



Office of Development Effectiveness

Review of Uptake of ODE Recommendations – Summary Report

Background

ODE has conducted a review of six published evaluations to examine whether or to what extent the recommendations have been implemented by program areas in line with the management response. The six evaluations reviewed include:

- An evaluation of policy dialogue in AusAID
- From Seed to Scale Up: Lessons learnt from Australia's Rural Development Assistance
- Responding to Crisis: Evaluation of the Australian Aid Program's Contribution to the National HIV Response in PNG
- Building on Local Strengths: Evaluation of Australian Law and Justice Assistance
- Working Beyond Government: Evaluation of AusAID's Engagement with Civil Society in Developing Countries, and
- Philippines Country Program Evaluation¹

These reports were selected on the basis that sufficient time has passed since their publication and key decision makers have had time to implement the recommendations.

The approach for the review was developed in consultation with DFAT Internal Audit and is largely based on how Internal Audit reports the status of audit recommendations to the Audit Committee. ODE's approach was endorsed by the Independent Evaluation Committee out of session in May.

Program areas were asked to provide progress updates to the ODE recommendations.² ODE provided guidance to ensure responses were evidence based and adequately addressed the content of the recommendations. Responses (cleared by relevant FAS') were received for all six evaluations and are provided at [Attachment A](#).

Analysis of findings

The six ODE evaluations had a total of 54 recommendations. Management agreed to 44 (81 per cent) of these recommendations without qualification³, agreed to a further two in principle, and partially agreed with eight (see Figure 1). Figure 2 shows the breakdown by evaluation.

¹ It should be noted that even there was no formal management response for the Philippines evaluation. However, at the time of the evaluation all recommendations were subsequently implemented.

² The following categories were used for the traffic light indicator reporting – fully implemented, ongoing implementation, partially implemented, no progress in implementation and recommendation not adopted (or not being progressed).

³ This figure includes six recommendations from the Philippines Country Program evaluation. It should be noted that a formal management response was not finalised at the time of evaluation completion.

FIGURE 1: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES TO ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

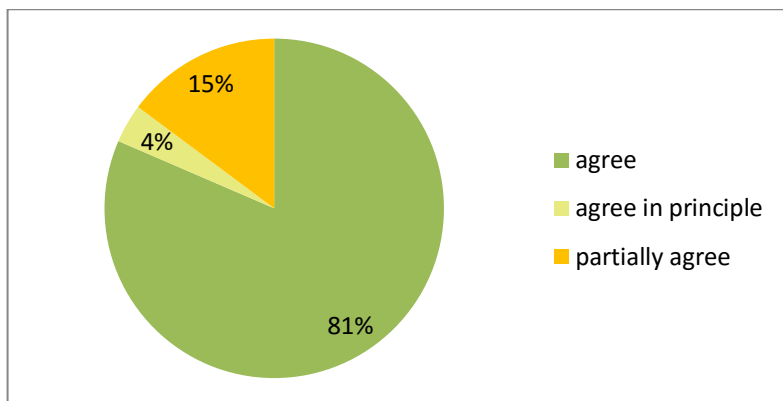
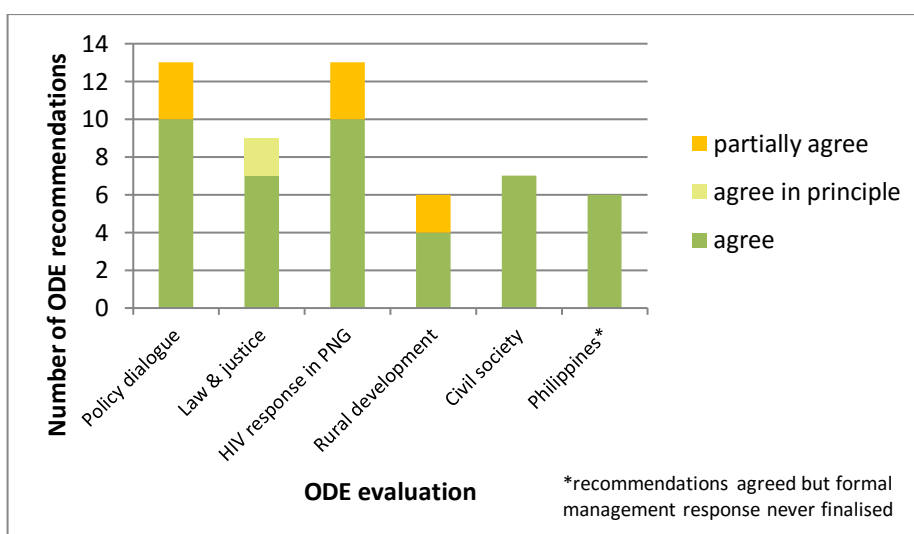


FIGURE 2: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES TO ODE RECOMMENDATIONS, BY EVALUATION



Implementation of ODE report recommendations:

The responsible program areas reported progress in implementing all 54 ODE recommendations. Of these, 15 recommendations (28 per cent) were reported as fully implemented, and the implementation of a further 31 recommendations (57 per cent) were reported as ongoing. Due to the nature of some recommendations and activities, their implementation status may be considered ongoing indefinitely. In addition, program areas may hold different views about whether and at what point in time a recommendation is deemed fully implemented.

As per Figure 3 below, a further eight recommendations (15 per cent) were reported as partially implemented (i.e. the recommendation was implemented in part but is not being pursued further). Of these, two recommendations were only ever partially agreed to during the management response process so it is expected that the recommendation would only be partially implemented. A further six recommendations were initially agreed to by program areas in their management response. Analysis of responses indicates that integration and a new aid policy environment are the primary reasons for these recommendations only being partially implemented. In some instances, program areas have responded with a description of the new opportunities that exist to progress ODE recommendations in a post integration environment.

FIGURE 3: IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF ODE RECOMMENDATIONS

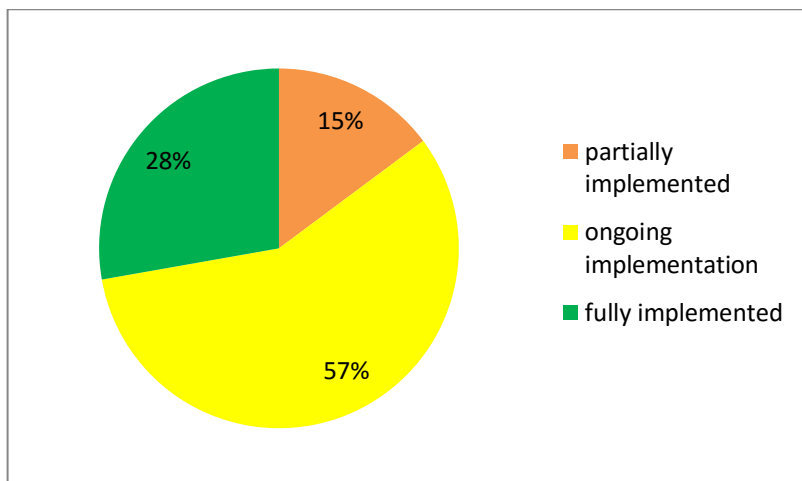
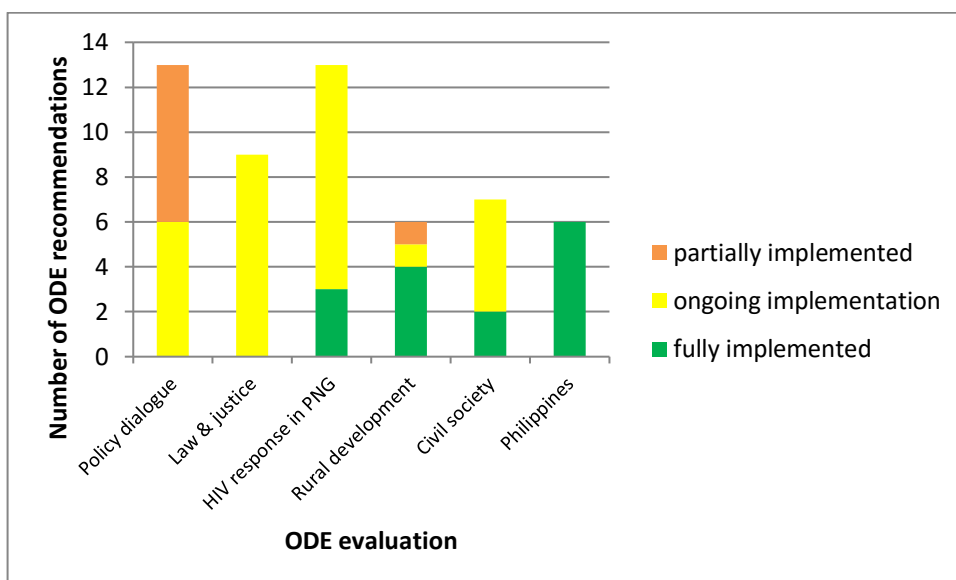


Figure 4 below shows the implementation status of recommendations, broken down by evaluation.

FIGURE 4: IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF ODE RECOMMENDATIONS, BY EVALUATION



Lessons learnt for future ODE reports and recommendations

Based on the analysis above, ODE reports have had a positive influence on program areas with the majority of recommendations from the six evaluation reports either now fully implemented (31% of all recommendations) or ongoing (54% of all recommendations). This indicates that program areas continue to see value and relevance in ODE evaluation reports long after their publication as a strong and credible evidence base on aspects of the Australian aid program.

A number of lessons learnt have been identified through this uptake of ODE recommendations exercise which promote continuous improvement of the evaluation reporting process:-

- Recommendations should be specific, objective and action-orientated.** The review of the six reports showed great variation in the length and preciseness of report recommendations. Some recommendations had lengthy sub-components while others lacked specificity and were overly descriptive. Management responses to ODE recommendations could be enhanced if

recommendations were specific, objective and action-orientated in nature. This would also enhance future monitoring of the implementation and uptake of future ODE recommendations.

- **All recommendations should have an agreed completion timeframe.** In their management response, program areas should be required to indicate a completion timeframe against each 'agreed' or 'partially agreed' recommendation. There are currently a large percentage of recommendations (54%) that after a year or more since the report was published still remain ongoing. The very nature of some recommendations will mean that they remain ongoing however it would be better practice to have a definitive end date after a substantial time period has lapsed with supporting evidence to show that the recommendation has been implemented.
- **That each evaluation has no more than eight report recommendations.** Two previous evaluations (Policy Dialogue and HIV Response in PNG) each had thirteen recommendations. Both of these evaluations also resulted in three recommendations only being 'partially agreed'. Limiting the number of report recommendations to no more than eight would help ensure that findings of the most strategic importance are reported on and allows program areas to focus their efforts in terms of where the most important policy and program changes are required.
- **A consistent rating scale for recommendations be developed and implemented.** At present, there is no ODE rating scale detailing how program areas should respond to recommendations in their management response. Developing and implementing an agreed rating scale that is used for all ODE reports would ensure consistency between evaluation reports and promote consistent data collection and analysis. The most common responses at present are: - 'agree', 'partially agree' or 'disagree'. ODE should also provide program areas with guidance as to what information should be included against each of the response categories.
- **Ensuring early findings and recommendation workshops are held with key stakeholders.** Involving key stakeholders in the evaluation process and discussing findings and recommendations as they emerge increases the program areas understanding and ownership of recommendations. This may lead to an increased likelihood that recommendations are agreed to. Early discussion and regular communication also allows program areas to align ODE recommendations with any resultant policy or program changes.

The impact of integration on ODE recommendations

Despite the integration of AusAID into DFAT, no recommendations were reported by program areas as having 'no progress in implementation' or 'recommendation not adopted/not progressed'. Responses from four out of the six evaluations made specific reference to integration and the new development policy framework which has superseded the Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework (which was in place at the time that management responses were drafted and finalised). Despite the structural and policy changes, the responses and action taken by program areas indicates that the majority of ODE recommendations are still relevant in the current operating environment.

Conclusion

The review of uptake of ODE recommendations has highlighted that ODE reports and their recommendations have had a significant impact on policy and program areas with the vast majority of recommendations from the six reports agreed to by management. Program areas submitted complete and evidence based updates to the implementation of recommendations. Going forward, it is important for ODE to decide how to improve the recommendation and management response process and to consider which lessons learnt should be implemented for the next phase of evaluation reports.