

Review of Uptake of ODE Recommendations

November 2016

Introduction

This review assessed the department's progress in implementing management responses to recent ODE evaluations. The review is carried out annually. Similar reviews were done in 2014 and 2015.

The review had three objectives:

- To assess the extent to which actions proposed in management responses have been implemented;
- To assess the influence of ODE evaluations on aid program management and policy; and
- To identify lessons to improve the usefulness of the annual uptake reviews.

Scope

The uptake of ODE recommendations is reviewed twice for each ODE evaluation with the first review taking place at least a year after the evaluation was published and the second review taking place after another year. This review considers 11 ODE evaluations published between March 2014 and August 2015:

Six evaluations are reviewed for the first time:

- Australia's Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis (September 2014)
- Working in Decentralised Service Systems (January 2015)
- Research for Better Aid (February 2015)
- Window of Opportunity: Targeting Undernutrition in Children (April 2015)
- Evaluation of the Australia-Vietnam Country Strategy 2010-15 (May 2015)
- Evaluation of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (August 2015)

Five evaluations are reviewed for a second time:

- Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development Program (January 2014)
- Quality of Australian Aid Operational Evaluations (June 2014)
- Evaluation of Australia's Response to the Horn of Africa Humanitarian Crisis, 2011 (July 2014)
- Smart Economics: Evaluation of Australian Aid Support for Women's Economic Empowerment (September 2014)
- Evaluation of Australia Aid to Timor-Leste (June 2014)

For comparative purposes data are also provided for the following evaluations which were reviewed in 2014:

- Working Beyond Government: Evaluation of AusAID's Engagement with Civil Society in Developing Countries (March 2012)
- From Seed to Scale Up: Lessons Learnt from Australia's Rural Development Assistance (April 2012)
- Responding to Crisis: Evaluation of the Australian Aid Program's Contribution to the National HIV Response in PNG (August 2012)

- Building on Local Strengths: Evaluation of Australian Law and Justice Assistance (December 2012) Countries
- An Evaluation of Policy Dialogue in AusAID (April 2013)

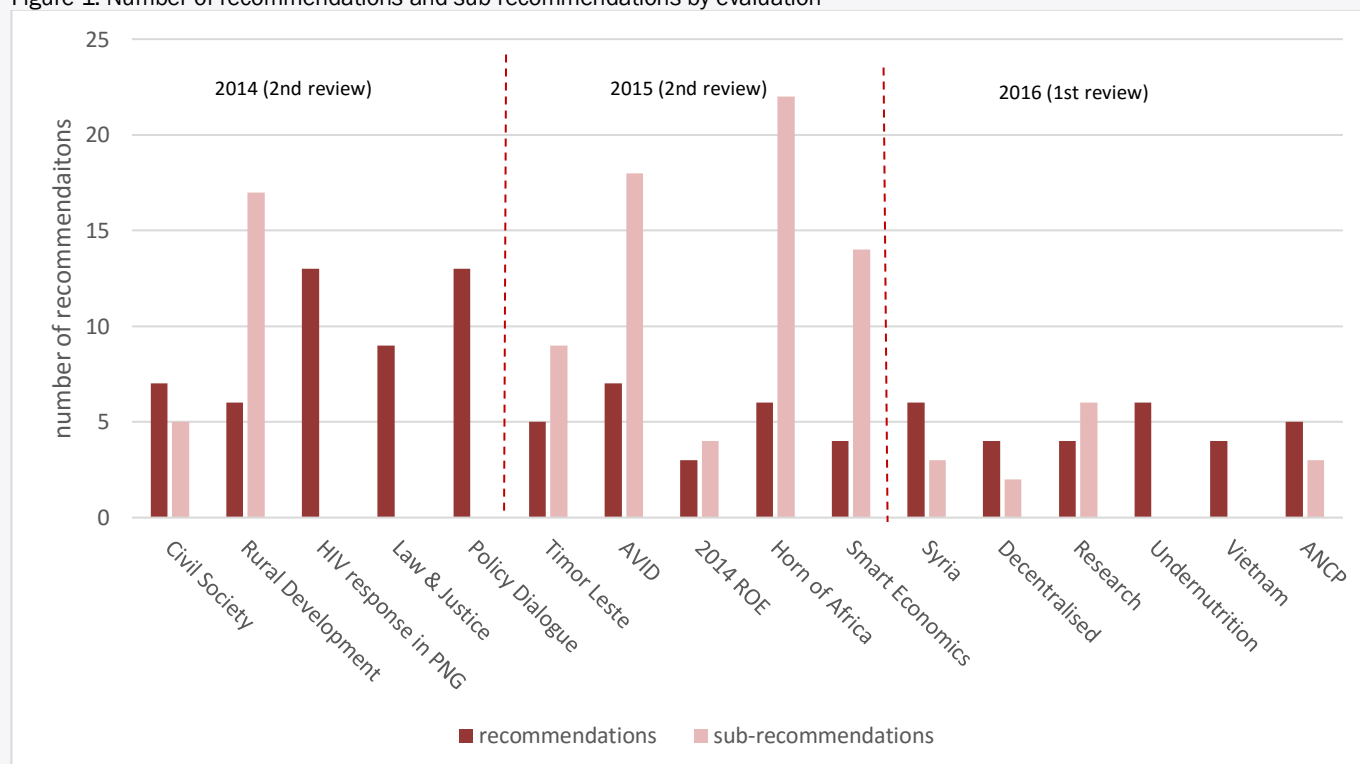
Method

As in the used in previous reviews, divisions were asked to rate their progress in implementation of recommendations and list actions undertaken to implement recommendations. A template for responses and a good practice example were provided for guidance. Divisions were given up to four weeks to provide their response but some took considerably longer. Similar to last year, delays were experienced due to staff turnover and the time needed for senior management to clear responses.

Findings

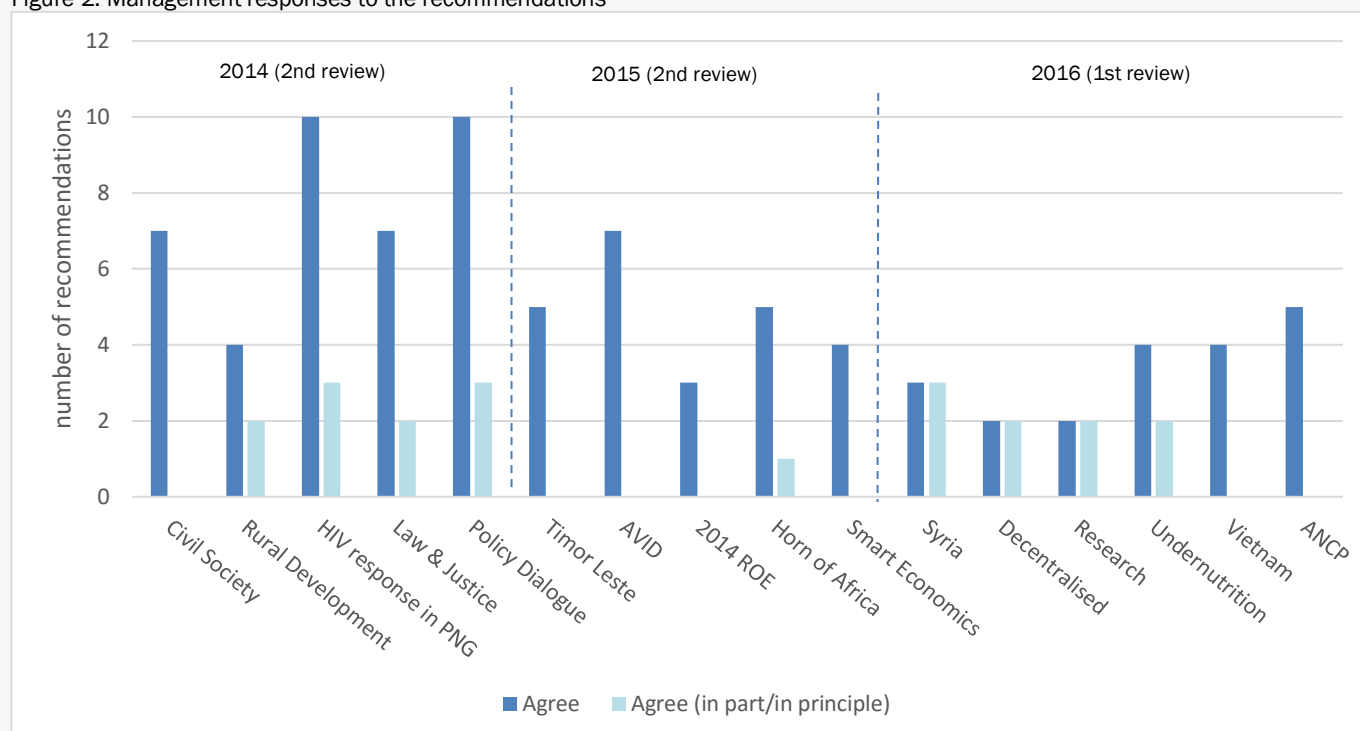
1. **Recent evaluations have fewer recommendations and sub recommendations** (Figure 1). Overall, for 16 evaluations reviewed there was on average 6 recommendations and 7 sub-recommendations per evaluation. For the more recent evaluations, there was on average 5 recommendations and 2 sub recommendations. This is indicative of ODE's success in having more focussed recommendations on key issues.

Figure 1. Number of recommendations and sub-recommendations by evaluation



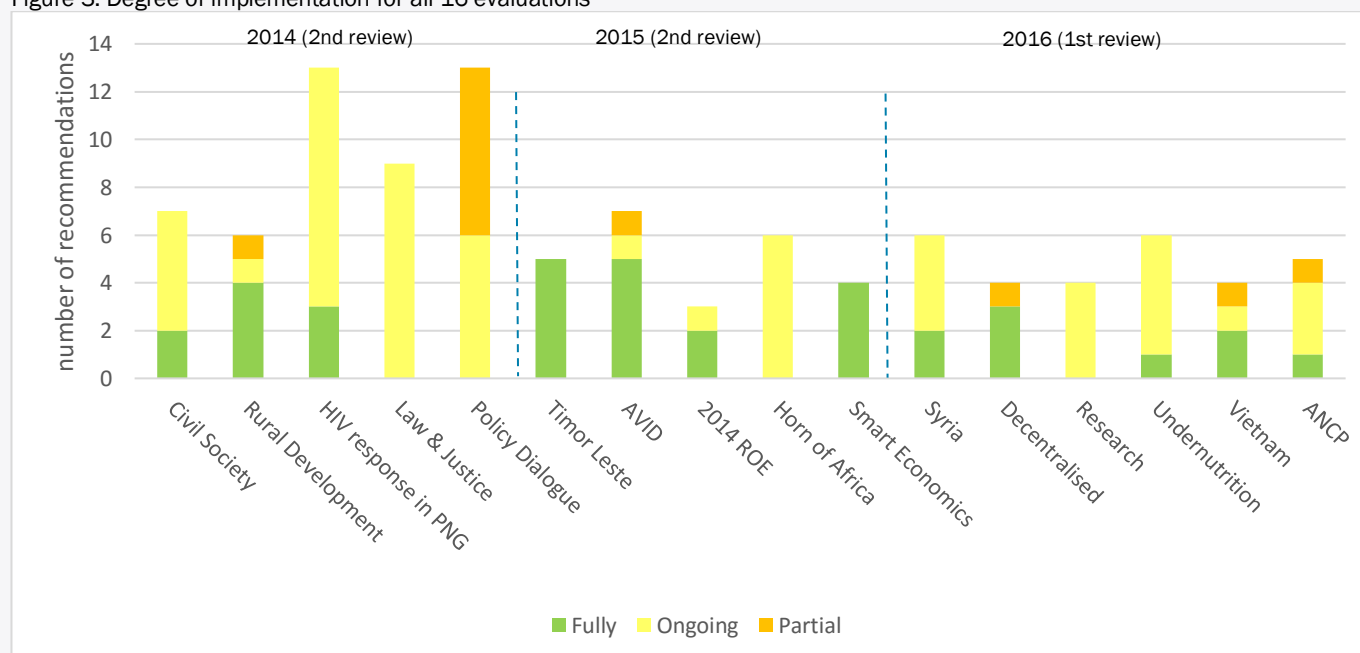
2. **Recommendations are being agreed, but more agreements are being qualified.** Of the total recommendations, 80% were agreed to fully, while 20% were agreed to 'in part or in principle' (Figure 2). Of the evaluations reviewed for the first time in 2016, 55% of the recommendations were agreed to fully and 45% were agreed in part or in principle.

Figure 2. Management responses to the recommendations



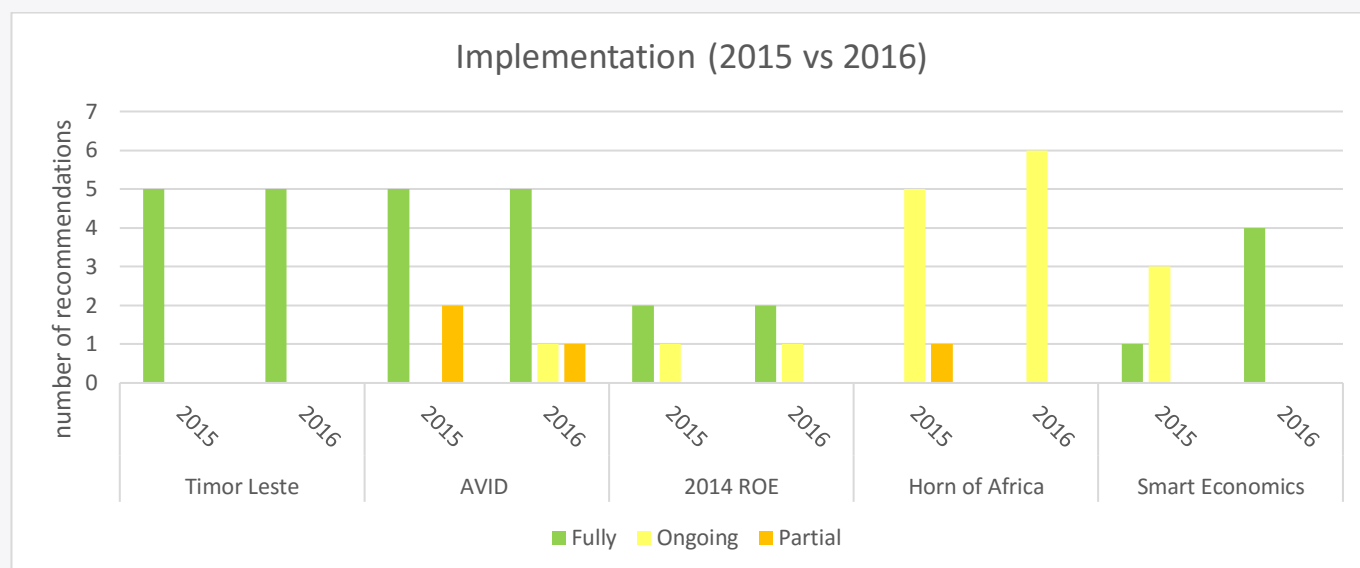
3. **All recommendations were being implemented** (Figure 3). Of a total of 29 recommendations reviewed for the first time in 2016, 59% were in 'ongoing implementation', 31% were 'fully implemented', and 10% were 'partially implemented'. Consistent with previous years, a majority of recommendations tended to be in 'ongoing implementation'.

Figure 3. Degree of implementation for all 16 evaluations



Implementation has progressed in the last year for the five evaluations that were reviewed for a second time in 2016 (Figure 4), 64% of recommendations are now 'fully implemented', 32% are in 'ongoing implementation' and 4% are 'partially implemented'.

Figure 4. Degree of implementation for evaluations included in the previous uptake review



4. **Assessing influence:** While all areas provided detailed evidence and examples of the progress made in implementing recommendations, it was difficult to assess the influence of ODE evaluations on the aid program management and policy. Furthermore, some of the actions described may not be directly attributed to the recommendations in the evaluation.

A number of examples were provided which seem to indicate that all recent evaluations have had varying levels of influence on the aid program management, policies, budgets and expenditures:

- The evaluation of humanitarian response to Syria resulted in DFAT developing a multi-year funding package for the crisis and improved efficiency due to a reduction in the number of implementing partners;
- The evaluation of decentralised service systems resulted in targeted training and improved guidance to officers on analysing and addressing political economy and decentralisation issues;
- The evaluation of research for better aid led to improved research guidance, and the value and use of research in policy and planning has been highlighted in the new aid programming guide;
- The evaluation of child undernutrition resulted in improved guidance and facilitated adoption of nutrition sensitive approaches across DFAT;
- The evaluation of Australia-Vietnam country strategy 2010-15 resulted in improvements in Annual Program Performance Review (APPR) outcome reporting and a well-developed and robust gender equality action plan; and
- The evaluation of Australian NGO Cooperation Program led to the introduction of a new funding policy which was agreed with the NGOs and applied in 2016-17.

Recommendations

The annual uptake review could be further strengthened by:

Recommendation 1: To improve the analysis of ODE evaluations' influence, respondents be asked to identify what they see as the most significant influence of the ODE evaluation.

Recommendation 2: Instructions in the template for management responses should be revised to specifically state that if the responses are 'agreed to in part', then the respondents should identify the parts of the recommendation that they agree with and parts they disagree with.

