

# Performance Framework Submission on Australia's New International Development Policy



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT



RESEARCH FOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
IMPACT NETWORK

A collaboration between  
the Australian Council for  
International Development  
and Australian universities

ACFID Development  
Practice Committee

ACFID Monitoring,  
Evaluation and Learning  
Community of Practice

# International Development Policy Review

## SUBMISSION AUTHORS

This submission was developed by ACFID, with expert oversight, input and advice from its Development Practice Committee, the Research for Development Impact Network and ACFID's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice.

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak body for Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in international development and humanitarian action. Our vision is of a world where all people are free from extreme poverty, injustice and inequality and where the earth's finite resources are managed sustainably. Our purpose is to lead and unite our members in action for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Founded in 1965, ACFID currently has 122 members and 27 affiliates operating in more than 86 developing countries. The total revenue raised by ACFID's membership from all sources amounts to \$1.615 billion (2018), \$846 million of which is raised from over 1.5 million Australians (2018). ACFID's members range between large Australian multi-sectoral organisations that are linked to international federations of NGOs, to agencies with specialised thematic expertise, and smaller community-based groups, with a mix of secular and faith-based organisations.

ACFID members must comply with the ACFID Code of Conduct, a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aims to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of signatory organisations. Covering 9 Quality Principles, 33 Commitments and 91 compliance indicators, the Code sets good standards for program effectiveness, fundraising, governance and financial reporting. Compliance includes annual reporting and checks. The Code has an independent complaint handling process.

The Development Practice Committee (DPC) is a long-standing expert advisory group drawn from ACFID's membership where experienced learning and development practitioners from the not-for-profit sector meet to: lead good practice within the sector; undertake applied research and development of tools and processes; provide relevant advice to ACFID on key issues around development effectiveness affecting the sector; and engage with government on development effectiveness practice. The DPC drives thinking within the sector on effectiveness, performance measurement, futures thinking and strategic thinking for complex problems.

Established in 2009, the Research for Development Impact Network (RDI Network) is a network of practitioners, researchers and evaluators working in international development. With currently over 2,300 members, the Network has become a key outlet for accessing diverse research expertise, brokering partnerships, convening forums and conferences, as well as supporting ethical research practice among NGOs and academia in Australia. The RDI Network works in partnership with ACFID, funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

ACFID's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice (MEL COP), launched in December 2019, brings together monitoring, evaluation and learning practitioners from the ACFID membership, academia and private sector to network within the sector on MEL issues.

ACFID's expert advisory groups, the Development Practice Committee and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice, with the Research for Development Impact Network, bring together expertise and longevity in development practice and ground-level impact understanding implications of ethical programming; ways for sharing and ensuring accountability to stakeholders; and guidelines to support good practice. As such these groups make recommendations here for the Development Policy Performance Framework in three areas: aligning Australia's performance to international frameworks; investing in what works; and delivering a transparent and accountable program. DFAT has experience and track record in meeting these requirements for a robust Performance Framework. The recommendations below clarify priorities and support a strong and nuanced performance framework which is developed in collaboration with a range of expert actors in the sector.

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding and working with the complex relationships around addressing poverty while leaving no one behind; supporting peace and stability; and working closely to align actions with communities and particularly civil society; these are fundamental and interlinking roles within Australia's development policy. They call for collaboration to understand and leverage the unique contribution of civil society and other actors. The performance framework for the development program should draw on DFAT's strong interest in achieving this understanding, through development research and collaboration.

## BACKGROUND

Australian and partner investment should be consistent with outcomes reported through the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. The principles of the partnership include:

1. ownership of development priorities by developing countries;
2. focus on results;
3. inclusive development partnership; and
4. transparency and accountability to each other.

The performance framework for Australia's International Development Policy must use evidence from communities, civil society, research institutions and partners to inform investment decisions that support and enhance positive development program outcomes and long-term positive change. The performance framework should prioritise understanding development impact from the position of investment recipients.

ACFID and the RDI Network research demonstrates that "the involvement of local partners in developing meaningful measures and the reliance on existing NGO systems mitigated against technocracy and fragmentation".<sup>1</sup> ACFID and the RDI Network's expertise in this area and connection to partners in our region and civil society should be utilised in developing a meaningful performance framework.

## SUBMISSION

An effective performance framework for Australia's Development Cooperation policy must: use evidence to inform measurement and decision-making; adapt programs to leverage impact; and be accountable and transparent both within Australia and to our partners around the globe.

This submission is grouped under three headings:

1. Align Australia's performance to the international framework;
2. Invest in what works; and
3. Deliver a transparent and accountable program from a trusted development partner.

## 1. ALIGN AUSTRALIA'S PERFORMANCE TO THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

### CONTEXT

Australia is signatory to a range of international commitments. Contemporary international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015) and commitments in the Grand Bargain (2016), as well as the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), reflect important shifts in the language, context and commitments driving the international development agenda, and development practice globally. These commitments call for Australia's accountability, policy and institutional coherence in measuring our contribution to the global development agenda, both domestically and internationally. Succeeding against Agenda 2030, as well as meeting Australia's commitments in the Grand Bargain, demand Australia frames our development efforts as part of a much larger interrelationship of global development. Australia must support and empower other actors and collaborators in new and different ways, encourage shared analysis, use results-oriented frameworks, and value mutual accountability for shared goals.<sup>2</sup> Australia's development assistance must reflect not only Australian values and priorities but also essential connections with global-level efforts to contribute to lasting change with partners, and report at and across scale to understand this impact, Australia's role, and collective contribution to both Australia's development priorities, and those of partners.

### ISSUE

Recent evaluation by the United Nations shows that at present the Asia and Pacific regions are not on track to meet any of the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> On some goals, the region is going backwards. Agenda 2030 can only be achieved through urgent and sustained action in the years remaining. Towards this, Australia must measure the performance of its international development in ways that allow us to understand not only progress against international commitments but also a deeper insight into practices, policies and impact across various scales. This necessitates working with partners, communities and governments, allowing lessons from positive and negative impact to emerge.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A systems-thinking approach<sup>4</sup> should be applied to the Department's performance framework to support impact measurement of complex international commitments like the SDGs and the Grand Bargain. The Department's new performance framework is timely as it can reframe DFAT's monitoring, evaluation and learning to capture and integrate results across different scales.
2. In lieu of an agreed international protocol for reporting within the full global agenda, DFAT should work with expert partners, to build a performance framework that complements, is informed by and informs agreed international measurements and DFAT's own foreign policy and development goals. By learning together how change happens in the current global landscape, we can be certain of Australia's contribution to DFAT strategic goals.
3. Given the short period remaining to implement a performance measurement framework aligned with the SDGs, it is preferable to re-frame, adapt and enhance existing tools. DFAT should draw on the wealth of experience, expertise and partnership already available in the Australian international development sector. ACFID's DPC, MEL COP and the RDI Network stand ready to work closely and support DFAT on this.



Students from a primary school take a drink break during the Just Play program. Photo: Connor Ashleigh/ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

## WATER FOR WOMEN AND THE GENDER ACTION PLATFORM

The investment design of the Water for Women program and the Gender Action Platform purposefully integrated research with programming, valuing the critical contributions of civil society engagement and enhancing the evidence base on which implementation is conducted. Early investment from DFAT in considering how to leverage and adapt to research drove the development of clear strategies to fund collaboration, facilitate learning and exchange and target activities. Both programs set and delivered against targets for the engagement of civil society and used the existing strength of the ANCP accreditation process for the selection of Australian NGO partners. These programs have since provided wide influence for the programs and well-documented outcomes for the development sector. These are learnings that can be leveraged for effective engagement of civil society and use of development evidence and research in critical facilities for Australia's development cooperation program.

## 2. INVEST IN WHAT WORKS

### CONTEXT

A well-developed performance framework will enable DFAT not only to measure outcome and impact at and across scale, but also to adapt and learn from the development program's and others' evidence in order to drive continuous improvement across the development program. 'Closing the loop' in this sense is critical to a high-functioning performance framework. However, when working with complexity, which Australia's development program must, this can be difficult. Commitments such as the Paris Declaration have laid out important accountabilities in this regard but have also led to a growing focus on the "results agenda",<sup>5</sup> with demand for and formalisation of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities increasing substantially.

Approaches used for integrating and reporting across different scales of work need to address this complexity or they risk perpetuating over-simplified understandings of program logics and development.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that the measurement system needs to be overly complex, however. A strategy and culture that is committed to drawing on the considerable expertise of implementing partners for a collaborative and shared responsibility to demonstrate Australia's contribution across cultures, contexts and root causes of poverty has a better chance of success and relevance.

The performance framework needs to be able to demonstrate effective and necessary responses across the aid program, stepping up to the challenges of greatest need, fragility, complex humanitarian scenarios and unacceptable disparities. Further, a framework that sets in place mechanisms to identify and leverage impact and take innovation to scale is critical to driving programming that pursues outcomes over project-specific deliverables or indicators in isolation. This will in turn drive greater collaboration (and connection with partners and recipients) rather than competition amongst development actors.

DFAT's various thematic policy sections play an important role in translating, communicating and connecting other DFAT staff to research relevant to their thematic area. These sections are well-placed to play a 'translator' role between evidence and research, and its use by country program teams, given appropriate support and resourcing to do this.

### ISSUE

Measuring development effectiveness requires high-level strategic intent, with associated commitment, processes and capabilities. This often involves both political and technical challenges. Nonetheless, investment in an evidence-informed, fit-for-purpose performance framework is invaluable.<sup>7</sup> DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) undertakes comprehensive evaluations of programs delivered as part of Australia's development cooperation program. However, the pathway from understanding impact, in a systemic and strategic way, to adapting strategy and investment for greater impact is less clear. Clarifying this pathway will provide critical value to a performance framework. Geographic areas, thematic teams, the knowledge and innovation hub and the ODE all have important roles to play in strengthening DFAT's approach to development research, evidence-based programming, and knowledge management. In addition, significant research is performed by research and civil society institutions, offering an often untapped evidence base to inform the development program's design.<sup>8</sup>

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DFAT should continue to invest in whole-of-program evaluation and research, utilise and share learnings and evaluations conducted by development partners, civil society organisations, contractors and academic partners. Systematic sharing can be prioritised, resourced and facilitated in DFAT with an internal system to support a culture of learning across and between all partnership types (see also Recommendation 8).
2. In line with the 2015 report on DFAT research "Research for Better Aid", DFAT should ensure that the development policy and program has a strategic research policy.
3. A performance framework should incorporate clear pathway for the use of evidence generated through development investments to inform decision-making around funding allocations and program strategies. ACFID and RDI Network call this Strategic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. The performance framework should have an evidence-building strategy and workplan, drawing on evidence from DFAT's own mechanisms as well as partner,

## THE AUSTRALIAN NGO COOPERATION PROGRAM WORKS

The ANCP has a 40-year track record and longevity as a civil society partnership that brings results and lasting impact and enables testing innovative responses to long term problems. This program continues to improve and add value to the Australian Government's bilateral programs. Ongoing presence of Australian NGOs in country mean ready-made partnerships and community level knowledge and response. 'The Program fosters reach through its partners into pockets of marginalisation and exclusion and challenge the patterns of poverty. The ODE's evaluation of the ANCP documents the effectiveness of the program's approach. The 2015 review described the ANCP has "one of the best performing programs," delivering 18.2 per cent of DFAT's aggregate development results for only 2.7 per cent of the overall development program spend. These results represent a clear opportunity to leverage greater investment in the resourcing of NGOs to deliver outcomes for Australia's development program.

research and civil society evidence. By consolidating the evidence on what works, where and why, investments, allocation and program strategies work strategically towards global development agendas.

4. Using a strategic and systematised evaluation and learning system, DFAT should scale-up programs and partnerships that have long-term, proven effectiveness. The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) is an example of such as program.
5. Information systems in DFAT should be enhanced to make research and evidence more accessible. DFAT should invest in information and knowledge management in collaboration with research and evidence partners to create a hub of resources, collaboration and evidence sharing (see ACFID Submission to Australia's New International Development Policy).

### 3. DELIVER A TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAM

#### CONTEXT

Australia accords to a number of international standards for the delivery of development assistance, including through membership of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC),<sup>9</sup> and as a signatory to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). The speed, accuracy and accessibility of reporting under these commitments is critical to Australia's reputation as a trusted development partner. A performance framework must be cognisant that development effectiveness is assessed not only by what is done, but also how it is done. The use of principled and comparable standards across the development program can enable reporting against performance in terms of outputs and outcomes, and understanding implementing partners' abilities to work according to an agreed set of principles in development and working approach, relationships with communities and local stakeholders, the extent to which local capacity is being strengthened, and sustainability.

To maintain a reputation as a trusted development partner, the Australian Government must invest in understanding the needs of its own development partners (be they Governments, multi-lateral partners, Australian and local civil society actors, the private sector and others), and contribute to the realisation of these needs as part of a shared vision of success. In a simple transactional partnership, it is straightforward to evaluate the value and contribution of each partner to the relationship. However, partnerships within Australia's development program are often complex and dynamic, making them challenging to evaluate. Arbitrary accountability requirements within partnerships often do not allow for their complex and political nature and are therefore often insufficient to capture their value and impact.<sup>10</sup> It is insufficient to rely on simple linear, cause-effect and results-based monitoring systems to measure the success of a given relationship. Further, a heavy focus on risk and financial accountability can 'crowd out' the other, less quantifiable aspects of partnership, underestimating the intrinsic value of the less tangible, such as interpersonal relationships.

#### ISSUE

Good governance across Australia's international development program requires strong levels of trust, built through lasting relationships at all levels. Such trust is built and maintained through, amongst other things, upholding expectations of transparency and accountability, and investing in strong partnerships across the development program. Accordingly, the Government's performance framework must further invest in evaluative assessments that incorporate reflections from recipients of development resources and support as critical indicators of success. The performance framework of Australia's development cooperation program should champion the use of standards for accountability at every level.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Performance Framework should be able to demonstrate the Australian Government's compliance with commitments to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, including a complete account of Australia's development investments and their performance (see ACFID Submission to Australia's New International Development Policy).
2. The Government should invest in evaluating Australia's development partnerships at every level, from multilateral relationships through to community and people-to-people linkages. This evaluation should seek to define Australia's value proposition as a development partner of choice, based on in-country partners' own view of Australia's role in the partnership.
3. The Government should invest in supporting cross-sector delivery partners (i.e. all delivery partners of international development investments) to develop and implement standards for accountability and development effectiveness. This investment should prioritise local capacity building and build on existing development standards such as the ACFID Code of Conduct, the Global Standard for CSO effectiveness and the Core Humanitarian Standard.

#### ACFID'S MEMBERS ARE LEADERS IN EFFECTIVE, PRINCIPLED DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

ACFID's members choose to hold themselves accountable to the ACFID Code of Conduct (the Code). The Code is a voluntary, self-regulatory sector standard, that sets a high benchmark for the approach, process and systems that constitute sector good practice. The Code has been recognised internationally as a leading standard in this regard. The Code was developed in 1997 and comprehensively revised in 2010 and 2016. The Code aims to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of ACFID's members. All full ACFID members are signatories to the Code, and complete triennial self-assessments of their adherence to its principles and commitments to ACFID.

ACFID provides assurance to external stakeholders by:

- Reviewing Code self-assessments;
- Verifying compliance with selected aspects of the Code;
- Overseeing an independent complaint handling process;
- Reporting on compliance with the Code to stakeholders; and
- Conducting spot checks, including emergency appeal website compliance checks.

ACFID's Code is an effective self-assessed measure of the effectiveness of development delivery that represents an opportunity to be leveraged and extended to delivery partners across the development program. Read more about the Code at <https://acfid.asn.au/content/about-code>.

# Endnotes

1. Jo Hall, *Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact across Different Scales*, ACFID/RDI Research Report, 2017, p.36
2. The Paris Declaration on Aid effectiveness, 2005 <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf>
3. UN, ESCAP, 2019 Asia and the Pacific SDGs Progress Report 2019 [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP\\_Asia\\_and\\_the\\_Pacific\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP_Asia_and_the_Pacific_SDG_Progress_Report_2019.pdf)
4. Read more: <https://www.forumforthefuture.org/blog/systems-thinking-unlocking-the-sustainable-development-goals> or on ACFID's SDG's toolkit <https://acfid.asn.au/learning/sdg-toolkit-individual-learner-online-course>
5. Jo Hall, *Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact across Different Scales*, ACFID/RDI Research Report, 2017, p.36
6. Jo Hall, *Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact across Different Scales*, ACFID/RDI Research Report, 2017, p.35
7. Jo Hall, *Demonstrating Outcomes and Impact across Different Scales*, ACFID/RDI Research Report, 2017
8. See also Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning) <https://cedilprogramme.org/> for example of ways that the UK Government is funding good research for evaluation and learning
9. See Recommendations 1,2,3,6 & 9 of the 2018 OECD Development Cooperation Peer Review of Australia <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Australia-2018-DAC-peer-review.pdf>
10. Kelly, L, Roche, C. 2014 "Partnerships for effective development" p. 34-35. [https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource\\_document/Partnerships-for-Effective-Development.pdf](https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/Partnerships-for-Effective-Development.pdf)



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT



**Cover photo:** Student studies at primary school in Pokhara, Nepal. Photo by Jim Holmes for AusAID/Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

**Author:** Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), Research for Development Impact Network (RDI Network), ACFID Development Practice Committee (DPC), ACFID Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Community of Practice (MEL COP).

**Published:** February 2020

**Designer:** Kate Bensen

 <https://acfid.asn.au>

 [main@acfid.asn.au](mailto:main@acfid.asn.au)

 +61 2 6285 1816

 @ACFID

 /ACFID

 /ACFID

 ACFID, 14 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT 2600