from joint applications under the Innovations Fund, there have been opportunities within AACES for joint implementation of objective 3 activities, preparing joint positions for policy discussion with DFAT and developing common agendas in countries of operation (for example, engagement by AACES agencies with the Government of Malawi over WASH budgets).
- *In-country coordination.* The AACES group in Malawi is regularly cited as having strong, active identity and to be influential in spreading good practice between members. The AACES groups in Tanzania and Kenya have also been active around specific issues.
- *Within NGO partnerships.* In the partnership between Australian and African NGOs, the ANGO role is partly to provide fiduciary assurance to DFAT and to contribute to public diplomacy. They recognise that a significant part of their contribution to the NGO partnerships is interpreting the funder's requirements and exercising quality control on reporting. However, ANGOs also pursue a capacity building role. The contributions most frequently cited by ANGOs in interviews were: challenging African partners to raise the bar in design ambition; providing technical support and mentoring for monitoring and evaluation; and support for communications and advocacy.
- *Yammer.* The RF output most consistently identified in the RF review as a contribution to partnership and learning was the introduction of the Yammer platform. This has been energetically promoted by the RF and had 117 members across AACES in October

2013, with active thematic and country groups. Usage data shows a steady increase over time. The review survey showed that most respondents (and African respondents more than Australian) agreed with the proposition that there was a wide range of resources and information on Yammer. However, it should be borne in mind that most staff of AACES partners have access to other sources of information, such as corporate knowledge sharing services, which are more directly relevant to them, and it has not been established that Yammer provides a unique source of information other than project documents.

- *The AACES annual report.* This summary of results from the ten AACES annual reports is a collaborative effort between the RF, DFAT and a working group of the PSC. It is the major communications product from AACES and an opportunity to tell a consolidated story about progress. ANGOs and DFAT reported during the RF review that the report presented the rationale, structure and results of AACES in an engaging way, and was useful in communicating AACES to the Australian government and within Africa. They also felt that the report helped AACES participants to understand that they were part of something bigger than their own program. However, its length, format and intended audience mean that it concentrates very firmly on direct benefits to people and does not, in in process or product, catalyse analysis in AACES about achievements against the design objectives.

The Innovations Fund has also been a platform for collaboration and potentially for learning. It is intended to “encourage the trialling of new models and approaches, which could have catalytic effects beyond AACES”.²⁴ To date two applications have been successful, both located in Kenya: one from World Vision and Action Aid to work with marginalised youth to identify and address the barriers to accessing livelihoods and services. The other is from MSI and Plan to integrate a livelihoods strengthening approach with access to sexual and reproductive health for young mothers. In each case the innovation has been to identify target groups who suffer multiple disadvantages in marginalised communities and to work with them to develop their own strengths. The implementation period is short enough to give an intensive period of learning about how the target groups think and respond to external facilitation. The application round for 2013 was suspended owing to lack of funds. A wider range of experience with the fund would be required to establish whether it was an effective tool for influencing program planning in AACES.

The review survey indicates that nearly all Australian partners (90%) and three quarters of African partners had collaborated often or occasionally with another AACES organisation in a way they did not plan in their original design; that 80% of Australian partners and 70% of African partners had shared resources with another AACES organisation in a way they did not plan in their design; and that around half of both groups had changed something often or occasionally as a result of what they had learned.

The disability workshop held early in the life of AACES has been mentioned as an important learning experience. Other examples of cross-AACES learning cited in interviews (such as taking disability inclusive latrine designs from Water Aid, developing strengths based approaches, adopting World Vision’s Community Health Worker assessment system, consultation on how to implement CLTS, how to work with religious leaders, using Water

²⁴ Innovations Fund Guidelines

Aid's advocacy scrapbook, using CARE's community scorecard) have mainly arisen from bilateral contacts. The conclusion from the examples is that a good deal of conscious learning (ie what is recognised as learning) is about technical solutions and activity management techniques (particularly monitoring and evaluation); and that the weight of learning has shifted away from the formal AACES structures to the relationships that have grown up as a result of them, particularly relationships between organisations working in the same sector and in the same country. Learning is also described beyond AACES into other activities supported by AACES partners and into networks of which they are part. This pattern of learning has implications for the program of reflection and themed workshops planned for the rest of AACES. The resources allocated to them may be better directed into more localised or sector specific events.

Mapping learning, collaboration and exchange in this way underlines the fact that while a great deal of learning is going on, no part of the system at present focuses on the key question for AACES formulated above, namely: "What are we learning about how civil society intervenes with marginalised communities and service providers to broker sustainable solutions?" This does not mean that understanding and practice on support for marginalised people are not being developed in fundamental ways through participation in AACES, simply that, if they are, this is not being captured. Although aspects of the overall program are being monitored, the whole is not. Despite the intentions of the design, the AACES governance and support structures are not equipped to do this, and it seems unlikely that DFAT, with reduced resources, could devote time and expertise to the task.

One option would be to allow the program to run its course and to capture learning by way of a final evaluation. However, this would be difficult if evidence of effective approaches is not being gathered now. The second option is to recognise the investment that has been made in a learning and collaborative structure to date and to maximise the return from it by strengthening the distillation of learning. For the remainder of the AACES program period, partners should consider bringing in an additional resource with a set of tasks along the lines of the following, working closely with AACES partners:

- Document further the approaches being taken by AACES activities
- Define audiences for learning from AACES
- Propose action research on topics of interest to potential audiences
- Plan a series of knowledge products based on current M&E and action research, including policy notes, "how-to" notes and published articles
- Identify synergies between current AACES objectives and the work of wider civil society in Africa
- Share in a clearly defined way responsibilities with the RF for organising AACES learning events

This resource should be based in Africa with access to academic and civil society networks. It might be found in one organisation, but may also be a network of organisations or individuals with links to development policy research and NGO activity. The key complementarity with current skills in AACES would be cross-program analysis drawing on knowledge what is working elsewhere in Africa in terms of civil society developing a distinctive role and influence.

8. Value for money

The AACES design document envisages consideration value for money (VfM) as part of the program's monitoring and evaluation systems²⁵. At that stage, AusAID was reported as exploring the option of establishing a value for money assessment of AACES with a baseline established at the start of the program and periodic assessment throughout the program that would include both the NGO projects and the partnership approach²⁶.

The AACES approach to VfM was further discussed after the formal start of the program and the AACES Value for Money Framework was agreed in May 2013. VfM was seen as one process to assess the merit or worth of the program and also to help guide improvements during implementation²⁷. It was also seen as a useful learning exercise to enable AusAID to review its approach to assessing the value of its work with civil society and to explore questions of equity and marginalisation within a VfM assessment²⁸.

The Framework was guided by the core principles of balancing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in ways that are both equitable and ethical. It is not prescriptive about methodology or approach and recognises that in line with the innovative and experimental nature of AACES, multiple assessment tools will be tested and used to capture tangible and intangible results as well as direct and indirect costs and benefits.

Objective 1

The flexible approach to VfM in AACES allows the NGOs scope for experimentation. Some interesting methods are being developed. Some NGOs have developed a VfM framework that reflects their individual program approach and organisation (for example, AOA, Caritas, MSI and Oxfam, although not all the frameworks have been fully implemented yet). There are also examples of a number of different VfM tools being trialled. There are examples of more quantitative approaches (such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) used by World Vision and AFAP and MSI's use of cost per Disability Adjusted Life Years) and more qualitative approaches which look at relative (as opposed to absolute) value and cost such as the Basic Efficiency Resource, used by Oxfam and AOA, and Plan's use of the Most Significant Change (MSC) evaluation technique. However, some agencies just used simple financial ratios such as the cost per beneficiary, spend against budget or overhead rates; this limited approach was disappointing given the broad understanding of VfM in AACES. This diversity of approach provides a good base from which to build understanding and experience of assessing VfM. Taken together, these different approaches should allow AACES to explore VfM across the full range of program domains, including measures of financial return on investment where appropriate, as well as the assessment of the value of more intangible outcomes in securing sustainable change in marginalised communities.

²⁵ AACES Program Design Document p. 5

²⁶ Ibid p.36

²⁷ AACES Value for Money Framework

²⁸ Ibid

All the NGO MTRs attempted to **demonstrate** value for money, providing evidence of the value of outcomes and processes²⁹. Some NGOs were also able to relate clear cost information to their assessments of value; for instance AFAP, World Vision and Care used SROI which expresses both value and resources invested in monetary terms, and Oxfam and AOA's case studies included both a judgement on the value of outcomes and information on resources used and leveraged from others to support plausible VfM claims. The inclusion of cost information in all NGOs' VfM assessments would have enabled a better overall picture of value for money in the program to be drawn.

Some reports gave detailed information about the value of support (in financial, time or other terms) leveraged from other bodies such as community inputs, local government or others, and this provided evidence of good VfM. For instance, AOA estimated the total cost of the work at the Naibor Group Ranch in Kenya as \$15,600, of which 75% was in-kind contributions from the community. Most reports identified leveraged support, but, without details of the level of this support, its contribution to VfM is harder to assess.

There was evidence in most reports that VfM was addressed as part of program **management**, for instance through purchasing and budget management, decisions about which projects to fund and so on. However, this information was often dispersed through the report and not clearly linked to the VfM analysis; for instance, Action Aid referred to market testing of purchases in Uganda and CARE reported asking local carpenters to build bee-hives rather than purchasing more expensive imported hives, both of which would be good evidence of attention to economy, but which were not included as VfM evidence.

Where reports **compared** their results with suitable comparators such as sector benchmarks, similar local programs or within their own program, this provided evidence of good VfM. For instance AOA used a standard cost for a pit latrine to illustrate the VfM of a program where community labour dug those latrines and MSI compared the cost per disability adjusted life year (DALY) averted as a result of their AACES activities against the cost per DALY of other health interventions. Most reports did not attempt this sort of comparison, even where comparators might be available, such as in the WASH sector (recognising such comparisons would need to be interpreted carefully in the light of the program's context.)

The reports recognised the value of the equity of outcomes as an important element of VfM, for instance by highlighting the outcomes that benefitted people with disabilities or the most marginalised. There are also some interesting attempts to incorporate community views into the VfM assessments; for instance Action Aid's Participatory Review and Reflection Processes, Plan's use of MSC, and CARE's community scorecards. Importantly, these processes are designed not only to strengthen the VfM processes for the AACES program, but also to equip communities to hold others to account³⁰; that is, they are

²⁹ This analysis is based on the BOND VfM framework, which identifies 3 types of approaches to VfM (demonstrating, managing and comparing for VfM) see

http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Value_for_money_-_what_it_means_for_NGOs_Jan_2012.pdf

³⁰ For more information see for example

http://betterevaluation.org/resources/guides/community_scorecard_process or

<http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7533.pdf>

empowering communities and in addition contributing to Objective 1 in themselves. This is a strength of AACES and should be helpful in building understanding and experience of how to include divergent and multiple views in VfM assessments – with a particular emphasis on community voices.

Where there was evidence on both value and the costs of achieving it (for example in the case studies from Oxfam and AOA, MSI's cost per DALY achieved, and the SROI studies), there was evidence of good value for money being achieved. All NGOs provided some evidence of value in their program, but the lack of other information in many cases, particularly on the cost side, means that it is difficult to reach a robust conclusion about the overall value for money of NGO programs in many cases. There is a case for NGOs to prioritise the development and implementation of their VfM approach, and seek to better link costs to outcomes.

When asked about the process of developing the VfM approach in AACES, there was a significant difference between the African and Australian partners: the African partners overall strongly agreed that DFAT's approach had been helpful in improving their practice, whereas the Australian partners disagreed overall with the statement. The reason for the difference is not clear; one possible explanation is that the African partners found it more helpful because they may have had less information and involvement in the issues at the start compared to the Australian partners, and/or prior knowledge by the Australian partners may have meant they were more wary about the risks of simplistic approaches to VfM and how this analysis may be used for future funding decisions.

An assessment of the value for money of the AACES program requires more than an aggregation of the value for money of individual activities; nevertheless, it will be important by the end of the AACES period that all NGO partnerships have further developed their VfM methodologies, taking account of all the elements that might demonstrate managing for value and making more effort to relate costs to outcomes. A full set of defensible VfM assessments will go a long way to demonstrating value for money. The treatment of this issue in some MTRs suggests that some AACES partners have some way to go before they embrace the demonstration of value for money as a core part of their responsibilities.

Program Level

The value attributed by partners to the partnership approach, and an assessment of the value of activities under objectives 2 and 3, are covered in sections 7, 5 and 6 respectively.

The review team attempted to compare the additional financial costs of the AACES partnership mode with the costs of other roughly analogous programs. There is no common classification among DFAT funded NGO programs for management and other overheads, so direct comparisons are not possible. The only firm figure available for the additional cost of AACES is the program support element of the NGO grants — an additional 5%, on top of the normal 10% “administrative costs” associated with other DFAT NGO programs, which acknowledges the resources required to participate in AACES such as attending PSCs, Reflection Meetings and so on — plus the cost of the RF. As at December 2013 the sum of these two elements amounted to \$3.5 million, or just under 10% of program expenditure. This suggests that AACES is at least 10% more expensive than a traditional NGO grants

program such as ANCP which does not have the same support structures as AACES; but as noted above, this calculation does not include a good deal of time invested in design and implementation by NGO and DFAT staff (with the NGO costs being divided among different AACES budget lines).

The review survey showed that overall 64% of partners felt that the benefits of the partnership outweighed or equalled the costs (broadly defined), 22% did not know or thought it was too early to tell and 14% felt that the costs outweighed the benefits. This suggests a need for more transparent discussion among partners of how costs could be lowered or benefits increased. This report primarily suggests ways in which the benefits could be increased in line with the original design, to justify further the additional costs of the AACES model and the early investments made in design quality and encouraging relationships. This assumes a continuing commitment by all partners to the original collaborative concept. The option of reducing costs by accepting a lower trend growth in information sharing and learning (i.e. relying on the relationships that have been made to date and scaling down the governance and support structures) is not recommended but should be clearly on the table as the counterfactual to the proposed changes.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation was a strong focus of the AACES design. NGOs were encouraged to use up to 10% of their budget for monitoring, evaluation and research activities, and all have done so, although budgets do not in general show how this expenditure is related to monitoring and evaluation outcomes.

Early in the life of AACES there was significant investment in improving monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including through a process of peer review by NGO partnerships of each other's systems. This process was frequently cited in interviews as a useful learning process and one which had contributed to capacity building of African partners, although the counter-argument was also made that the process had been complex and cumbersome and had left partners implementing programs with unusable monitoring frameworks, a view borne out by some of the findings from MTRs (see below).

Apart from giving clear guidance on expectations for NGO level monitoring and evaluation, the design proposed additional processes for capturing and reflecting on results. These included research to be commissioned by the PSC, and peer reviews of implementation.³¹ The annual report was intended to be the result of a process of reflection based on NGO annual reports but also an analysis of "trends, themes and interesting cases of note, and ... the contribution made overall towards the AACES objectives and outcome areas."³² The fact that these provisions have largely not been implemented³³ has contributed to the position described in section 7 in which, although there is much monitoring and reflection

³¹ According to the design, annual peer reviews would include at a minimum the annual review of NGOs' progress and proposed annual plans, and periodic review between NGOs based on shared sectoral or geographic focus.

³² Program design document, p 35.

³³ The Resource Facility did carry out two partnership surveys which were separately envisaged in the design document.

happening, AACES does not have an internal capacity to answer fundamental questions about its own success.

The adequacy of current AACES monitoring and evaluation systems has been tested by looking at the MTRs and the principal reporting products (NGO annual and snapshot reports and the AACES annual report).

The use of routine monitoring data in MTRs was variable, ranging from none at all to comprehensive. Where monitoring data was not used, the MTR relied on information gathered through the review processes alone, and so missed the opportunity to correlate findings with, or to supplement, monitoring data, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of monitoring in practice. In some other cases the monitoring data used was primarily at activity and output level, and in one MTR there was comprehensive outcome data but very little on processes, particularly those related to the building of community institutions. Good practice highlighted in the MTRs included

- Monitoring data being used by field staff as inputs to regular meetings to determine work programs
- Longitudinal studies being used for evaluative purposes (for example, a comprehensive baseline household study in project areas carried out for AOA)
- Involvement of communities in regular evaluation (for example, through Action Aid's Participatory Review and Reflection Process)
- The MTRs themselves being used to introduce new monitoring techniques (enhanced qualitative reporting for MSI and the use of ranking techniques for Plan)

However, MTRs also noted significant problems with monitoring, including poor capacity of African partners, over-complicated monitoring frameworks, poor record keeping, strongly output based monitoring sometimes poorly related to stated outcomes and limited involvement of communities in judgements about progress.

Analysis of the 2012-13 NGO annual reports suggests that there are broadly three categories of reporting:

- Those based on quantitative and qualitative monitoring information that is relevant to an underlying theory of change
- Reports based on relevant information and case study examples which may or may not be derived from routine project monitoring
- Reports which are strongly output based.

In most cases it is difficult to interpret the information so as to understand whether the assessment is that the project is where it expected to be at this time. The format, which obliges NGOs to say something about each of the outcome areas for objective 1, encourages a fragmentation of evidence of effectiveness. The same problem arose in the MTRs, where the review team noted that in some cases the same information was presented in two formats to report progress against the project objectives and the MTR evaluation questions (which reflect the program perspective). It is not clear whether in practice the annual report

format allows a systematic view for DFAT program managers of progress across objective 1, or whether the lessons learned amount to a set of new and useful insights for partners.

The Annual Report, as an external communications tool aimed at a wide non-specialist audience, does not attempt to capture the complexity of the annual reporting from NGOs. It concentrates, understandably, almost entirely on the direct benefits of program activities to households, communities and service providers. It does not, however, help AACES partners to make sense of the diverse evidence coming out of the programs.

Monitoring and evaluation in AACES is responding to a number of different imperatives. It must:

- provide the numbers and case studies for communications purposes
- feed operational decisions about where to concentrate resources
- help NGO partnerships explain for their own accountability purposes whether their theory of change is being borne out or needs adjustment
- promote accountability to communities
- provide a basis for tracking value for money.

Current monitoring and evaluation systems are doing the first consistently, because that is the function for which there is the strongest program-wide demand. Annual planning processes depend to a certain extent on the second. It is not clear from annual reporting how far current systems support regular evidence based reflection within the project, not only on how the activities are going but on whether the activities are still the right thing in the right place at the right time to reach the objective. However, there is sufficient evidence in the MTRs of monitoring and evaluation systems struggling to meet the demands above and with systems that are only partially operational or over-complex. The mid-term point is an appropriate one for partners to undertake a stocktake of whether the NGO level monitoring systems set up in the early period of AACES have been implemented and whether they are still fit for purpose and simple enough to operate. A greater degree of concentration on tracking theories of change may also lead the NGO partnerships to reflect on how they will better align their monitoring and evaluation systems to their underlying theories.

10. The MTR process

NGO partnerships were asked to prepare an evaluation plan for clearance by the MTR team leader. Most partners contracted an independent evaluator for their MTR. All reported that they were on the whole happy with the process and product for their MTRs. Nevertheless, as noted in section 2, the reports displayed a varied understanding of the rationale of AACES. In reporting on outcomes at household level of direct service provision or other NGO inputs, they were mostly systematic and compelling. Evidence of increased access to services was also well covered. However, when recording increased voice for marginalised people and changes in the capacity and motivation of service providers, it was not always clear how this related to an expectation of how power relationships could be sustainably changed.

Inevitably, it was difficult for an outsider to capture the complexity of thinking which has gone into the implementation of AACES activities. Those which came closest to explaining progress against a theory of change used insiders (the original activity designer or a consultant facilitating a reflection process with the implementation team). The in-depth visits revealed depths of understanding which did not appear in the reports.

There are strong arguments for maintaining the responsibility of each NGO for its own evaluation, based on the principle of equal accountability within AACES to all other partners. However, one lesson learned is that a consistent approach to evaluation plans does not guarantee consistency of product. It will be more important in the final evaluation to establish the effectiveness of AACES against the original intent, and it is not too soon to start planning for this now. It may be necessary to begin thinking about how enhanced learning and analysis will fit into the final evaluation, and how the process could lead both to greater consistency of approach and quality of output. It is important that the evaluation is able to draw on and be part of the enhanced process of strategic learning described earlier in this report; that procurement processes allow for the right choice of evaluator at the NGO level; and that sufficient time is built in for evaluators to understand the AACES design. Final evaluations at the NGO and program level may benefit from the more active involvement of program staff without undermining the evaluators' independence.

11. Conclusions and recommendations

AACES is supporting a diverse set of well-targeted interventions. There is good evidence that activities are making a difference at household and community level. All projects have elements of strengthening voice and mobilising communities to link to service providers, and of project engagement with service providers. The program remains highly relevant to Australia's interests in Africa, particularly if other elements of the program, and Australia's official presence in the continent, continue to reduce. It is still a strong source of potential learning for new directions in the Australian aid program in Africa, although the areas for convergence will need to be carefully defined.

Sustainability strategies are implicit in the approaches, and are probably better understood by project staff than appears in the MTRs. Activities have focused on establishing relationships and on early gains in the first three years, and there are plans to focus more strongly on sustainability in the last two. Nevertheless, sustainability emerges as a key issue to be addressed in the remainder of the period. This will involve greater attention to theories of change that link current activities to social and attitudinal changes, and to more explicit ideas about how civil society intervenes with marginalised communities and service providers to broker sustainable solutions to community needs, particularly where national capacity and motivation to provide services is weak.

Recommendation 1: That all NGO partnerships continue to examine how their theory of change remains relevant in their contexts and make it clear in annual plans and annual reports how they are working with communities and other civil society organisations and networks to navigate the realities of power and politics to broker sustainable solutions.

Despite attempts by DFAT and some NGOs to achieve program and policy influence on the Australian aid program beyond AACES, the design aim of objective 2, results have been minimal. The greatest evidence of AACES having influenced Australian policies is in the design of new NGO funding programs. There has been sharing of information and policy discussion, particularly in the WASH sector, but those agencies which have been most active have been those with recognised technical capacity who would not have needed the framework of objective 2 to engage with the Australian Government. It has been unclear to NGOs what inputs are valued and where the entry points for influence are. The pragmatic response has been to focus on support for learning and exchange within AACES. This is an equally valid use of funds, but there needs to be a formal recognition that the balance of effort under this objective has shifted significantly.

Recommendation 2: That objective 2 be reworded to read “AACES projects are strengthened through learning, collaboration and exchange between AACES partners”; and that DFAT prioritise and communicate its own requirements for learning from AACES in the emerging policy context.

The objective of informing the Australian public about development issues in Africa has been embraced by a number of agencies, and has given rise to NGO collaboration and a good deal of creative thought. It is in most cases different from what NGOs would normally have done, and is clearly additional. Monitoring shows that it has met its limited outcomes. However, it is difficult to value by the normal standards of NGO communication with the public; the restrictions on its use mean that there can be no follow through to action by the recipients of communication; and the same restrictions have given rise to a lot of administrative exchange. DFAT has now announced that there will be no further funding for development awareness raising from 2014/15; this decision will not significantly undermine the main aims of AACES. However, the experience so far within the program of communications capacity building of African partners and encouraging Africans to tell their own stories are worth preserving.

Recommendation 3: That objective 3 be removed in the light of the DFAT policy directive, but that NGO partnerships seek to integrate into existing capacity building activities the capacity of African partners and the communities with whom they work the ability to generate their own communications products and to tell their own stories.

Trust and mutual respect are well established in practice as partnership principles. Learning, collaboration and exchange are features of AACES at every level and felt to be valuable by all partners. After a stage in which large scale workshops were important in setting up the AACES identity and networks, learning is moving to country, sector and personal networks. There may be a need for fewer large scale gatherings and more encouragement of local exchange.

Learning has largely been on technical and operational issues. Although these are useful, current processes are not encouraging partners to examine more fundamental issues of whether the AACES model is generating useful evidence about how to work with African communities. The mechanisms set up in the design to make this happen have not developed as envisaged. If AACES is to deliver the full value envisaged at the outset and justify the

additional costs of its partnership structures, it needs to step up the distillation of learning. It is unlikely that this can be driven by any individual partner or governance structure, and will need to find room within its existing budget for an additional resource.

Recommendation 4: That AACES partners identify a resource, preferably in Africa, who can develop a learning strategy, facilitate exchange on strategic issues, help with learning products, and link AACES with other development practitioners in Africa.

AACES has devoted a lot of effort to developing a value for money framework that recognises the special dimensions of the work it is doing, and gives NGO partners scope to develop their own appropriate and defensible approaches. Some have done so, though not all used it for the MTR. Some MTRs show interesting practice which deserves further discussion between partners, particularly as regards establishing value. Overall more progress needs to be made towards analysis of value for money that includes all elements of management practice and links as far as possible and appropriate value to costs.

Recommendation 5: That all NGO partners further develop their approach on assessing value for money in the remainder of the AACES period and demonstrate that their monitoring and evaluation systems are set up to give the information required to make the assessment.

Monitoring and evaluation was a strong focus of the early months of AACES. There are layers of different requirements for monitoring data which it is not easy to satisfy with a single data set. There is some good monitoring and evaluation which shows up consistently in the main suite of reporting products and in the MTRs. But the standard is variable. The information most consistently collected is the quantitative information on immediate benefits to households and communities. Because of communications imperatives, this is carefully monitored. However, there are sufficient indications from the MTRs that monitoring systems are not working as well as intended for it to be timely for NGO partnerships to take stock of their monitoring and evaluation systems in the light of resources available and demands as they have developed.

Recommendation 6: That all NGO partnerships review their monitoring and evaluation systems to check their fitness for purpose by the end of 2014 and report findings and actions, if any, to the PSC.

The MTR structure rightly recognised the equality of each partner in allocating the responsibility for the NGO MTRs to individual NGOs. However, an opportunity for consistency in approach was missed, and information relevant to the basic functioning of AACES was harder to elicit from the NGO level reviews than it should have been. Lessons for the final evaluation include the benefit of allowing a long lead time for evaluators to become familiar with AACES; the need to be more creative in sharing approaches to NGO level evaluations to ensure consistency, and in tapping the expertise of project staff alongside independent evaluators.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference – AACES Mid-Term Review

1. Background

1.1 Overview of AACES

The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) is the largest AusAID program of funding for Australian Non-Government Organisations (ANGOs) in Africa. The program is being implemented over five years (2011-16) and has a budget of up to \$90 million.

The program focuses on the AusAID priority sectors in Africa: food security, water and sanitation, and maternal and child health. It targets marginalised communities in 11 countries - Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with particular attention to women, children, people with disability, and people vulnerable to disaster (refer to map and activity summary in Appendices 1 and 2).

AACES is implemented by ten ANGOs through approximately 39 in-Africa partners.

The overall intention of AACES is to enable Australian NGOs and their partners to contribute to the AusAID strategy for Africa, through a partnership program focused on community-based interventions across the sectors of water and sanitation, food security, and maternal and child health.

AACES has three objectives:

- Objective 1: Marginalised people have sustainable access to the services they require.
- Objective 2: AusAID policies and programs in Africa are strengthened, particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalised people.
- Objective 3: The Australian public are more informed about development issues in Africa.

Objective 1 comprises approximately 90 per cent of the program. ANGOs and their partners are working to empower marginalised people to identify and demand services that meet their needs. ANGOs and African partners are also working with governments and other duty bearers to inform and influence them about policies, programs and services which are required and how they could be provided. In some cases, ANGOs and African partners provide the services required.

The focus of *Objective 2* is the exchange of information and learning between AusAID and the NGOs, and between the NGOs themselves. The underlying assumption in this objective is that NGOs have particular expertise in targeting and working with marginalised people which they are able to communicate to AusAID.

Objective 3 targets the Australian public to better inform them about development issues and challenges in Africa and the way in which Australian aid is seeking to respond to these challenges.

Responsibility for the management of AACES is shared between AusAID, ANGOs and African partner NGOs through a program steering committee (PSC). The PSC meets twice per year to agree on key strategic and operational decisions including: prioritisation and protocols for Objectives 2 and 3, oversight of the partnership agreement, consideration of program level monitoring and communications. When necessary, the PSC devolves responsibility to working groups (comprised of AusAID and NGO representatives) for a number of issues, including the development of the annual report and program review. The PSC is comprised of two representatives from AusAID (one from Post and one from Canberra) and two

representatives from each of the ten ANGO projects (one from the ANGO and one from an in-Africa partner). The positions of Chair and Vice-Chair rotate among the members on an annual basis.

A Resource Facility provides administrative and technical support for AACES, including communications, reporting and facilitation of PSC meetings and workshops. The Resource Facility role is currently contracted to the African Capacity Building Foundation, based in Zimbabwe, but with a recently opened office in Nairobi dedicated to providing support to AACES. The PSC approves the annual work plan of the resource facility and oversees its activities.

1.2 The AACES approach

Partnership is a feature of AACES. In October 2011, a joint partnership agreement was signed by AusAID the 10 ANGOS and their Africa-based partner NGOs. The agreement commits AACES partners to a set of partnership principles: trust, flexibility, accountability, mutual respect, collaboration, transparency, learning and a commitment to the cause of poor and marginalised people.

Community empowerment is important for communities and marginalised groups to reach their full potential. AACES programs build on existing assets, strengths and resources of communities and supports them to be the architects of their own development aspirations.

Learning informs ongoing improvements to program results, efficiency and effectiveness. To encourage this, the design proposed an intentionally flexible approach to implementation that started with clearly defined overall objectives and first-year implementation plans, but then allowed for further development of projects during the term of the agreement via the submission of annual plans. There are also a number of mechanisms for sharing information between partners.

Innovation is encouraged as an important learning element in the program and is supported by an Innovations Fund. The Fund supports collaboration in creating new models and approaches that can have catalytic effects and provide benefits to other programs beyond AACES.

Value for money is an increasingly important consideration in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of the program and assessing the value of working with civil society. The AACES approach to value for money is guided by the core principles of balancing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in ways that are both equitable and ethical.

1.3 Strategic Environment for Civil Society Engagement

The Australian Government's aid policy, *An Effective Aid Program for Australia: making a real difference – Delivering real results*, states that Australia will increase assistance to civil society organisations (CSOs) where they are effective and provide the best delivery mechanism to achieve results. This policy committed AusAID to the development of the *Civil Society Engagement Framework*, released in June 2012, which sets out how Australia will work more effectively with CSOs in Australia and overseas to increase the impact of aid. The objectives and principles of engagement of the Civil Society Engagement Framework are highly relevant to AACES (see <http://www.usaid.gov.au/ngos/Pages/default.aspx>). The approaches outlined in the Framework are intended to result in: i) improved effectiveness and impact; ii) sustainability; iii) reduced risks and shared accountability; iv) efficiency and value for money; and v) diversity and innovation.

2. Purpose

The purpose of MTR is **to make an assessment of how AACES is tracking against its objectives, identify gaps and areas for improvement.**

The MTR is intended to be a learning process to take stock and identify gaps and areas of improvement. Questions will need to consider what is going well and what progress has been made, what can be done better and what lessons can be taken away to inform future programming?

The AACES design notes that an independent midterm review (MTR) will be undertaken in Year 3 of the program. AusAID will commission the review, but final approval of the terms of reference (TOR) and team members will be given by the PSC.

The MTR will be used in a number of ways:

- For learning and improvement (by AACES NGOs and AusAID);
- Accountability requirements (to AusAID, in-country partners, communities, etc); and
- To inform and influence stakeholders (within Australia and abroad, including the Australian public and partner governments).

The review will examine not just the program outcomes, but also the range of management approaches used within the program, including the PSC, resource facility model, the partnership approach and value for money.

Undertaking a MTR for a program such as AACES is complex – all partners have different ways of working, different management structures, different outcomes they are trying to achieve, different groups of beneficiaries and duty bearers they are working with, and a wide range of tools and techniques used to make assessments of progress. Therefore, the MTR will attempt to draw out at NGO- and program level, key elements of performance assessment, eg. relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, etc.

3. Key Issues

3.1 Two levels of enquiry

The AACES MTR will be undertaken at two stages, in line with the AACES monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework:

- M&E within each of the NGO projects (“NGO-level”)
- M&E for the overall AACES program (“program-level”)

Firstly, NGOs will conduct independent MTRs of their own AACES projects over the period October 2013-February 2014. Information from these MTRs will then be analysed as part of the AACES program-level review, which will take place from March-April 2014. An independent MTR panel of advisers (the panel) will quality assure the NGO-level reviews and undertake the program-level review.

NGO-level

ANGOs are responsible for the NGO-level MTR of their projects. NGO-level reviews can be undertaken by NGOs internally or with the support from external consultants. The panel will provide early advice to the NGOs as they develop their review methodologies and ensure AusAID M&E standards are being adhered to, including:

- NGOs have the necessary support in methodology development to ensure quality MTRs are undertaken and reliable performance information is produced, and
- Importantly, NGOs incorporate AusAID’s monitoring and evaluation requirements, including key evaluation questions³⁴, into their reviews to ensure the necessary information is

³⁴ The AACES MTR working group met on 17 October 2012 to agree on the purpose of the MTR and a process for undertaking the MTR (see Appendix 4 for the minutes). These were adopted at the December 2012 PSC meeting in Harare. The working group also agreed that a core set of evaluation questions would be considered

available for the broader MTR of AACES and facilitate the crafting of the program-level narrative of progress.

The results from the NGO-level reviews will be available and discussed in time to feed into annual plans for year 4.

Program-level

The program-level MTR will collate the NGOs' MTR findings into a program-level assessment of progress towards AACES objectives, drawing upon examples from the NGO-level review to illustrate points. In addition, the program-level review will also examine the range of management approaches used within AACES, including the partnership approach, value for money, the PSC and the resource facility model.

The assessment of management approaches utilised by AACES is likely to be scheduled for late 2013 in parallel with the NGO-level reviews. The AACES program-level review will take place from March to April 2014.

3.2 Assessment of progress towards objectives and outcomes at the program level

The MTR will make an assessment of progress towards the three AACES Objectives and the following outcomes:

- Objective 1:
 - Marginalised people, particularly women, have greater voice and engagement with decision makers and duty bearers;
 - Policy formulation and implementation by duty bearers is more informed by local issues and evidence;
 - There is an increase in the capacity and focus of duty bearers to deliver inclusive and sustainable services;
 - There is an increase in the demand for services by marginalised people, in particular women;
 - There is an increase in marginalised people, particularly women, utilising and benefiting from services; and
 - Information is available from marginalised people, particularly women, about how access to services has contributed or not to their wellbeing and development.
- Objective 2:
 - Processes in place to share information and research between AusAID and AACES NGOs, and between AACES NGOs;
 - As a result of these processes, action is undertaken (e.g. research, learning event, information exchange, etc.) between AusAID and the AACES NGOs; and
 - Specific improvements are able to be identified in AusAID policies or programs in terms of how they target and better serve the needs of marginalised people.
- Objective 3:
 - Opportunities for the Australian public to be informed about development issues in Africa, and about Australia's (government and NGOs) response to these needs; and
 - Increased reach to either:
 - A wider cross section of the community, or
 - A deeper understanding within targeted communities.

by each ANGO to inform an assessment of how AACES is performing at the NGO-level and facilitate the crafting of the program-level narrative of progress.

3.3 Value for Money

Value for money (VfM) assessments are increasingly being used by donors to gauge the merit of aid activities, and during 2013, AusAID is developing an agency-wide approach to defining VfM and the elements which underpin VfM. Equally, VfM assessments provide an opportunity for recipients of aid funds to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of their programs – a number of large international NGOs have made significant investments in the theory and application of VfM methodologies in recent years.

A value for money (VfM) Framework has been developed by the AACES partners that outlines the approach to assessing VfM under AACES³⁵. During the MTR, two levels of assessment will be undertaken: individual NGO VfM assessments and a program-level assessment by the review team.

NGO-level

There is a varying level of VfM expertise amongst AACES partners. For some, it will be the first time a VfM assessment will be made of their activities; for others, international partners have adopted and undertaken VfM assessments from which the ANGO can draw upon. Again, the focus is on learning and improvement and so ANGOs have been encouraged to select the VfM methodology that best suits their organisation, implementation arrangements and partners. The Framework identifies a number of questions that need to be addressed during NGO-level assessments:

- How the results achieved through the project compare to the expected results.
- How they define VfM given their particular approach and context/s of their projects.
- Two to three of the best examples to demonstrate their VfM, including equity.
- The extent to which beneficiaries believe the project has improved their wellbeing.
- The extent to which the project has leveraged resources (including support) from government, other duty bearers, or other donors³⁶.
- The extent to which the project influenced the broader work of the NGO or partner NGOs (e.g. within a sector, country, or internationally).
- How the VfM of their work could be improved.
- How the results achieved are sustainable.

Program-level

The VfM of the overall AACES program will be assessed by considering four broad elements, against which key questions have been identified:

- Inputs: average costs of technical staff and administrative and management costs
- Outcomes and Impacts
- The partnership approach
- Program management

The results of the NGO-level assessments will feed into the narrative of the value for money of AACES. The program-level enquiry will undertake primary data collection as necessary, in order to respond to the key questions and sub-elements. The VfM Framework provides further information on the VfM assessment to be undertaken during the MTR.

³⁵ The current version of the Framework will be modified as necessary towards the end of 2013 as the agency-wide principles are developed.

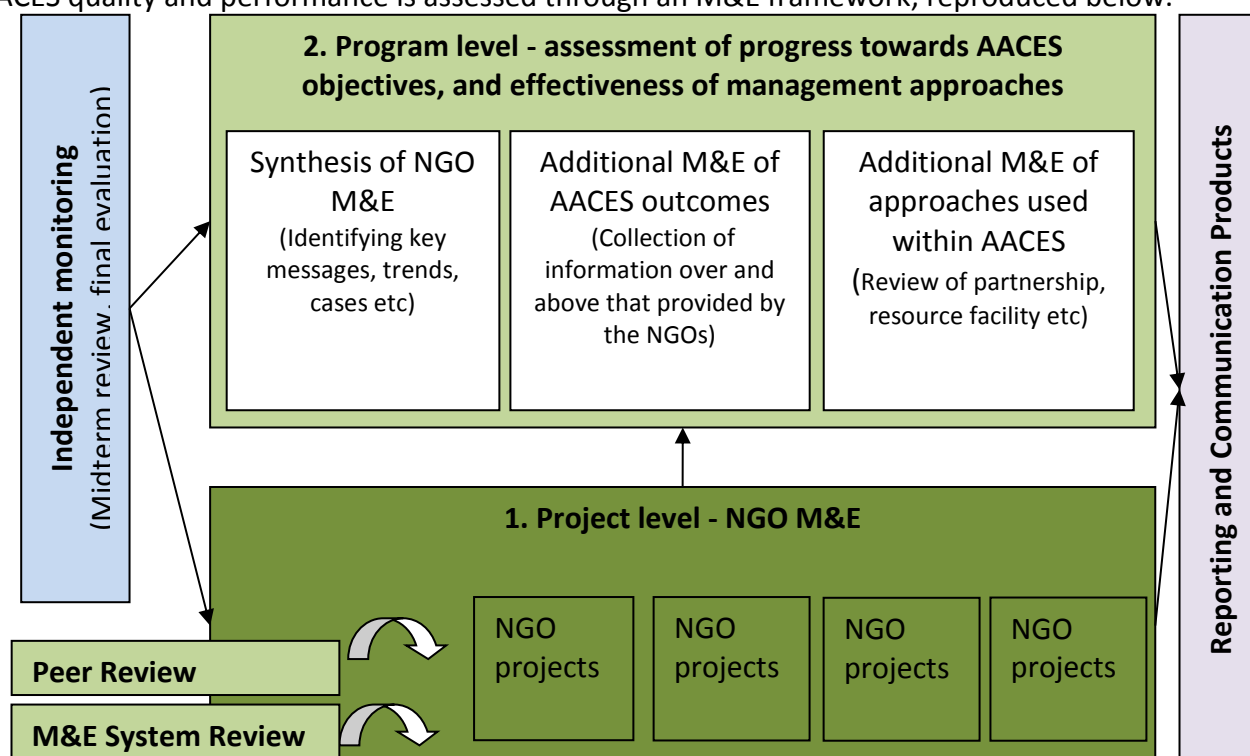
³⁶ Support can include non-financial contributions, eg greater engagement in an issue, and could be quantified or qualitative.

3.4 Seeking NGO and beneficiary feedback on AACES performance

The MTR provides an opportunity to gather information about the ANGO and African partner perspectives on the management approaches employed under AACES, progress towards program-level objectives and areas for improvement. It will also be important to incorporate beneficiary perspectives into the assessment of progress towards AACES objectives, and possibly identify new information on why results are or are not being achieved.

3.5. AACES Program Logic

AACES quality and performance is assessed through an M&E framework, reproduced below.



AACES does not have a theory of change articulated in the program-level design. The three AACES objectives also identify very different approaches and target audiences. A number of products have been developed to feed into the assessment of progress:

- Objective 1: snapshot indicators and reports, annual reports
- Objective 2: activity log, annual review of progress, snapshot reports
- Objective 3: activity log, snapshot reports.

3.6 Innovations Fund

Projects will be still in the first year of implementation. Consideration of Innovations Fund activities will include:

- are they “innovative”?
- are they likely to achieve the aims as stated in the guidelines?
- early progress in the utility of separate NGOs working together.

4. Key Management Decisions

The MTR fulfils an important accountability function – accountability to African beneficiaries, to Australian taxpayers who have provided the funds for AACES, to meet AusAID quality and performance requirements, and to other AACES partners. While the

MTR working group agreed “future funding decisions will not be dependent on the findings of the MTR”, the results will inform programming, and potentially budget, decisions made by AusAID Africa program’s senior management team.

The MTR is intended to inform management decisions regarding:

- NGOs will use the information to feed into Year 4 work plans due in June 2014.
- AusAID will use the information to make an assessment about the effectiveness of NGOs as a mechanism for aid delivery that reaches the most marginalised and vulnerable that will inform the development of Africa country delivery strategies and the Annual Program Performance Report (APPR).
- AusAID will use the information to assess whether the partnership approach, including the governance arrangements, leads to a better functioning and effective program and share this information with other program areas considering new civil society initiatives.
- An assessment will be made of the VfM of AACES, as per the VfM Framework
- An assessment of the utility of the Resource Facility model will result in:
 - A recommendation on whether to continue with the model or consider other options to manage the administration and communications of AACES
 - An assessment of the performance of ACBF as Resource Facility, leading to a decision on whether to extend ACBF’s contract until AACES completion date.

5. Key Evaluation Questions

5.1 Assessment of NGO-Level performance

These questions will be considered by NGO-level reviews, in addition to other areas of enquiry deemed appropriate by the NGOs. This will ensure the necessary information is available for the broader MTR of AACES.

- Relevance: Are the NGOs adapting their projects in response to changes in their local context? How have the projects taken in account their social and political environment? How have the NGOs used and enhanced the legitimacy of civil society in the circumstances of each country?
- Effectiveness: To what extent are the NGO projects on track to achieve their objectives? Are partnerships progressing in line with expectations and good partnership practice? How do the results contribute to each of the outcome areas of the AACES objectives? In what way has the NGO contributed to Objective 2? In what way has the NGO contributed to Objective 3?
- Efficiency: Are inputs of good quality and timely? What are the strategies for achieving and measuring value for money and how effective have they been?
- Sustainability: What is the sustainability strategy for the projects? What has been the progress against it?
- Gender and disability: To what extent has the project supported more equal access by women, men and people with disability to the benefits of the activity, and more broadly to resources, services and skills (e.g. by increased access directly, or by removing barriers to access)? To what extent has the project developed the capacity of partner government and civil society to understand and promote gender equality?
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Are M&E systems fit for purpose? Are they being used for reporting and learning?

5.2 Assessment of AACES performance

The program-level questions on AACES performance will be elaborated further in the Evaluation Plan.

- Relevance: Are the AACES objectives still relevant to Australian Government and partner government priorities, and to the context/needs of beneficiaries?
- Effectiveness: To what extent is AACES on track to achieve its objectives? Consider each of the outcome areas. Any challenges or opportunities to improve progress towards objectives?
- Impact: What evidence is there that AACES is producing intended or unintended changes in the lives of beneficiaries and their environment, directly or indirectly?
- Efficiency: Are we using inputs of aid program funds, staff and other resources in the most efficient manner to achieve the desired results?
- Learning: Are all NGOs learning consistently from each other? What examples are there of learning across AACES being put into action? Of the structures for promoting learning within AACES, which work best?

- Monitoring and Evaluation: Is the AACES M&E system collecting the right information to allow judgment to be made about meeting objectives and sustainability at this mid-term point? To what extent are the NGOs using performance information to improve their projects? To what extent are the NGOs monitoring, revising and using their theory of change to improve their effectiveness? Does AACES need a theory of change? Can the AACES M&E framework be strengthened?
- Gender and disability: To what extent has AACES supported more equal access by women, men and people living with a disability to the benefits of the activity, and more broadly to resources, services and skills (e.g. by increased access directly, or by removing barriers to access)?
- Resource Facility: Does the Resource Facility model facilitate the efficient and economical delivery of AACES? Is ABCF performing the role adequately?
- Value for Money: As per the AACES VfM Framework.
- Partnership Approach: Is the partnership approach practiced by AACES leading to a strong performing program?

6. Review Process

The review will be conducted by a panel of independent reviewers over a period of up to 12 weeks in total, and will be contracted in two phases:

6.1 Phase 1 – June 2013

Note the composition of the review panel will need to be endorsed by the PSC at the June 2013 meeting.

- A briefing of the key issues and priorities for the review team by AusAID.
- Document review and appraisal (see list at Appendix 6)
- Preparation of a draft Review Plan which includes a methodology (see the proposed check list for the review plan at Appendix 7), in consultation with AusAID and the MTR working group
- Participation at the AACES annual Reflections Meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 24-26 June
 - Present and discuss the draft review plan with AACES partners
 - Undertake initial consultations with AACES NGO partners and AusAID staff
 - Observe the i) the Reflections Workshop to gain an on the ground understanding of issues experienced by AACES activities, and ii) VfM workshop to gain an understanding of VfM in the AACES context
 - Provision of advice as needed to NGOs on the development of NGO-level MTR plans and key evaluation questions
 - Initial consultations with ACBF

- Revise Review Plan based on consultation outcomes; including defining duration, scope and key evaluation questions. The revised Review Plan will contain a fully elaborated methodology and outline the required team composition.

6.2 Phase 2 – July 2013-May 2014

Phase 2 will be dependent upon approval by the PSC in June 2013 of the consultant identified as MTR Team Leader and the draft Review Plan.

- Approval of the Review Plan by the AusAID delegate
- In consultation with AusAID, determine the skill-set required for the remaining panel members, including:
 - Civil society specialist
 - Value for Money specialist
 - Sectoral specialists (likely to be AusAID advisers, eg. the Regional Africa MCH Advisor, based in Addis Ababa)
- AusAID will contract the remaining specialists through the Aid Advisory Services panel and internal thematic groups
- Provide quality assurance advice to NGOs as they undertake the NGO-level MTRs over September 2013 – February 2014
- Assessment of AACES Program-level functions October-December 2014
- Implementation of the Review Plan
- Delivery of a report by team leader.

6.3 Consultations

The review team will include the following AACES stakeholders in consultations:

- AusAID:
 - Africa Posts: AusAID Minister Counsellor (initially at the Reflections Meeting), Counsellor Nairobi, 1st Secretary Civil Society and Scholarships, Program Manager Civil Society
 - Canberra: Director of East Africa II section in Canberra, Program Manager Ethiopia and NGOs, a/g Senior Program Officer Ethiopia and NGOs, Africa Quality and Performance team.
- NGO representatives, including:
 - ANGO key contact points
 - African partners (present at the Reflections Meeting)
 - Outgoing/incoming PSC Chair and Vice-Chair
- ACBF
- In-country beneficiaries
- Partner country implementing agencies at project-level

6.4 Key Dates

TASK	TIMELINE
PHASE 1	
Document review & draft review plan	June 2013
AACES PSC briefing; approval of the TOR and MTR team leader	24-26 June 2013
PHASE 2	
Finalisation of the review plan	22 July 2013
Confirmation of review team	31 July 2013
Quality assurance role for AACES NGO-level MTRs	September 2013-February 2014
Resource Facility assessed	November-December 2013
NGO-level review reports submitted to AusAID	Mid-March 2014
AACES Program-level draft review report concluded	30 April 2014
Annual Reflection Meeting to discuss draft MTR report, share learning between NGOs and AusAID from the review process and plan next steps	19 May 2014
Revised report	27 May 2014
Peer review appraisal	3 June 2014
Final review report	6 June 2014

7. Review team

The review team will consist of a team leader (who will be an experienced evaluator), a Civil Society Specialist / VfM specialist and sectoral specialists as required. Should an individual with combined civil society and VfM experience not be found, the team may complement the team's skills with an additional member with the required specialisation. Collectively, the review team is required to have skills and experience in following areas:

- Experience in design of monitoring and evaluation systems
- Experience in managing complex civil society programs in Africa
- Knowledge and understanding of the development context in Africa
- Ability to balance best practice methods and international experience with current and emerging conditions in Africa
- Experience in Value for Money concepts and approaches
- Experience with a range of development partners including community development organisations, international NGOs and local government.

7.1 Proposed roles/responsibilities of the review team

Team Leader: The Team Leader should be an experienced evaluator, with experience in managing and evaluating complex civil society programs in Africa desirable. The team leader will be responsible for:

- Overall management and direction of the team.
- Preparation of the review plan including study instruments, confirmation of the key evaluation questions and composition of the remainder of the team.

- Providing advice to AusAID on field visits and consultation with key stakeholders as necessary.
- Lead in consultations with key stakeholders.
- Formulation of recommendations in respect of each of the review questions.
- Oversight of report preparation and presentation.
- Ensuring AusAID quality standards are met in relation to all review outputs.
- Submission of documentation and reports to AusAID within the agreed time frame

7.2 AusAID roles/responsibilities

The AusAID roles are defined as follows:

- Driver- the driver of the MTR process is AusAID Canberra (Emma Stone)
- Consultation - people to be consulted are:
 - Nairobi Post AACES officers (Lisa Staruszkiewicz/Leisa Gibson and Alice Oyaro), also with responsibility for consulting with Counsellor Nairobi
 - Sector and Post contacts who have been heavily involved with AACES – secondary
- Decision maker – Canberra (ADG Africa, through Director East Africa II)

Appendix 1 – AACES activity location map

Appendix 2 – AACES NGO and activity summary

Appendix 3 – List of AACES NGOs (from annual report)

Appendix 4 – MTR working group meeting outcomes 17 Oct 2012

Appendix 5 – Document review list

Appendix 6 – Review Plan check list (M&E standards)

Annex 2: Results and analysis of the MTR on-line survey.

As part of its review, the MTR team sent an invitation to complete an on-line survey to 43 Australian and African AACES partners together with a representative from DFAT in Canberra, DFAT in Nairobi and the Resource Facility. We received 28 responses which is a response rate of 65%. Some of the main results are described and analysed below.

Partnership

AACES partnership principles

Respondents were asked to rank the seven partnership principles with the following results:

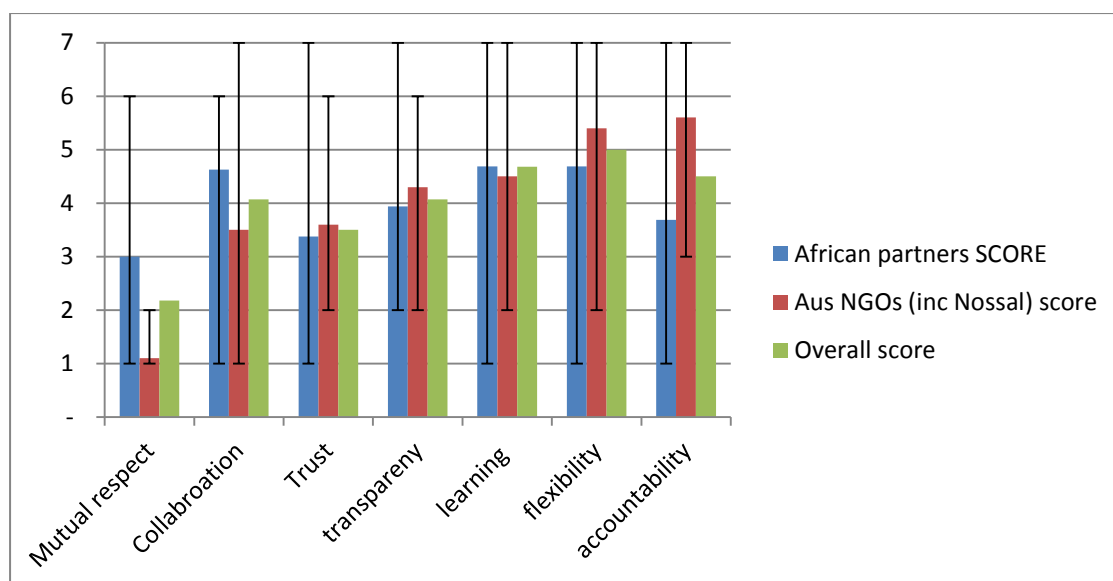
Principle	Overall rank	Aus partners rank	African partners rank	DFAT rank	Overall mean score	Aus Partners mean	African partners mean	DFAT mean
Mutual respect	1	1	1	1	2.2	1.1	3.0	1.0
Trust	2	3	2	4	3.5	3.6	3.4	4.0
Collaboration	=3	2	5	2	4.1	3.5	4.6	2.5
Transparency	=3	4	4	3	4.1	4.3	3.9	3.5
Accountability	5	7	3	=5	4.5	5.6	3.7	5.5
Learning	6	5	=6	=5	4.7	4.5	4.7	5.5
Flexibility	7	6	=6	=5	5.0	5.4	4.7	5.5

- All rank mutual respect highest, though the responses were more broadly spread in the African partners. Nine of the ten Australian partners ranked mutual respect 1, one rated it 2 (mean = 1.1, SD=0.3). African partners ranked it between 1 and 6 (mean = 3.0, SD= 1.9) This difference is significant at $p<0.05$ ³⁷.
- African partners rate accountability much higher (3rd) than Australian partners (last) or DFAT (joint last). The difference is significant.
- None of the other differences is significant.
- Learning is rated low by all partners, which is interesting given the responses to the questions below about what has helped and hindered AACES.

The results are shown graphically below — the error bars show the range of responses for each.

It is not clear what conclusions, if any, can be drawn from these differences which may be influenced by different understandings of the principles and being closer to program implementation may affect the view on accountability.

³⁷ The results have been analysed for statistical significance, but the results of this analysis need to be treated with a degree of caution; the sample is very small, and the groups are likely to be different in a number of ways that are not known. DFAT answers are not included in the in statistical calculations which follow due to the extremely small sample.



What has helped and hindered

Respondents were asked the most important thing that had helped or hindered AACES. A summary of the comments are below. The first three (sharing of learnings, promotion of cooperation not competition and the building of relationships and trust) were mentioned most frequently.

Most important HELP	Most important HINDRANCE
Sharing of learnings and exchange visits — being able to see the bigger picture Richer deeper reporting as a result.	
Promotion of cooperation, not competition, from the design stage. Making partnership an outcome and providing resources to support it. 'Buy-in' from DFAT	Organisational interests surpassing collective interests. Ongoing silo mentality Power issues about relative size of organisations and difficulties in ceding power to African NGOs. Conflicting agendas.
Building relationships and trust Communication - including from DFAT	The time and effort needed to build and maintain relationships.
Enthusiasm, openness and relaxed approach	Speaking only the positive. Lack of support from senior management.
Diversity and flexibility of programming.	Having many approaches, TOC and sectors - linkages may not have been realised early enough or discussed.
Having more than one partner in a country.	Being the only partner in a country. Moving office from Harare to Nairobi
Being in touch with the field	
	Limited funding and uncertainty over future funding

It is interesting to note that learning, sharing and exchange visits were mentioned so often as helping factors although learning ranked only 6th out of the 7 principles. This may be

simply because exchange visits and reflection meetings are a tangible expression of the principles – some of the others are harder to pin down but are the intangible foundations of this practice.

Importance and Practice of Partnership

The intention of the survey was to try to tease out some further information on the VfM of the partnership arrangement. Our contention is that if aspects of the partnership are felt to be both important and well practised, then they are better VfM than if they were less important and/or less well practised. Conversely if they are not important and/or poorly practised, then the VfM is lower.

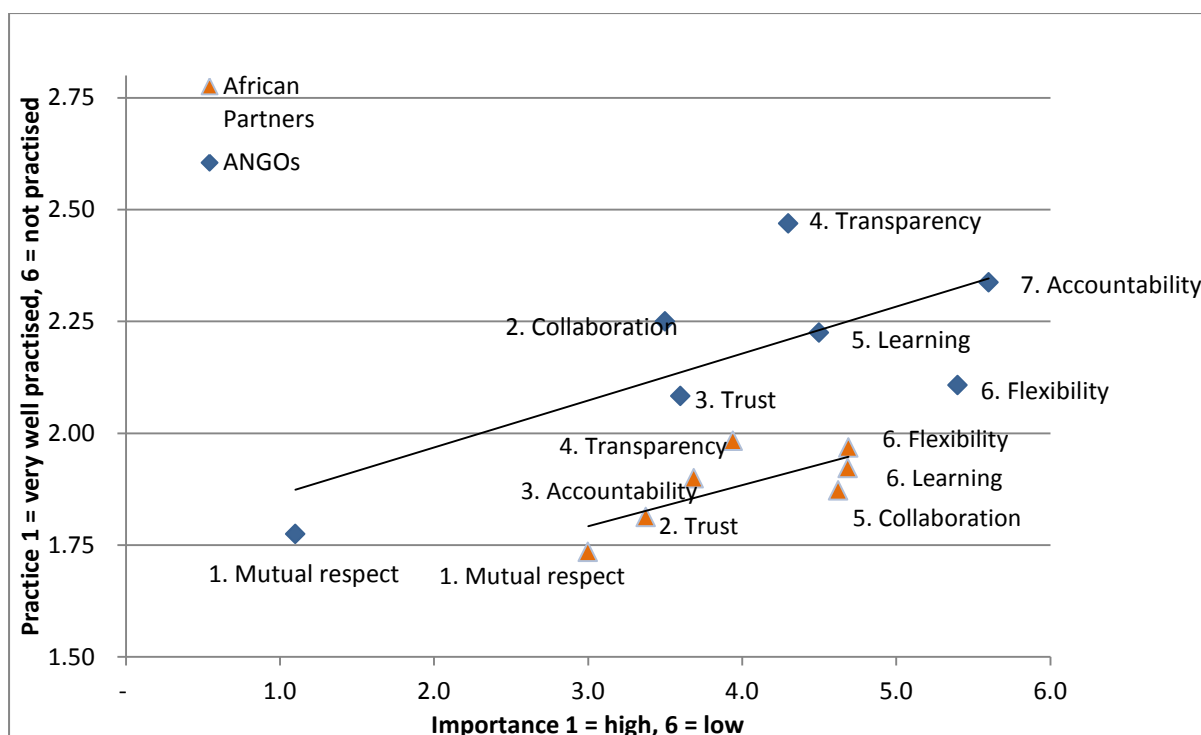
Practice of partnership principles in four dimensions – the theory

The first step was to repeat part of the AACES partnership survey by asking how well the partnership principles are practised in four relationships: between DFAT and the ANGOS; between the ANGOS; between the ANGOS and their African partners; and between the African partners.

The results show that:

- Generally all partners agree that the principles are well or very well practised — the average ranking is less than 3 (1 = very well practised, 6 = not practised) — or they are not prepared to say differently.
- African partners are more likely to rate all principles as better practised than the Australian partners. It is interesting that these results are similar to the results of a similar survey about accountability in which one of the review team was involved where field staff also tended to rate practice higher than Head Office³⁸. It is not clear why this is the case; perhaps there are issues of power and voice, and information asymmetry.
- Those principles that have been scored higher for importance also tend to be scored higher for practice. This is shown in the graph below which plots the average score for the ranking of each principle (see table above) against the average for how well respondents believe the principle has been practised.

³⁸ See Davis, T, MacDonald, K. and Brenton, S. (2012) 'Reforming Accountability in International NGOs: Making Sense of Conflicting Feedback' in *Development in Practice* 22:7, 946-961, DOI: [10.1080/09614524.2012.696093](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.696093) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.696093>



Practice of partnership principles– the practice

The survey asked a number of questions that were designed to probe further into the reality of how partnership is practised in AACES. The questions suggested specific examples of some of the partnership principles and asked respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement (6 = completely agree, 1 = completely disagree). There were two groups of questions: the first was around the importance of various behaviours and the second was around how well these behaviours were practised — for instance in group 1 we asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement “It’s important that my organisation can share and discuss with other AACES partners both the good news about our program and things that are more difficult or not going so well.” and in group 2 the corresponding statement was “Difficult issues are discussed openly in AACES.”

Looking at the questions around the *importance* of certain behaviours:

	Importance/theory	Overall	African partners	Australian partners	DFAT
1	It’s important to have regular face to face meetings with AACES partners.	5.6	5.6	5.5	6.0
2	It’s important that everyone gets to speak and be heard in AACES.	5.6	5.7	5.5	6.0
3	It’s important that documents and reports (such as annual reports) from all partners are shared and available on the AACES Yammer site.	5.3	5.5	4.7	6.0
4	It’s important that my organisation can share and discuss with other AACES partners both the good news about our program and things that are more difficult or not going so well.	5.5	5.8	5.1	6.0
5	It’s important that my organisation is funded in a way which enables it to respond quickly to changing circumstances.	5.6	5.8	5.5	4.5

6	It is important to hear about other AACES programs and learn from their experiences.	5.6	5.8	5.4	6.0
7	It is important that agencies are open to feedback.	5.8	5.9	5.1	6.0

Basically, partners report that they are all very important! As with previous questions, the Australian NGOs consistently rank the importance lower than the African partners.

The difference between the African and Australian partners is significant for both questions about sharing information: question 3 (important to share documents) and question 4 (sharing and discussing good and bad news). One might speculate around reasons for these differences, for instance, African partners feel further from the centre of the AACES 'action' and therefore value more highly accessing information from the inner circle.

Looking at the questions about the practice of behaviours:

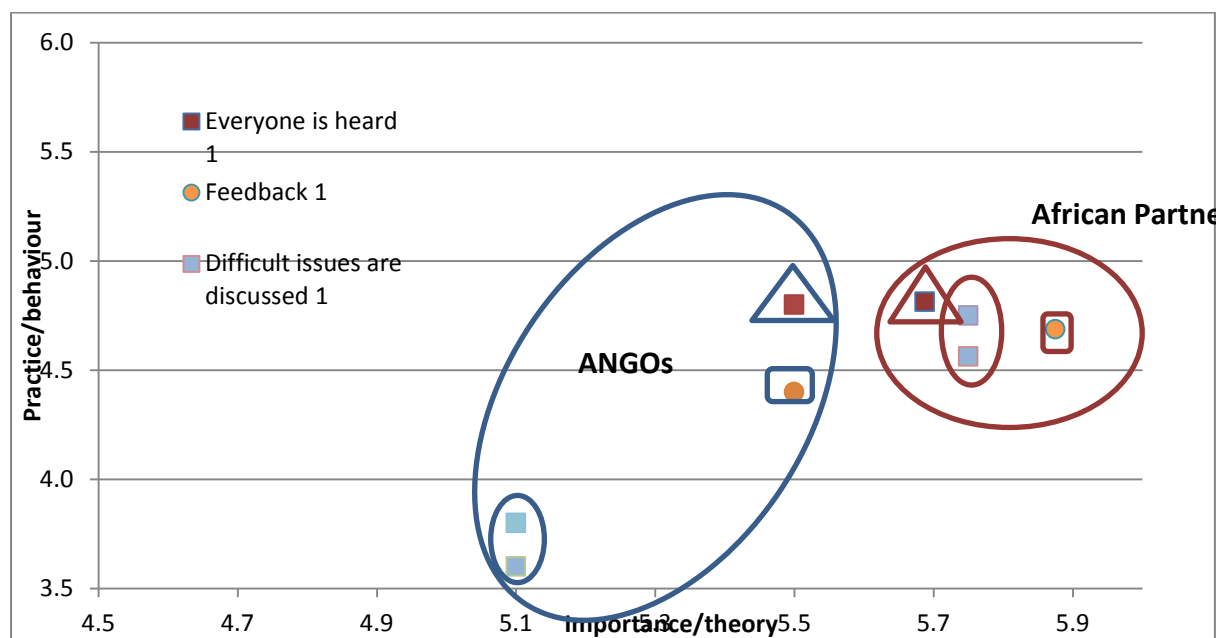
	Behaviour/practice	Overall	African partners	Australian partners	DFAT
8	I regularly visit the AACES Yammer site.	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.5
9	The resources on the AACES Yammer site are more than just AACES reports and forms - there is a wider range of resources and information shared between partners.	4.3	4.6	3.8	3.5
10	Everyone's views are equally valued and respected in AACES.	4.9	4.8	4.8	4.5
11	There are too many AACES partner meetings and the money would better spent on something else.	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.5
12	The partnership means that there is less bureaucracy and reporting in AACES compared to other programs funded by DFAT (for Australian NGOs) or my organisation's Australian NGO	4.0	4.3	3.9	2.5
13	The networks and links that my organisation has established as a result of our involvement in AACES will continue after the end of the AACES program.	5.0	5.1	4.7	5.0
14	My organisation has developed its skills and capacity as a result of participation in AACES.	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.0
15	AACES partners share good news AND bad news.	4.2	4.6	3.6	4.5
16	Difficult issues are discussed openly in AACES.	4.0	4.8	3.8	4.0
17	Generally AACES partners are open to feedback and change their behaviour as a result.	4.6	4.7	4.4	5.0
18	The AACES program funds its partners in ways that encourage flexibility and responsiveness.	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.0
19	Overall the partnership way of working has improved our program.	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.5

Drawing out some points:

- In what is becoming a familiar story, the African partners rate most aspects higher than the Australian partners. the interesting exceptions are the development of skills, where Australian partners agree more strongly (although the differences are not significant) and Australian partners disagree more that there are too many partner meetings.
- There is a significant difference between the views of African and Australian partners on the questions 8 and 9 about openness and trust where the Australian partners seem to feel there is considerably less of it being shown in practice.
- In question 2 there is a significant difference in their views on the AACES Yammer site and its resources. This mirrors the differences in opinions about the importance of sharing information noted above.
- The agreement with the statement about the reduction of bureaucracy is moderate (overall 4) with African partners agreeing the most, Australian partners slightly less but DFAT disagree (although with very few respondents.) This may suggest that there is at least as much bureaucracy for DFAT in the AACES model, but that this does not get passed so far along the 'chain'.

Some of the results show more clearly in the scatter plots below which map the theory/importance answers against the behaviour/practice answers.

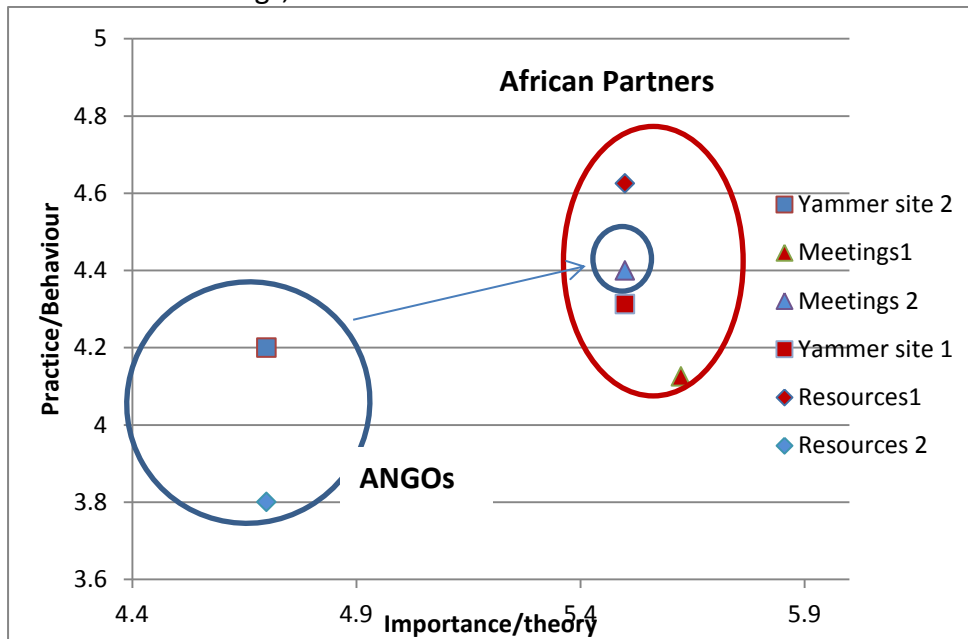
The first graphic below looks at issues around hearing everyone, giving and receiving feedback and discussing difficult issues. The matrix below has mapped importance on the x axis against practice/behaviour on the y axis for pairs of questions and answers, separately for ANGOs and African partners.



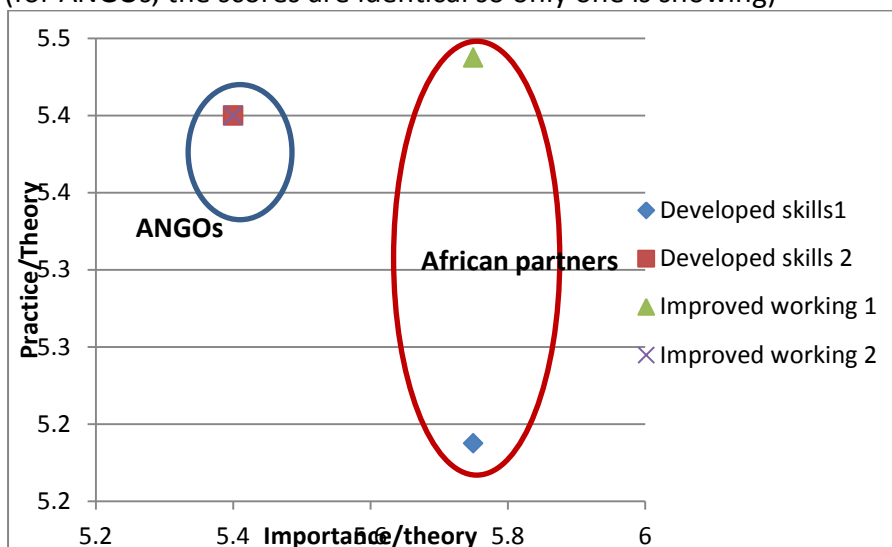
For example for “everyone is heard” the score for the statement “it’s important that everyone gets to speak and be heard in AACES” (Q2) is mapped on the x axis against the score for the statement “Everyone’s views are equally valued and respected in AACES” (Q10). This shows more clearly the information contained in the tables above:

- The African partners (whose responses are within the red circle) rate the importance of all statements more highly than the Australian partners (whose responses are in the blue circle).
- They also rate the practice more highly, except for “everyone is heard” where the practice is rated the same as Australian partners. Given the previous observation that African partners tend to score more highly for whatever reason, this may be significant.
- The difference between the views on whether difficult issues are discussed is particularly clear.

There is a similar scatter plot below looking at the different perceptions of importance of face to face meetings, the Yammer site and its resources.



And finally, the graphic around learning and skills building, which is showing a similar story (for ANGOs, the scores are identical so only one is showing)



Role of DFAT

Respondents were asked to say how much they agreed with a number of statements about DFAT and its role in AACES (on a scale from 6 = completely agree to 1 = completely disagree). The responses are summarised below

	Australian partners average response	African partners average response	Overall average all partners (excl DFAT)
AusAID/DFAT's approach to Value for Money has been very helpful in improving our practice.	3.3	5.3	4.6
AusAID/DFAT has managed to balance its role as a partner and funder extremely well.	5.2	5.5	5.4
AusAID/DFAT compares very well with other funders of my organisation.	5.2	5.3	5.3
The turn over in AusAID/DFAT staff makes building effective partnership relations challenging.	2.9	3.2	3.0
AusAID/DFAT communicates very well with AACES partners about changes in policy.	4.0	5.1	4.7
AusAID/DFAT has demonstrated high levels of flexibility and responsiveness to concerns raised by AACES partners.	5.1	5.4	5.3

Some points to highlight in these results:

- Generally DFAT seems to have managed its role well, although turnover is a concern.
- African partners tend to rate DFAT slightly more highly than the Australian partners, but the differences are not statistically significant except for:
 - African partners agree much more strongly that DFAT's approach to VfM has been helpful. This is a significant difference at $p < 0.05$ (but bearing in mind low sample sizes). Speculating again, this might be because African partners have had less exposure to these issues prior to AACES whereas Australian partners were better informed at the start. Or they are less aware of the potential risks of the approach? Or are more open to new ways of doing things?

Learning – has anything changed?

We asked some questions around whether there were examples of learning from the partnership that had been put into practice. Results are:

My organisation has collaborated with another AACES organisation in a way that we did not plan in the original design of our program (e.g. joint research, joint policy papers, program	Often (more than 3 x)	Occasionally (2 or 3 x)	Only once	never
African partners	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%
Australian partners	40%	50%	10%	0
DFAT				100%

My organisation has shared resources (e.g. training) with another AACES organisation in a way that we did not plan in the original design of our program.	Often (more than 3 x)	Occasionally (2 or 3 x)	Only once	never
African partners	12.5%	56.3%	18.7%	12.5%
Australian partners	20%	60%	20%	0
DFAT				100%

My organisation has changed something (e.g. a policy, or program) as a result of what we have learnt from other AACES organisation(s).	Often (more than 3 x)	Occasionally (2 or 3 x)	Only once	never
African partners	6.3%	43.3%	12.5%	35.5%
Australian partners	0	50%	40%	1
DFAT		100%		

Our conclusions from these figures are that partners highly value the learning from meetings exchange visits and there have been some tangible expressions of this in terms of changed programs or policies or unplanned collaborations or sharing of resources. There are a number of examples given where one could make assumptions that the exchanges would be been unlikely given that “normal” business would probably favour in-NGO family and in-country learning. It may also be significant that some report that the learnings are being applied to non-AACES programs indicating a wider value from the learnings.

Has it benefited participants?

We asked partners if the partnership way of working had benefited the people they were working with. We asked for an example to illustrate this benefit (assuming there was one.)

	Agree the partnership way of working has resulted in benefits for the people we are working with	Somewhat agree our program has generally benefited from the partnership approach, but it's hard to link this to any direct benefits for the people we are working with	Disagree - the partnership way of working has not had any benefits for the people we are working with	Not sure
African partners	14	2		
Australian partners	7	3		
DFAT	2			
Overall	23	5	0	0

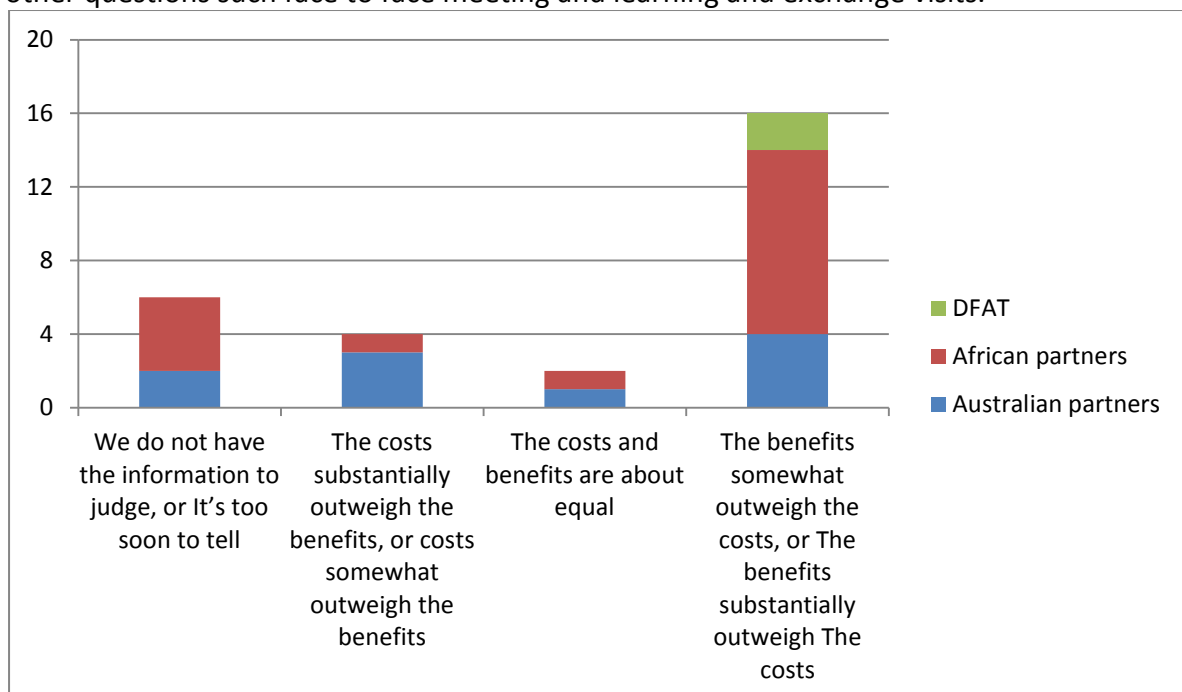
Partners clear strongly agree that the partnership has had benefits for their programs and the people they work with. If so, and if we agree that the benefits that they describe are substantial, then this is a clear indication of VfM

Overall view of costs vs benefits

Respondents were asked about the overall value for money of the partnership by selecting one of the following options:

	Overall	Australian partners	African partners	DFAT
We do not have the information to judge	11%	10%	13%	
It's too soon to tell	11%	10%	13%	
The costs substantially outweigh the benefits	7%	10%	6%	
The costs somewhat outweigh the benefits	7%	20%	0%	
The costs and benefits are about equal	7%	10%	6%	
The benefits somewhat outweigh the costs	25%	10%	31%	50%
The benefits substantially outweigh the costs	32%	30%	31%	50%

Overall 57% of partners felt that the benefits outweighed the costs, which means that a substantial proportion don't know or disagree. Australian partners less convinced about the benefits, (only 40% felt that benefits outweighed costs and 30% felt that the costs outweighed the benefits) but none of the differences were significant – see the graph below. The fact that only just over half felt the partnership benefits outweighed the costs might be surprising given the high value that respondents gave to all aspects of the partnership in other questions, not only in how the partnership principles were practised, but also the high ranking of the importance of many practical partnership activities that were explored in other questions such as face to face meeting and learning and exchange visits.



OBJECTIVE 3

Results of the Survey

Respondents were asked the following questions about Objective 3, scoring on a scale from 6 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree) or 'no opinion'

	Question	African partner rating average	Australian partner rating average	Combined average rating
1	it's important that DFAT supports the education of the Australian public	5.8	5.3	5.6
2	My organisation has very little or no involvement in any AACES Objective 3 activity.	2.6	1.5	2.1
3	AACES support to Objective 3 has enabled my organisation to reach a wider cross-section of the Australian community.	4.4	4.9	4.6
4	AACES support to Objective 3 has enabled my organisation to deepen the understanding of targeted communities about development challenges and issues in Africa.	5.2	4.5	4.9
5	AACES support to Objective 3 has enabled my organisation to inform target communities about the way in which Australian aid is responding to these challenges.	5.2	4.5	4.9
6	The limits of what can and cannot be funded significantly reduces the value of what we can achieve under this objective.	4.2	4.3	4.2
7	Because of our work on AACES Objective 3 my organisation has developed valuable new partnerships, networks or links.	4.5	4.8	4.6

Discussion

Interestingly, African partners rate the importance of the objective more highly than the Australian partners and agree more strongly that it has enabled them to deepen the understanding of Australian communities about the challenges of development and how Australian aid is responding. This is despite the fact that their response to the question about involvement suggests they have been less involved in activities. A couple of possible explanations for this might be:

- The objective is genuinely allowing African partners to reach (or *feel* that they have reached) the Australian public in a way that they have not been able to do previously. We know from the reports that some activities are actively supporting African partners to tell their own story (e.g. AOA blog and Caritas video story-telling); or
- They have been asked to supply a lot of information, and they know it has cost dollars so they assume it has had an effect.
- Australian NGOs are closer to the Australian public and are more informed about the reality of what has been achieved and are therefore more sceptical.

There is evidence, which is backed up in the MTR reports, that the partners believe that the restrictions on advocacy and fundraising limit the value of objective 3 activities. This is

backed up by the financial information which shows (with a couple of exceptions) that budgets are underspent.

When considering the VfM of objective 3, there are some other points to consider:

- These sorts of activities are inherently risky (and difficult to measure) – the best thought-out activities flop, others take off because they are in the right place at the right time, or picked up by the right people (e.g. the AOA blog). The wins could be large, but you have to try a lot of things to get a few good wins (or kiss a lot of frogs!), but acknowledging there are likely to be quite a few failures along the way.
- And when is important– some of the activities may have a big impact/value in the future (some of the education activities for instance potentially), but are not apparent at this stage.

Annex 3: NGO approaches to Value for Money

This annex gives an overview of the approach taken by NGOs to the assessment of the VfM of their programs.

- **Action Aid**
 - The consolidated Action Aid report has no specific consideration of value for money, although it does consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the program, together with the overhead rate. The detailed country reports contain sections of VfM. In the report on Uganda this included qualitative reports on aspects of VfM including achievements compared to expected results, community valuing of results and their views on how it could be improved, leveraging of resources and the wider influence of the program on Action Aid and its partners. The report from Kenya conceptualised VfM as “the ability of a project to realise more benefits both tangible and intangible beyond expectations” and the number of people benefitting from the program.
 - Discussions with Action Aid staff in Australia indicated that Action Aid is considering the VfM approach that will be used across the Action Aid family.
- **Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific (AFAP)**
 - AFAP used a Social Return on Investment methodology. Calculations of SROI were based on a preliminary analysis of findings and presentation of preliminary outcome and impact level achievements as well as challenges. Stakeholders were grouped according to thematic areas based on their technical areas (e.g. Food Security, MCH, WASH and Governance, Capacity Building and Advocacy), and one day outcome monetisation workshops were held in each country (i.e. Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) to put monetary values to the social benefits for households reached. These results were presented to all groups for validation.
- **Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA)**
 - AOA have a VfM framework that uses a BER approach, and are still progressing towards full implementation. The VfM case studies reported use the BER methodology to assess economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity for an overall assessment of VfM. There are details of inputs, including AACES financial costs, in-kind community resources as well as local government and other resources.
 - The report has noted where systems need to be adapted or improved for full VfM measurement. It also commented that AOA were looking to track medium and longer term outcomes and look at whether VfM changes over the period.
- **CARE**
 - Care’s MTR considers VfM in terms of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. The MTR views efficiency as ‘burn rate’ (i.e. spend vs budget). In assessing effectiveness, the MTR included a beneficiary perspective through a community score card system which Care is rolling out. The scorecard, or a modified version, was used with various stakeholders for a participatory ranking exercise on value which has been used as a basis for a VfM assessment, though it is not clear how the outcome of these ranking exercises has been linked to inputs and a judgement made about VfM.

- *Caritas*
- Caritas has a VfM framework which uses an adapted BER methodology, but this has not yet been fully implemented .
- The MTR reported on VfM against: results compared to expected results; beneficiary satisfaction; influence on the broader work of partners; and linked the values set out in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching with the program’s focus on marginality and the importance of promoting citizen voice in assessing value. There was an emphasis on the value being achieved through the use of the Strength Based Approach including the sustainability of this approach and the resources that had been contributed by the community in achieving the outcomes.
- *Marie Stopes International*
- Marie Stopes are using their corporate “Impact 2” tool as the basis for VfM assessment. This is a well-developed peer reviewed tool that estimates a range of health impact measures as a result of family planning services. Measures include Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs, a standard health sector measure) which, when used with cost information, gives a cost per DALY that is a measure of VfM. As with any similar tool, the result depends on the information included and the assumptions made (for instance, the tool utilises country level and regional maternal mortality data in its estimates, and as such, how current and robust this data is a limitation). Due to the wide range of variables and assumptions that feed into Impact 2, details on the tool’s methodology were not included in the report. There was however, a link to the full tool, methodology and assumptions which are available online <http://www.mariestopes.org/impact-2>.
- The evidence from the DALY figures is supported by a qualitative narrative about other aspects of value in the program, such as the value of working with marginalised people such as PWD and remote communities, and the value of specific operational approaches taken by MSI (for example, service provision through outreach) in a qualitative form in the narrative.
- *Oxfam*
- At an organisational level, Oxfam has not yet decided on a VfM approach and it therefore does not have a fully developed VfM framework for AACES. For the MTR a consultant worked with Oxfam staff to develop and test a framework to be considered for future use.
- The approach was in two sections. The first section describes the processes and procedures in place across the program management cycle to ensure VfM in the AACES program and how these are being applied within AACES based on evidence from program documentation.
- The second section adapts the Basic Efficiency Resource approach to look at the VfM of two case studies. It uses program M&E information to assess the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the program based on rating criteria which consider the alternatives available and influencing factors in the context of the program. These assessments were checked with partner organisations, but as Oxfam notes, they would be improved by including stakeholders inputs.
- *Plan*
- Plan’s approach to VfM was based on the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique to focus on what changes are valued and why from the perspective of community members.

- For the MTR, stories were collected, analysed and ranked by groups in seven communities in total in three countries. A range of stakeholder views were sought and varying village contexts chosen. The process did not assign or consider monetary or financial information values; it was considered more appropriate to explore the valuing of rights and well being through descriptions, ranking and prioritising.
- **WaterAid**
 - WaterAid's MTR states that its VfM methodology makes the important assumption that if the design of the project was good, with valuable objectives and sufficient resources then one measure of VfM is the achievement of those objectives within the allocated resources.
 - It also looks at spend vs budget over the first two years as the first part of a VfM assessment. This assessment was extended to include information from M&E and other review processes to make qualitative judgements of value that included specific case histories that address beneficiary perspective, equality and sustainability and a satisfaction score card given to country program staff.
 - Discussions with WaterAid in Australia suggest that the MTR does not fully reflect the VfM approach that it is developing. This is intending to build on existing M&E to explore and test assumptions about value for WASH programs, for instance around claims about the value of time saved for women in collecting water, and to explore value more widely, including lifetime costs. It is intended that this approach will be reflected in the report at the end of the AACES program.
- **World Vision**
 - World Vision carried out a full Social Return on Investment (SROI) study in part of its Uganda program. Full details of the process was not included in the report, but issues such as displacement, dead weight, attribution, drop-off and the discount rate had all been considered and a sensitivity analysis had also been carried out. Community time had also been included as a cost. The results indicated good value for money with a ratio of benefit to cost at project end of 2.4:1 and 4.8:1 after 10 years.
 - World Vision also reported on three case studies from Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania which included community voices in valuing but did not include financial details.

Annex 4: Resource Facility Review

Introduction

1. The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) is the largest Australian Government program of funding for Australian Non-Government Organisations (ANGOs) in Africa outside the Australia-NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The program is being implemented over five years (2011-16) and has a budget of up to \$90 million. The program delivers community based interventions in the sectors of food security, water and sanitation, and maternal and child health. It targets marginalised communities in 11 countries - Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with particular attention to women, children, people with disability, and people vulnerable to disaster. AACES is implemented by ten ANGOs through approximately 39 in-Africa partners. It aims to be more than a set of parallel activities bound by a common funding source; it is made up of a set of partnerships between and among Australian and African NGOs, and between the Australian Government and NGOs, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, innovation and learning, including learning for wider Australian aid programs in Africa.

2. The design of AACES provided for a Resource Facility to undertake routine program management tasks and responsibilities as well as having the capacity to contract other work. The intention of the Facility was to support coordination and communication and, originally, program level monitoring. In line with the overall design of AACES, it was intended to support the NGOs and AusAID³⁹ to maximise the time they had to manage both their own activities and the obligations of the partnerships created by AACES. Following a competitive process among a number of Africa-based organisations, the Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), headquartered in Harare, was selected in late 2011 to establish and manage the Facility. The contract was signed and operations began in January 2012. The Facility has three staff (a Coordinator, a Communications Officer, and a Finance and Administration Officer) and has the capacity to draw on the wider resources of ACBF for back-up. Although AusAID has contract management responsibilities, the Resource Facility reports to the AACES Program Steering Committee (PSC) on which all the ANGOs are represented.

3. A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of AACES began in October 2013 and will be carried out in stages up to May 2014. The evaluation plan for the MTR includes examination of the management processes used within AACES, including partnerships, governance, value for money and support arrangements (the Resource Facility). The review of the Resource Facility was carried out in October 2013 in Nairobi and through telephone interviews with AusAID staff and members of the AACES Program Steering Committee (PSC). The evaluation plan and questions are at Annex 1.

4. Since there is little quantitative monitoring information for the Resource Facility this review relies mainly on qualitative perceptions, particularly those of the Australian NGOs and AusAID staff. More perceptions of the usefulness of the Facility, and more importantly suggestions on what further value could be added by it, could have been obtained by widening the population of interviewees to include African NGOs. However, it was felt important to concentrate on the basic

³⁹ AusAID was integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade during the period of this review. The acronym AusAID is retained throughout this report for the sake of convenience, but is strictly only correct for retrospective references.

effectiveness and efficiency of the Facility rather than to increase expectations of what it might be able to deliver. As noted later in this report, canvassing the views of African NGOs on what additional support the Facility could provide should be a more prominent part of its responsibilities in the coming year.

The Resource Facility: from design to contract

5. The predecessor program to AACES, the Australian Partnerships with African Communities Program (APAC), was largely managed by AusAID staff with the support of individual consultants for specific tasks. It was assumed, rightly, in the AACES design that AusAID program staff and senior ANGO managers would need to be relieved of some of the routine duties associated with a multi-partner program in order to have time to concentrate on making the new ideas in AACES work. The duties assigned to the Resource Facility in the design and the initial scope of services (organise meetings, manage internal communications, check invoices, produce an annual report, support monitoring and research) are consistent with this relief role. However, the design also proposed that the facility

be located in a development organisation in Africa ... to ensure it is well connected with key issues and understands how to work effectively across different African contexts. It will also ensure the facility has wide-ranging contacts as a basis for contracting specific tasks as required.

6. This proposal contains an expectation that skills, knowledge and networks not otherwise available within partners would be mobilised in support of AACES as the program developed. This expectation was not set out in the scope of services which formed the basis for the tender process, but informed the selection of organisations invited to bid. The AusAID procurement outcome minute records the view that

It is important that the selected organisation has strong links within the African development community [and] understands the nature of partnerships between government and civil society.

Only organisations which potentially offered these advantages and were already established in Africa participated in the tender process.

7. The tender process did not identify any organisation with satisfactory capabilities over the range of tasks required, and ultimately a reduced scope of services was agreed which matched the perceived capabilities of ACBF, the highest scoring bidder. The main amendment was the removal of the requirement to support monitoring and evaluation. At this point the strengths of the ACBF bid were perceived, among more basic management skills, as: experience in engaging with civil society organisations; good quality research; strong knowledge management; proactive approach to media management; and enthusiasm to learn from AACES partners and AusAID.

Has the Resource Facility been effective?

Was the expectation of how the RF model would contribute to the effectiveness of AACES clear and consistent with the overall theory of change in AACES, and have those expectations been met? Have the demands on ACBF as the service provider been clear? Have ACBF's main products

and services each met expectations? How has ACBF promoted partnership and learning across AACES? What opportunities have there been for ACBF to propose and follow through improvements to AACES operations and how have these been used? Have there been any benefits realised by AACES or the Australian aid program in Africa from links with the wider ACBF network?

8. The basic assumption that AACES needed a contracted out resource to free up management time and support the activities that underpin partnership and learning has not been challenged by experience. Part of the implicit theory of change of AACES is that horizontal partnerships between NGOs (supplementing the more traditional vertical ones between Australian NGOs and their African partners) would improve quality of outcomes, and that they are unlikely to be achieved without applying resources to the intentional structural “glue” that brings partners together. The operation and value of partnerships will be further explored in the main mid-term review, but in terms of outputs the two reflection workshops, two thematic workshops and four PSC meetings, as well as the creation of a communications platform, would have been impossible to organise without the backing of a Resource Facility.

9. The two alternatives to contracting out would have been:

- i. for AusAID to have employed more staff. A calculation of the comparative costs, assuming that AusAID would have had to employ three staff at roughly equivalent levels to the three currently employed by ACBF, suggests that some 12% of the contract price (\$370,000) might have been saved by keeping the functions in house. However, this does not include additional demand on AusAID’s corporate systems. In practice, it would have been difficult to secure agreement for three additional positions. Moreover, most members of the PSC feel that having a Resource Facility which is not part of AusAID and reports to the PSC has diluted the dominance of AusAID and so helped to foster the partnership approach.
- ii. for NGOs to have seconded staff to form a Resource Facility. The cost savings would have been similarly modest but offset by the difficulty of agreeing rules of procedure and chains of responsibility. At this point it is impossible to establish whether staff would have been available.

10. Of more relevance to the way that the Resource Facility has developed within AACES is the question of what sort of contracting out, and with what range of tasks, was appropriate. The design and the contracting documents suggest that AusAID attached importance to a particular set of attributes (African knowledge and networks) in bidders which made them potentially more than providers of basic secretariat and communications services. Implicitly there was a trade-off between contracting an organisation for which service provision was not part of core business and that organisation’s added value. However, expectations of what added value would mean in practice were never clearly established either in the contract or in the first year. There were three reasons for this:

- *The form of contract.* The contractual model followed for the agreement with ACBF, like all contracts, gave prominence to the contractual deliverables. Expectations that ACBF would find ways to add value from its knowledge and networks were not easily set out in a contract, and are almost invisible in the signed version. In retrospect AusAID’s aspirations to draw on ACBF’s values, reputation and expertise for a common purpose look similar to the

aspirations for the relationship with the NGO partners in AACES, for whom a deliberately non-contractual model was chosen. Partnership agreements are increasingly used by Australian aid to derive and develop a range of benefits from collaboration with other organisations. Given the effort involved in setting up the range of partnerships already required by the AACES design, it is not surprising that AusAID did not pursue this option for ACBF. However, the contractual relationship, taken together with the other pressures below, has not favoured an open, exploratory and informed exchange about expectations. ACBF has been encouraged to present proposals for a higher level of contribution but these are cast and scrutinised as additional activities for the Resource Facility rather than creative proposals for mining ACBF's capacity.

- *Pressure of time.* Even at the beginning of the contract the potential demand on AusAID staff to invest in understanding ACBF to shape a mutually beneficial and creative contribution to AACES was significant. Both sides had to make major efforts to get the priority services as defined in the contract right, because of a steep learning curve for ACBF and some well recognised performance issues (see below). Getting added value from ACBF was a second priority which, on the evidence of interviews with AusAID staff, got low residual attention. The requirement for the Resource Facility to take more initiative in using the resources of ACBF was discussed a number of times with ACBF senior management and featured in the AusAID contractor performance assessment in February 2013. During the assessment the Facility was asked to "make suggestions given their potential value-add to the program [and] ...to be more proactive." However, at the time of this review there was still no understanding between the Facility and AusAID for what that would mean.

- *Lack of demand.* The responsibilities of the AusAID program managers from the beginning of AACES were primarily to their own management and to the AACES NGOs. There is no evidence of demand in program implementation from either group for drawing on ACBF's knowledge and networks. There have not been the senior level exchange visits between organisations that would have characterised a more proactive approach to determining ACBF's additional contribution. Feedback from AusAID senior management on the program was mainly on the results of the NGO programs rather than on the programmatic aspects of AACES. While there has been some policy discussion between ACBF and AusAID, it has been limited to the mining sector and has been largely independent of the AACES relationship. Interviews with PSC members suggest that the Australian NGOs, at least, have not missed a wider role for ACBF in the implementation of AACES, with most members stating that the range of responsibilities now carried out by the Facility (i.e. the Priority Services) was about right for the needs of AACES. Two out of ten thought that there was scope for the Facility to grow into a more developmental and less administrative role, while recognising that this might cost more.

11. The implied vision of the design and early tender documents of drawing on institutional insights and experience from an African institution shaped the tender process, but has not been achieved (although the Facility has drawn on the wider resources of ACBF for a number of practical purposes covered below, and a minority of PSC members considered that the mere fact of being run by an African organisation has helped create ownership of AACES by African NGOs). In practice

AusAID expectations of the Facility have been progressively lowered,⁴⁰ while the capacity of the Facility to understand AACES and provide the priority services has improved. The remainder of this report covers the evidence for concluding that a point of equilibrium has been reached, although not by an efficient route.

12. The review looked separately at the Resource Facility's products and services. Of the products, the first Annual Report (2011-2012) was thought by all interviewees to be a high quality and useful product: high quality in that it presented the rationale, structure and results of AACES in an engaging way, and useful for⁴¹

- i. Explaining AACES to AusAID senior management and other Australian decision makers
- ii. Highlighting to African audiences the extent of Australian support for development in their countries, and communicating the idea of NGOs working together to African decision makers
- iii. Creating an occasion (country launches) to reinforce local contacts in Africa
- iv. Helping African NGO staff to feel that they were part of a bigger enterprise.

13. The process of production is recognised by AusAID, the NGOs and the Resource Facility itself to have been flawed. What went wrong is documented in the Resource Facility's Lessons Log, but the principal problems were a poor first draft, lack of planning and unrealistic timelines. As a result, considerable time was spent by AusAID and NGO staff, and ACBF's communications officer, in rewriting the text and supporting ancillary functions such as illustration and layout. Expectations of an interactive e-version of the report were not met despite what AusAID saw as a clear brief. Constructive lessons have been drawn from the experience, as demonstrated by the much better quality of drafts and full compliance with a more demanding set of deadlines for the current annual report process. However, the experience of having had unexpectedly significant inputs to this and other written products has caused AusAID to question quality control within the Facility (the quality of planning documentation was scored 2 – weak – in the contractor performance assessment) and to take a hands on approach in the planning stage of all written products. This approach will only be relaxed once they are confident that the apparent recent improvement is sustained.

14. A Partnership Survey was undertaken by the Resource Facility in 2012 and 2013. Based on a survey and (in 2013) one to one interviews, it provides a set of data on perceptions of the practice of partnership behaviours in AACES. For its execution the Facility was able to draw on ACBF's statistical and IT resources. The small numbers of respondents make drawing robust conclusions difficult, and the reports are rightly careful in making sense of the data. However, as interviewees for this report pointed out, the results are not compelling pointers to the need for behaviour change.⁴² The consensus among interviewees was that the Facility had carried out the brief given to them by the PSC well and that the continuation of the survey may provide a useful time series, but that more thinking needed to be done about methods for understanding partnerships in ways which led to more specific pointers to change.

⁴⁰ This process can be traced from the design through successive scopes of services and contract amendments through to the contractor performance assessment.

⁴¹ This list is derived from interviews; factors of usefulness are listed if mentioned by one or more interviewees.

⁴² The extent to which this perception is shared by African NGOs will be further explored in the Mid-Term Review.

15. The Resource Facility has additionally produced for AusAID internal purposes briefs detailing AACES activities by country. These now cover every country of operation and AusAID reported that they drew on them regularly.

16. The secretariat services provided by the Resource Facility are regarded by AusAID staff and the PSC as now meeting expectations after some learning experiences, particularly over the first reflection workshop. The organisation of regular meetings and learning events is highly rated (AACES NGOs are represented on working groups to prepare major events). Minutes of PSC meetings and workshop records are regarded as reasonably accurate. The process of producing workshop records is long drawn out (six weeks for the last reflection workshop) and dependent on the quality of notes available to the facilitator, and the value of the product (at over 30 pages) should be reviewed. The role of the Yammer communications platform managed by the Facility in instant communication about AACES events to all partners and acting as a repository of important documents is highly appreciated, as is the role of the Facility's Communications Officer in popularising it and encouraging its use.

17. The role of the Resource Facility in communications is still developing. The AACES communications plan devotes most of its pages to the Annual Report which is well established in the Facility's work programme as the key external communications tool. The same is true of Yammer and the regular newsletter for internal communications. Responsibilities in respect of the media are less well defined. The Resource Facility has a clear role in the overall and country level launches of the Annual Report, and achieved extensive Africa-wide coverage of the last report by drawing on ACBF's network of media contacts. However, the offer to develop media packs for special dates in the development calendar had no uptake, there have been no media releases unrelated to the Annual Report, and there has so far been no time to develop the low or no cost media visits to AACES activities envisaged in the plan. There appears to be no consensus on how extensive the Facility's media efforts should be, although no informants for this review advocated greatly expanded objectives, or had a clear view of how they should fit with the strategies of AACES partners. There is no mention in the communications plan of support to partners' communications activities, but a potentially useful initiative is being undertaken by the Communications Officer to provide story writing and photography training to AFAP's African partners. In general the supply led parts of the media section of the communications plan have not so far produced results; it may be that there is more potential in building relationships with communications colleagues in African NGOs to identify demands for support.

18. Two aspects of the Resource Facility's services were of more interest to AusAID than the NGO partners:

- i. *Support for evaluations of NGO activities in Zimbabwe and South Sudan.* In each case the Facility was tasked with recruiting a consultant, but in the first case it was also responsible for coordinating comments and providing a finished product. Although recruitment was effective, getting to a final version of the Zimbabwe report was a long drawn out process in which the Facility had responsibility but no power to ensure that all relevant views were provided promptly. This seems to have been more a case of inappropriate outsourcing of activity than a weakness on the Facility's part, and as a consequence its role in the second evaluation was limited to recruitment and administration.

- ii. *Invoicing.* ACBF's invoices to AusAID under the contract have been dogged by errors ranging from addition errors to transposition of exchange rates and inclusion of inadmissible expenditure. The last mistake was as recent as August 2013. ACBF's explanation is that because ACBF does not normally have reimbursable expenditure it has no automated system for generating such invoices, allowing more scope for human error. Managers have now introduced a degree of automation and believe that the scope for errors has been reduced. The mistakes have caused significant damage to ACBF's reputation with AusAID, whose staff have had to spend a lot of time in follow up correspondence. As a result of ACBF's track record, the priority service in the contract of checking NGO invoices was not activated (in practice it is difficult to see how contracting out this core fiduciary responsibility would have worked).

19. The expectations of the policy contribution that ACBF could make to AACES, and the results, have been covered above. The review also considered whether in more modest ways the Resource Facility had contributed to partnership and learning across AACES, or in other ways proposed and followed through improvements to AACES operations. Most interviewees felt that the Facility had contributed to the development of partnership by being responsive to feedback from across AACES, not just from AusAID as contract holders. The Facility output most consistently identified as a contribution to partnership and learning was the introduction of the Yammer platform. This has been energetically promoted by the Facility and now has 117 members across AACES, with active thematic and country groups. Usage data shows a steady increase over time, but the Facility's assessment is that it is not yet being used to its full potential as a medium for exchange of ideas. The use of Yammer to give access to ACBF's on line library is a demonstration of intent to make a useful contribution to learning, but like the media kits for special occasions it is a general offer which may have little take up among busy program staff unless it is accompanied by pointers to items of special relevance.

20. The Resource Facility has not so far made an identifiable contribution to shaping reflection and learning workshops. The concept note produced for the first workshop was helpful but did not reflect a distinctive approach from ACBF experience. The recruitment of facilitators has been treated as routine procurement, with mixed results. AusAID staff have already raised with the Facility the possibility of the Coordinator or the Communications Officer taking a more active role in planning and managing meetings on the basis of experience so far; a variation on this theme might be to bring in ACBF staff with special skills and insights as contributors to meetings. A more proactive contribution would complement, not replace, the welcome move by NGO partners to contribute to preparation and facilitation of meetings.

21. In attempting to move beyond responsiveness to specific feedback to more actively meeting the expectations of AACES partners, the Resource Facility faces a difficulty. There is some demand from AusAID and some of the NGOs, and a commitment from its parent organisation, that it should step up from being an effective administrative machine to contribute more constructively to the implementation of AACES. However, in practice it has not been easy for it to understand what the expectations are, especially given the diversity of organisations which make up AACES. There is no identifiable set of "learning products" that would suit the range of requirements, and as some have pointed out, learning is not all about supply. Some ANGOs are satisfied with the present position. Some African NGOs may want capacity building beyond the immediate requirements of AACES. The contractual relationship with AusAID makes it difficult for NGOs to work out what they can demand

from the Facility. The participation of the PSC chair and vice-chair in monthly meetings between the Facility and AusAID has opened up a channel of communication between the Facility and the ANGOS, but it appears so far to have acted more as a vehicle of transparency than a means of providing firmer guidance to the Facility. In the circumstances careful planning in the context of the next annual plan to anticipate requirements will not satisfy every partner and may not be productive (there will in any case be no additional budget for new initiatives). A little imagination and creativity invested in small initiatives (such as the media training for AFAP partners) responding to demand or to experiment with demand may provide greater returns.

Has the Resource Facility been efficient?

Has ACBF carried out its obligations so as to require no more than the expected supervision from AusAID? Have communications with AusAID been regular and effective? Has expenditure been in accordance with the budget? Are ACBF's procurement and financial practices well managed and robust? How has the resource facility team drawn on the wider resources of ACBF?

22. AusAID anticipated that ACBF would take longer to understand working with AusAID than, say, an Australian managing contractor, and made allowances for the additional time it would take to understand the underlying principles and structures of AACES. Nevertheless, the contractor performance assessment records that at the end of the first year there were still significant efficiency issues, ie that AusAID staff had had to spend much more time than anticipated on corresponding about written products, chasing deadlines, following up incorrect invoices and generally making the intellectual running on the content of major events. The total time spent by AusAID staff on the 2011-12 Annual Report is not recorded but is felt to have been a major inefficiency (some of it in retrospect avoidable, as demonstrated by the decision this year to rationalise AusAID involvement in commenting on drafts). The experience in 2013 has been of steady improvement. The Facility now maintains a tracking matrix for all activities in the Annual Plan. The latest version shows all activities on track, and AusAID staff confirmed that they no longer spend time chasing missed deadlines. The move of the Facility from Harare to Nairobi, completed in mid-2013, later than expected owing to protracted negotiations with the Kenyan Government, has improved communications, allowing regular face to face meetings during peak workloads and for monthly meetings with the PSC chair.

23. Externally, interviewees felt that the Resource Facility's performance had improved over time and that it now provided clear communications and plenty of advance notice allowing efficient responses to partnership requirements (principally reporting and attendance at events).

24. Resource Facility expenditure has been well within budget (\$1.268 million or 41% of the contract budget spent 19 months into the contract or with 80% of the contract period elapsed), and there is sufficient remaining for a six month no cost extension.

25. The main expenditure items other than salaries are consultants and costs of conference venues. There has been one instance of AusAID directing the Facility to contract a named consultant for convenience, but otherwise in recruitment the Facility has used ACBF's competitive procurement procedures which are similar to AusAID's and require sign-off of each contract by in-house procurement specialists and the ACBF Executive Director. For conference venues, a set of recommendations is prepared based on availability in the selected capital and negotiated rates with individual hotels in what is generally a competitive market, particularly with the lead time which the

Resource Facility uses. The choice of venue is constrained by security requirements and is made ultimately by AusAID.

26. The Resource Facility has not yet completed its move to new premises. It is housed in a Kenyan research organisation, but the three staff are not co-located and must walk some distance or e-mail to communicate. ACBF are working on a solution, but these conditions are a major bar to efficiency.

Conclusions and recommendations

27. The ambitions of AACES required dedicated resources to provide the glue to underpin the proposed partnerships. The options for providing these resources were limited: the modest savings from keeping the functions in house would have been outweighed by the undermining of the partnership (if they had stayed with AusAID) or confusion in roles and responsibilities (if NGOs had provided the staff).

28. ACBF has not lived up to the intentions of the design or the potential it displayed in the tender process. Some of this is due to lack of initiative by ACBF and the slower than expected learning process around key services; some of it is due to a lack of clarity on the part of AusAID as to what it wanted, and lack of time to invest in working this out with ACBF. But the secretariat services that the resource facility has delivered turn out to have been the ones that stakeholders value most. There is still some demand and potential for the Resource Facility to add greater value to the implementation of AACES drawing on its links with the wider ACBF; but the effort put into defining and planning it must be balanced against the uncertain returns. Supply led initiatives do not appear to have worked; the emphasis needs to be on identifying and stimulating demand. With an eye to sustainability and ACBF's core mandate, the focus should be on initiatives which allow African NGOs to do a better job within AACES partnerships. AusAID and the PSC may need to spend some time with senior ACBF managers to determine guidelines and examples, but in principle such activities might include:

- Using existing skills of ACBF staff to provide practical training
- Using ACBF staff as resource people or facilitators for AACES events (on the lines of the proposal to invite ACBF's communications specialist to run the Annual Report launch)
- Effecting targeted introductions for AACES NGOs to research resources in their countries of operation
- Bringing specific pieces of research to the attention of AACES partners

29. The implicit trade-off between the lack of service provision experience and the advantage of African knowledge and networks did not turn out as expected.. On the other hand, AACES has a secretariat which shows every sign of providing core functions which meet expectations. AusAID's investment in this result has been heavy and not very efficient, and it has not been possible in this limited review to establish whether it was an investment in the Resource Facility alone or whether there has been wider learning for ACBF. Nevertheless, provided that current staff stay in position, the Facility is an asset that should not easily be discarded.

Recommendation 1

The Resource Facility should be retained in its present form for the remainder of the AACES program.

Recommendation 2

ACBF should continue to provide the Resource Facility for the remainder of the current AACES program.

Recommendation 3

The Resource Facility Coordinator should be given a flexible mandate from the PSC to develop initiatives drawing on ACBF resources which enrich AACES learning or are of practical use particularly to African NGOs. Recognising that there will be no additional budget, such initiatives should be undertaken within existing budgets, be sufficiently attractive for AACES partner to contribute, or funded from other sources. This mandate should be backed by ACBF management and take a specified proportion of the Coordinator's time.

Recommendation 4

The AACES communications plan should be revised during 2014 to take account of 2013 experience and emerging opportunities to support communications efforts in AACES members if there is a demand.

30. There remain considerable reputational risks to the Resource Facility. Despite improvements in performance, it has still to prove that it can deliver sustained high quality in written products, step up its substantive (not just administrative) contribution to AACES events and ensure an end to invoicing errors. The risks are to some extent implicit in the Tracking Matrix, but not set out explicitly with mitigation measures.

Recommendation 5

The Resource Facility Coordinator should take personal responsibility for identifying reputational risks and implementing mitigation measures. This aspect of his performance should be covered in the annual contractor performance assessment.

31. ACBF senior management take a welcome interest in the Resource Facility and the relationship with AACES (it is covered along with all aspects of ACBF performance at regular senior executive meetings). This interest covers working conditions for Facility staff, but the problem has not yet been solved.

Recommendation 6

ACBF should resolve the question of accommodation for the Resource Facility without delay.