



Management Response

Mid Term Review of the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme

September 2014

Initiative Summary

Initiative Name			
AidWorks initiative number	INJ318		
Commencement date	1 July 2011	Completion date	30 June 2016
Total Australian \$	\$90 million		
Total other \$	N/A		
Delivery organisation(s)	ActionAid Australia, Anglican Overseas Aid (AVI and Nossal Institute for Global Health), Australian Foundation for Peoples of Asia and the Pacific, Care Australia, Caritas Australia, Marie Stopes International Australia, Oxfam Australia, Plan Australia, WaterAid Australia, World Vision Australia		
Implementing partner(s)	See: http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/web/aaces-annual-report-2012-13/Pages/annex-list-of-aaces-ngos.aspx		
Country/Region	11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa		
Primary sector	Food security, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, women's empowerment and disability inclusion.		
Initiative objective/s	<p>AACES is a partnership program with ten Australian NGOs, their in-country partners and DFAT, delivering community-based interventions in 11 African countries focusing on marginalised groups including women, children, people with disability and people vulnerable to disaster. The three AACES objectives are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marginalised people have sustainable access to the services they require (approximately 90 per cent of the program) 2. DFAT policies and programs in Africa are strengthened particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalised groups (approximately 5 per cent of the program) 3. The Australian public are more informed about development issues in Africa (approximately 3 per cent of the program). 		

Evaluation Summary

Evaluation Objective: To assess how AACES is tracking against its objectives and to identify gaps and areas for improvement. In tracking progress against objectives, the focus was on developing an understanding of how AACES as a whole is delivering value to DFAT and its partners. Validating individual activity results was not a focus of the evaluation.

Evaluation Completion Date: 24 June 2014

Evaluation Team: John Winter (Team Leader), Rosalind David (Civil Society Specialist), Anna Roche (Value for Money Specialist) and Chris Roche (Value for Money Expert).

This management response was prepared by DFAT in partnership with AACES NGO representatives. Please note that 'AACES partners' refers to DFAT, Australian NGOs and their in-Africa partners.

Response to the evaluation report

Assessment of the quality of the report

- › The Mid Term Review was intended to be a learning process to take stock and identify gaps and areas for improvement. DFAT and AACES partners wanted to know what was working well, what progress had been made, what could be done better and what lessons could be taken away to inform future programming.
- › The report responds to these questions comprehensively and meets DFAT's monitoring and evaluation standards. It provides practical recommendations and lessons to strengthen AACES in its remaining two years, as required in the terms of reference.
- › AACES partners respected the consultants' ability to grasp the complexity of the program quickly and to work in the spirit of partnership throughout.
- › DFAT appreciates that the complex nature of AACES may have impacted the review's comprehensiveness, given the numerous partners, (10 Australian NGOs and some 40 in-Africa partners) differing country contexts, (11 African countries of delivery), and a combination of different approaches, (strengths- and rights-based, and participatory) and areas of focus (food security, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, women's empowerment and disability inclusive development).
- › In addition, as the consultants attest to under Limitations (page 3) in the report, the overall review was to some extent limited due to its relatively heavy reliance on information provided in the diverse set of individual NGO reports. This meant that some judgements made by the consultants may reflect a lack of information in individual NGO midterm review reports for which supplementary data gathering could not compensate. The report and its recommendations should be considered with this in mind.

Key findings of and responses to the report

- › The report provides evidence that AACES remains highly relevant to Australia's interests in Africa. AACES is generating lessons about how to include the most marginalised people in the benefits of economic growth and improved governance. It is also delivering a valuable understanding of the context of extreme poverty.

- › It is clear that the program is making a difference at the household and community level, supporting individuals' access to, and ability to demand services, as well as building the capacity of duty-bearers responsible for delivering services.
- › The efforts of program partners to target or include women and people with disability in activities were recognised in the report. These early successes make AACES well placed to deliver on many of the Australian Government's priorities and align closely to some of the Strategic Targets set out in the Aid Policy Statement released in June 2014.
- › Recommendation 2 is based on the consultants' identification of a variation between the design intent for Objective 2 (DFAT policies and programs in Africa are strengthened particularly in their ability to target and service the needs of marginalised people) and its practical implementation. However, AACES partners agree that work to strengthen AACES projects (as part of DFAT programs) is a legitimate component of objective 2 that enables stronger results on the ground and should be highly valued. DFAT's response to this recommendation is addressed in the below table.

Future Directions of the Program

- › The report is timely at this point in the five year program. DFAT encourages AACES NGOs to use the review findings as an opportunity to strengthen their projects and contribute to improving the program as a whole in its remaining two years.
- › DFAT will track the actions set out in the table below to ensure progress is achieved in line with the recommendations on NGO theories of change, sustainability beyond the life of AACES, monitoring and evaluation systems and value for money approaches.
- › Despite the good work being done to strengthen AACES projects, more could be done to document the successes and lessons involved in trialling new and unique approaches. This information can then be used to inform partner NGO programs funded from other sources, and other DFAT programs in Africa and elsewhere in the remaining years.
- › DFAT appreciates NGO partners' flexibility in implementing the policy directive to discontinue development awareness raising activities from July 2014.
- › While the Africa Program budget has reduced significantly over the last two financial years, there has been limited impact to AACES activity delivery.
- › Given the constrained budget environment, now is an opportune time to demonstrate the program's value and strengthen results in its final years.

Response to the recommendations

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>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</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>DFAT agrees that NGO partnerships should continue to examine the relevance of their theories of change.</p> <p>AACES partners agree more can be done to document the unique approach to working with communities and civil society organisation to broker sustainable solutions.</p>	<p>DFAT will assess the program theory of change as presented in the MTR, taking into consideration NGOs' theory of change examinations, annually during the Quality at Implementation process.</p> <p>DFAT will revise reporting guidance, including relevant templates, to make more explicit the need for NGO partners to capture the relevance of their theories of change.</p> <p>AACES partners will work together to establish a process to improve external communication (see recommendation 4) about how they are working with communities, and other civil society organisations and networks to deliver sustainable change to the lives of marginalised people within their lived realities in the communities where AACES is implemented.</p>	<p>DFAT - AACES program managers (at desk and Nairobi Post) updated reporting guidance with endorsement from AACES PSC by end of July 2014 to be used in annual reports due 10 September 2014.</p> <p>DFAT will monitor NGOs progress to capture the relevance of their theories of change when assessing annual reports.</p> <p>DFAT and the PSC Chair will monitor progress to improve external communication providing updates at future PSC meetings.</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>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.</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>AACES partners agree that to date, work on objective 2 has been heavily balanced towards strengthening AACES projects, mainly through supporting learning and exchange within AACES. This is in line with where we envisioned the program would be at this point of the five year program.</p> <p>While there is still an appetite within DFAT to learn from AACES to strengthen policies and programs more broadly, opportunities to inform DFAT policy may be reduced in the current policy context and budget environment.</p> <p>For this reason, the suggested rewording of the objective to focus on programming rather than policy makes good sense but there is still scope to inform other development programs outside of AACES projects, including those being delivered in Africa.</p>	<p>DFAT will reword the objective to: “Development programs, including AACES, are strengthened, particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalised people through learning, collaboration and exchange among AACES NGOs and between AACES NGOs and DFAT”.</p> <p>DFAT will ensure all references to objective 2 in reporting guidance and in the public domain are changed to reflect the revision.</p> <p>DFAT will identify its learning requirements, particularly areas where it is keen to learn from civil society, and share this with partners. AACES NGOs will nominate areas of mutual interest to focus engagement for the remaining two years of the program. Progress of engagement in these areas of mutual interest will be measured in the final evaluation.</p>	<p>DFAT will revise wording in reporting guidance and in the public domain by end of September 2014.</p> <p>DFAT - AACES program managers (at desk and post) will identify its learning requirements by end of September 2014.</p> <p>Once learning requirements are identified, AACES NGOs will nominate areas of mutual interest to DFAT by end of October 2014.</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>3. That objective 3 be removed in 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 on the ability to generate their own communications products and to tell their own stories.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>AACES NGOs were informed in May 2014 that funding for development awareness raising activities will be discontinued from 1 July 2014 and that from year 4 onwards no new objective 3 activities could commence.</p> <p>Where it fits within objective 1 work, DFAT encourages AACES NGOs to continue the capacity building work they are doing with their African partners and communities to build their voice to tell their own stories. In doing so, DFAT will ensure that any development awareness raising activities that follow on from this work are not funded by the Australian Government.</p>	<p>Prior to the report's publication, AACES NGOs were informed that each NGO contract would be reduced by 3 per cent (the upper limit of objective 3 activities) for the next two years in line with the policy directive to discontinue development awareness raising activities from 1 July 2014.</p> <p>DFAT will revise reporting guidance, including annual plan and annual report templates, and accompanying budgetary annexes to reflect this change.</p> <p>DFAT will support capacity building work that promotes the voice of African NGOs and community beneficiaries where it fits within objective 1.</p>	<p>DFAT revised templates for the annual plan by mid-June 2014 and the annual report template by end of July 2014.</p> <p>DFAT reviewed annual plans in July 2014 to ensure AACES NGOs are working within the scope of objective 1 where capacity building activities to promote the voice of their in-Africa partners are continued.</p> <p>NGO partners will share good practice, for example through blogs, the AACES Resource Facility and Yammer.</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>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.</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>AACES partners agree that opportunities to share lessons from AACES may have been limited to date by not having a clear learning strategy but believes that this can be focused on in the remaining two years of AACES within the existing AACES architecture.</p> <p>There are two components to learning for AACES partners: NGOs learning from their project level experience; and learning as a result of AACES as a program.</p> <p>In the current financial environment, targeting existing resources within AACES will provide value for money while making the most out of these opportunities.</p>	<p>DFAT has already negotiated a broader scope of services in the extended contract with the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) which serves as the AACES Resource Facility, given its links with research and education institutions in Africa.</p> <p>Resource Facility to work with the PSC to develop a learning strategy by the end of September 2014, tying in the learning requirements of DFAT as set out in recommendation 2.</p> <p>Intra-NGO networks can be utilised for research papers and for developing an evidence-base on particular issues, approaches, successes or failures. More work could be done by NGO partners to explore the existing research links they have and how to use them in this context.</p> <p>Annual Reflection meetings are already facilitating exchange on strategic issues (disability and gender) and could certainly be a forum for developing a learning strategy.</p> <p>Modifying the purpose of the AACES Annual Report from a communications product that listed key results and outcomes to an evidence-based/learning product that seeks to inform policies and programs would provide NGOs with the opportunity to disseminate learning and evidence in a meaningful way.</p> <p>Reporting guidance will be modified to allow NGOs to capture lessons learnt as part of exploring their theories of change.</p>	<p>DFAT finalised the Resource Facility extension by 15 July 2014.</p> <p>Resource Facility to work with DFAT and the PSC to develop a learning strategy, facilitate linkages with relevant African institutions, track documentation produced by AACES partners and publish it for internal and external use.</p> <p>NGO partners to strengthen research links and learning products, where appropriate, and ensure that learnings are disseminated across AACES partners through the RF and yammer.</p> <p>AACES partners identify and review learning opportunities, documentation and strategies at PSC meetings, workshops and through yammer.</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>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.</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>AACES partners support this recommendation but note that development of approaches to value for money are related to organisation financial and project management processes and systems, as well as monitoring and evaluation information.</p>	<p>NGOs will further develop and document their approaches to assessing Value for Money in the next two years, in line with the AACES Value for Money Framework.</p> <p>DFAT will revise reporting guidance for NGO projects to add a section on Value for Money, including for the case studies.</p> <p>In developing the next Annual Report, the Resource Facility will draft a section that will include an assessment of the Value for Money of the partnership approach to detail the strength of the unique approach of the AACES partnership.</p>	<p>NGOs to demonstrate development of their approaches in their annual report due on 10 September 2014.</p> <p>DFAT revised reporting guidance by end of July 2014.</p> <p>Resource Facility to begin collating existing evidence of the effectiveness of the partnership approach to be included in the AACES Annual Report, published in early 2015.</p>

Recommendation	Response	Actions	Responsibility
<p>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.</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p> <p>AACES partners agree that all NGO partnerships should review their monitoring and evaluation systems.</p> <p>In line with usual reporting procedures within the AACES architecture, the PSC has agreed that it would be more appropriate for NGOs to report findings from their reviews of their M&E systems to DFAT and actions will be followed up by DFAT with individual NGOs.</p>	<p>NGOs will review their monitoring and evaluation systems and report findings from these reviews to DFAT in the next snapshot report.</p>	<p>NGOs to provide report findings in the February 2015 snapshot report.</p>