



Australian Government

AusAID

Office of Development Effectiveness

Working Beyond Government

EVALUATION OF AUSAID'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



ODE EVALUATIONS & REVIEWS

MARCH 2012



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IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Jude Howell | Jo Hall

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Cover image: Bike Club members about to leave Wan Smolbag's Youth Centre on a field trip to Mele village in Vanuatu.

The field trip included a tour of the village and ended in races at the local sports ground.

Photo credit: Dianne Hambrook, 2010

Office of Development Effectiveness

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) at AusAID builds stronger evidence for more effective aid. ODE monitors the performance of the Australian aid program, evaluates its impact and contributes to international evidence and debate about aid and development effectiveness. Visit ODE at www.ode.ausaid.gov.au

Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Abbreviations	vi
More ODE Analysis	vii
Executive Summary	viii
Evaluation of AusAID’s engagement with civil society in developing countries	viii
Building on innovation: towards a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society in developing countries	ix
Partnering with civil society: towards more sustainable systems of service delivery and governance	x
Being fit for purpose: towards more enabling ways of working with civil society in developing countries	xi
Further investigation	xii
Management Response	xiii
Introduction	1
An evaluation to stimulate the aid program’s thinking about civil society	1
Risks of working with civil society in developing countries	2
How working with civil society achieves development results	3
Building on innovation: towards a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society	5
Pockets of innovation and strategic thinking	5
Silos of civil society innovation	6
Maximise the benefits through a strategic and developmental approach	7

Partnering with civil society: towards more sustainable systems of service delivery and governance	11
Choose intermediaries to promote sustainable rather than parallel structures	11
Include civil society in program approaches	13
Harness the capacities of both state and non-state providers	14
Strengthen the enabling environment for civil society	15
Being fit for purpose: towards more enabling ways of working with civil society	17
Move from short-term project grants to longer term partnerships and core funding	17
Consider funding for financial sustainability	19
Fit selection processes to purpose	20
Promote mutual and multiple accountabilities through greater transparency	22
Ensure benefits will accrue from donor harmonisation	22
Further investigation	25
Summary of recommendations	26
Annex 1: Evaluation methods	27
Annex 2: References	30

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Abbreviations

ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANCP	Australian NGO Cooperation Program
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PACAP	Philippines–Australia Community Assistance Program

More ODE analysis

See more of the analysis that contributed to this report:

Literature review

- » Working paper: Good practice donor engagement with civil society (literature review)

Mapping of AusAID's engagement with civil society

- » Summary—Mapping AusAID's engagement with civil society in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Philippines
- » Papua New Guinea—Mapping AusAID's engagement with civil society in the Papua New Guinea Program
- » Vanuatu—Mapping AusAID's engagement with civil society in the Vanuatu Program
- » Philippines—Mapping AusAID's engagement with civil society in the Philippines Program

Aid activities case studies

- » Church Partnership Program Report
- » Analysis of five cases of AusAID engagement with civil society in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines
- » Papua New Guinea—Australia HIV and AIDS Program: civil society engagement—case study report
- » School-based procurement watch project (Bantay Eskuwela), Philippines
- » Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP) (2005–2009)—case study report

Country program case study

- » Evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society in Vanuatu—country program case study

Theory of change narrative report

- » Theory of Change—Why AusAID works with civil society in developing countries

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Executive Summary

Evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society in developing countries

Key points

- » In-depth evaluation of AusAID's engagement with civil society in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Philippines finds innovative and strategic models for working with civil society.
- » Incorporating civil society into country-level analysis recognises civil society's role in development and can strengthen programming.
- » Choosing intermediaries embedded in local systems can enhance sustainability, help bring small activities to scale and reduce transaction costs.
- » Linking civil society with partner governments can expand the reach of basic services.
- » Longer-term, core funding and improved partner selection can improve development results and mitigate the risks of working with civil society.

Civil society in developing countries can be a powerful agent for change. Alongside government and private sector actors, civil society can contribute to positive and sustainable development in partner countries in many ways, including by delivering better services, enhancing social inclusion, and making governments more effective, accountable and transparent.

AusAID has a long history of working with civil society in developing countries. A significant proportion of the aid program is spent on activities involving civil society organisations. Current funding arrangements represent a deepening commitment to long-term partnerships. For example funding of \$50 million to 2016 was recently allocated to the ongoing Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea (PNG)—a partnership between seven mainstream PNG church denominations, their counterpart Australian faith-based non-government organisations (NGOs), AusAID and the PNG Government. Since 2002, AusAID has partnered with BRAC, a large Bangladeshi development NGO, with annual funding currently around \$30 million per year. The 2011 aid policy statement *An Effective Aid Program for Australia* indicates the Australian Government will continue to increase its assistance to civil society organisations.

Such focus warrants investigation into the way AusAID engages with civil society. In this context, the Office of Development Effectiveness commissioned a major evaluation of AusAID's work with local civil society in its partner countries. The evaluation looked at international good donor practice in engaging with civil society¹ and examined AusAID's experience across three countries: Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Philippines.²

A broad definition of civil society was used in this evaluation to include the following kinds of organisations: NGOs, informal groups, cooperatives, trade unions, social movements, faith groups,

¹ *Working paper: Good practice donor engagement with civil society, 2010*, available at www.ode.usaid.gov.au

² Individual evaluation reports are available at www.ode.usaid.gov.au

think tanks, direct action groups, human rights organisations and, in some contexts, clan groups. The analysis of the evaluation reports was supplemented by secondary evidence from other countries. AusAID's partnerships with Australian NGOs were largely beyond the scope of this evaluation unless they were an intermediary organisation for AusAID's work with local civil society.

Working with civil society in all its variety is not without risks for donors. It is not always clear which civil society organisations have real local legitimacy. Civil society organisations may have weak management and problems with probity, transparency and accountability. Donors clearly cannot associate with groups within civil society who might be working against the interests of development, for example those which finance terrorism. In addition, both donors and civil society face practical challenges such as the difficulties of taking small and successful activities to scale, the sustainability of civil society organisations, the potential duplication of activities (numerous organisations providing similar services), multiple funding (several donors funding an organisation for the same activity) and the high transaction costs for donors of dealing with a myriad of small organisations. And, in the end, donors are held to account for the actions of the independent civil society actors they fund.

Nonetheless, donors recognise that civil society in developing countries has an important role in development alongside state and market actors. Because the state is not the only driver of development, or of a more effective state, donors need to consider the roles of all the drivers and decide how they will engage with them. Australia sees strengthening civil society as a core element of the aid program's approach to improving governance and achieving development results.

The findings and recommendations from this evaluation suggest ways of managing the risks while optimising AusAID's engagement with civil society to achieve development results. They are arranged around three key actions:

- i. Finding strategic approaches for engaging with civil society. AusAID's experience demonstrates the value of developing a sound understanding of the role and actors in civil society and of engaging strategically and progressively as this understanding deepens. Some risks can be mitigated through careful selection of civil society partners, assisted by strengthened analysis of the role of civil society at country level.
- ii. Working with local systems and partners. Choosing appropriate intermediaries can help donors manage high transaction costs and sustainability issues, and take small activities to scale.
- iii. Applying good practice in the design of individual programs. For example, building trusted relationships in their engagement with civil society, AusAID can develop long-term partnerships and core funding with some organisations.

Building on innovation: towards a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society in developing countries

The evaluation found examples of innovative and strategic models for engaging with civil society in developing countries. For example, AusAID and the Government of Vanuatu analysed the drivers of development in 2007 and determined that two major civil society groups—the churches and the chiefs—had authority and reach across the islands. Programs with the churches and chiefs, particularly with the chiefs to debate the role of *kastom* governance (incorporating customary law, traditions and norms) in the community, have since been developed. The Vanuatu program was able to cease its resource intensive small grants program and focus its civil society support on four strategic partnerships: with the churches, chiefs, Vanuatu Women's Centre and a local NGO (Wan Smolbag).

However, innovations like this—working with groups beyond a traditional donor focus on NGOs, including civil society in country level analysis and selecting civil society groups as strategic partners—have occurred in pockets only and have not been driven by an overarching strategy on the part of the aid program. Such a strategy can be articulated in the civil society engagement framework, flagged in the 2011 aid policy statement *An Effective Aid Program for Australia*. Analysis of the type done in Vanuatu can be used to inform all country strategies for the aid program, in order to develop a more strategic approach to working with civil society. Such analysis would identify the key legitimate actors in civil society and their contribution to development. It would seek to understand their relationship with the government and identify if and how donor support to civil society can serve to progress development. A more strategic approach to working with civil society can help the aid program reduce numerous small activities with civil society organisations and manage some of the political risks.

Underpinning this and the remaining recommendations is a need for greater technical expertise in AusAID to advise country program staff on working with civil society. Reactivating AusAID's civil society network would provide a means to share lessons of working with civil society across different country contexts.

Recommendations

1. **Develop a civil society engagement framework that recognises civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process.**
2. **Integrate country-specific civil society strategies into country aid strategies; include analysis of civil society in country situation analyses.**
3. **Invest in appointing a civil society adviser in Canberra and major country programs, and in activating networks for sharing lessons related to engaging with civil society.**

Partnering with civil society: towards more sustainable systems of service delivery and governance

The evaluation considered what it would mean to expand the aid effectiveness principle of working in partner systems, advocated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, to include the systems of civil society in developing countries.

The evaluation found that building sustainable, local systems should be a primary consideration in the aid program's selection of delivery partners. Where aid is delivered through parallel structures, such as a stand-alone managing contractor office, local systems miss out on being strengthened and it can be more difficult to take small activities to scale. In the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP), for example, funds were invested in developing a parallel structure rather than a local and more sustainable structure, such as an umbrella civil society group. Choosing appropriate intermediaries—including Australian NGOs if they can demonstrate how they will build sustainable civil society locally and achieve results—can help donors manage high transaction costs.

The evaluation also found that including civil society (along with partner governments and other actors) in policy dialogue and implementation of sector-wide approaches can strengthen sector development efforts. In the Philippines, AusAID's support for the NGO Procurement Watch, as part of its broader program of education support, provides a good model.

There is potential to take such an approach to scale because of the ability of groups like Procurement Watch to mobilise volunteers right across the Philippines. AusAID's support to civil society groups in Papua New Guinea for the prevention of HIV, which sits within the government's framework, is another example of providing support to civil society as part of a sector approach.

AusAID support for partner governments to contract civil society organisations can also expand the reach of basic services. In this model, the state retains stewardship and oversight functions by setting policies and regulating the provision of services, but leaves the delivery of services to non-state providers, who are often better able to mobilise resources on the ground. In Australia, this arrangement between government and not-for-profit service providers is common practice and increasing. Harnessing the capacities of both state and non-state providers for service delivery is particularly relevant in countries like Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, where capacity is limited.

However, the evaluation found that some of AusAID's excellent work with civil society tends to remain isolated from AusAID's program with partner governments. In Papua New Guinea, for example, AusAID and Australian NGO partners have had significant success working with PNG churches, strengthening their ability to work together and to deliver services like health and education. But AusAID's work with the churches, which deliver some 60 per cent of health services in remote areas of PNG, remains separate from AusAID's large health program. Similarly in Vanuatu, Australia's Law and Justice Program does not work with the chiefs in spite of their role in customary law, explored in AusAID's *kastom* governance program.

In some countries, donors can provide assistance that strengthens the enabling environment for civil society. This could also benefit donors in managing their concerns over weak management, probity and legitimacy of some civil society organisations. For example, donors can help civil society organisations develop local accreditation and self regulating processes or help governments develop the legal framework for civil society organisations' operations. Traditionally this has not been a focus for AusAID but there are examples of Australian NGOs providing this enabling support. The evaluation suggests that the aid program consider explicitly strengthening the enabling environment for civil society as part of its strategic efforts to strengthen civil society generally.

Recommendations

4. **Develop a rationale for choosing aid program intermediaries on the basis of their ability to help develop sustainable local civil society as well as to deliver results.**
5. **Include civil society in policy dialogue and implementation when designing sector wide approaches with partner governments.**
6. **Support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society as part of strengthening civil society, where the context is appropriate.**

Being fit for purpose: towards more enabling ways of working with civil society in developing countries

The evaluation found that while considerable work has gone into developing new ways for donors to work with partner governments, short-term projects remain the norm in work with civil society, which affects their ability to have sustained impact. Again there were notable exceptions, with better practice involving long-term partnerships with trusted civil society organisations and core funding to help higher capacity civil society organisations achieve their objectives.

The careful selection of civil society partners, arising out of the strengthened analysis of the role of civil society at country level as well as the effectiveness of individual organisations, is a key to managing risk. When selecting civil society partners, AusAID or its intermediaries have often relied on competitive rounds, even when this may be at odds with the purpose of strengthening civil society. It can create shopfront NGOs that have no real legitimacy but are created in the hope of securing donor funds. There are a range of other options that AusAID and its intermediaries

can choose, which may be better suited to selecting civil society partners that are more likely to be accountable to their constituencies and, potentially, self-sustaining.

In choosing an appropriate selection process, the aid program should consider the seven principles described in the 2009 *Commonwealth Grant Guidelines*, in particular the focus on outcomes, proportionality and value for money. As with all aspects of the aid program, fraud and mismanagement cannot be tolerated. By designing processes and guidelines to fit the intended result of the funding, the aid program can be more proactive, and adopt a more targeted, open or demand driven approach to selecting organisations.

Two areas of aid effectiveness—mutual accountability and harmonisation—continue to pose challenges for AusAID’s work with civil society. One practical action to promote mutual accountability is for the aid program and civil society to be more transparent by publicly releasing information about their funding, performance and results. This would help hold both civil society and the aid program to account. The evaluation found that despite the best efforts of donors to harmonise their support, the subsequent burden on both donors and civil society organisations actually increased. AusAID and other donors could find more efficient ways of harmonising support that are less burdensome all round. For example when more than one donor has selected a civil society partner for core funding (such as Australia and New Zealand with Wan Smolbag in Vanuatu) the arrangement could be administered by a single donor in a way that simplifies the civil society organisation’s reporting and ensures both donors’ requirements are met.

Recommendations

7. Design individual programs with civil society as follows:

- Move from short-term to longer-term funding where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance and consider providing core funding to trusted and effective civil society organisations.
- Develop a clear basis for selecting individual civil society organisations. Choose partners through targeted rather than competitive approaches, where appropriate.
- Promote mutual accountabilities through greater transparency of both civil society organisations and the aid program.
- Harmonise more efficiently with other donors so that the benefits accrue to both recipients and donors.

Further investigation

Two areas were deemed beyond the scope of this evaluation:

- i. engagement with civil society by Australian Government departments (other than AusAID) that deliver overseas development assistance
- ii. the efficiency and value for money of working with civil society organisations (more research is needed in this area)

Three areas were identified for further investigation:

- i. the effectiveness of AusAID’s engagement with global civil society including Australian NGOs
- ii. effective donor practice with civil society in post conflict situations
- iii. the cost effectiveness of trialling a trust fund arrangement to build financial sustainability for local civil society organisations.

Management Response

Evaluation of Australia's Engagement of Civil Society in Developing Countries

AusAID welcomes the insights provided by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) in its evaluation of Australia's engagement with civil society in developing countries. It provides valuable and timely information for the implementation of the Government's policy priorities as outlined in *An Effective Aid Program for Australia: Making a Real Difference—Delivering Real Results*, which calls for strengthening and working more closely with civil society.

As noted in *An Effective Aid Program for Australia: Making a Real Difference—Delivering Real Results*, delivering aid through civil society organisations enables us to benefit from these organisations' grass-roots networks, niche areas of specialisation, and presence on the ground. Differences in size and areas of specialisation mean that civil society organisations can be more flexible and dynamic than other partners. Working with civil society organisations is therefore an important component of our overall approach in helping people overcome poverty and is why AusAID already works closely with civil society across the aid program.

Drawing from evidence gathered, the ODE evaluation report *Working Beyond Government* confirms that working with civil society organisations which are embedded in local systems can enhance sustainability, help bring small activities to scale, and reduce transaction costs. The report also observes that civil society can contribute to positive and sustainable development by delivering services and making governments more effective, accountable and transparent. The report provides some good, practical examples of how we might work more strategically with civil society to achieve more effective development outcomes. These include:

- » selecting local civil society partners based on sound analysis of the role of, and key actors in, civil society in each country; our engagement with these civil society partners could progressively increase as our understanding deepens;
- » reducing transaction costs by choosing strong intermediaries (including Australian NGOs where appropriate) to work with local civil society partners;
- » developing longer-term partnerships with civil society organisations.

AusAID is committed to engaging more effectively with civil society in these ways, and agrees with the report's seven recommendations. AusAID is taking forward the findings and recommendations of *Working Beyond Government*. We have developed a policy statement on governance, which includes the critical role of civil society (this document is available on AusAID's website). We are also in the process of developing a new Civil Society Engagement Framework in consultation with the Australian Council for International Development. The Framework is expected to be launched in March 2012 and will set out the practical and strategic ways in which we engage with civil society organisations into the future.

Peter Baxter
Director General
AusAID
February 2012

Response to Evaluation Recommendations		
<p>Recommendation 1: Develop a civil society engagement framework that recognises civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process.</p>	Agree	The Government's aid policy directions, as set out in <i>An Effective Aid Program for Australia: Making a Real Difference—Delivering Real Results</i> , include the development of a civil society engagement framework. The community partnerships branch of AusAID is taking the lead on developing this, in consultation with Australian NGOs, AusAID's program areas and other relevant stakeholders. This will address findings and recommendations from the ODE evaluation.
<p>Recommendation 2: Integrate country-specific civil society strategies into country aid strategies; include analysis of civil society in country situation analyses.</p>	Agree	AusAID agrees to incorporate strategies on engaging civil society into country strategies where appropriate, especially where the country situation analysis identifies this as an important component of Australia's development response.
<p>Recommendation 3: Invest in appointing a civil society adviser in Canberra and in major country programs, and in activating networks for sharing lessons related to engaging with civil society.</p>	Agree	AusAID has already agreed to appoint governance advisers in Canberra and in major country programs; their scope of responsibility includes civil society. AusAID notes that there is already a Social Adviser with the Indonesia program, located in Jakarta, and a Social Development Adviser with the Philippines program, located in Manila.
<p>Recommendation 4: Develop a rationale for choosing intermediaries on the basis of their ability to help develop sustainable local civil society as well as to deliver results.</p>	Agree	The rationale for working with Australian NGOs and others will be further developed and clarified in the civil society engagement framework.
<p>Recommendation 5: Include civil society in policy dialogue and implementation when designing sector wide approaches with partner governments.</p>	Agree	AusAID agrees that when civil society is able to contribute either directly or indirectly to policy dialogue, better policy implementation is generally the result. The Government's aid policy framework <i>An Effective Aid Program for Australia: Making a Real Difference—Delivering Real Results</i> calls for engaging with and supporting civil society groups in striving for more inclusive and transparent decision-making in developing countries. AusAID agrees to include civil society in dialogue with partner governments where it is practicable to do so.

Response to Evaluation Recommendations

<p>Recommendation 6: Support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society as part of strengthening civil society, where context is appropriate.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>AusAID agrees to seek opportunities and support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society where feasible. AusAID country program areas will be responsible for analysing the enabling context for civil society as part of country situation analyses and developing suitable initiatives as appropriate.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: Design individual programs with civil society as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Move from short-term to longer-term funding where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance and consider providing core funding to trusted and effective civil society organisations. » Develop a clear basis for selecting individual civil society organisations. Choose partners through targeted rather than competitive approaches, where appropriate. » Promote mutual accountabilities through greater transparency of both civil society organisations and the aid program. » Harmonise more efficiently with other donors so that the benefits accrue to both recipients and donors. 	<p>Agree</p>	<p>AusAID agrees with the overall recommendation, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Agrees that moving from short-term to longer-term funding models is desirable where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance, and is already doing this in some programs, such as Indonesia and Bangladesh; » Will ensure that the selection of civil society partners, as outlined in the civil society engagement framework, will be on the basis of capacity and performance, and will give consideration to targeted rather than competitive approaches where appropriate. » Agrees that mutual accountability should be promoted; this will be given effect in part through the Transparency Charter being developed as one of the agreed recommendations in <i>An Effective Aid Program for Australia: Making a Real Difference—Delivering Real Results</i>. » Agrees to continue to harmonise with other donors in developing and implementing programs with civil society, with a focus on achieving better results.



The Catigbian Agro-Tourism and Technology for Livestock Enhancement (CATTLE) Project in the Philippines works to improve household income through sustainable, modern livestock management. Photo credit: AusAID/PACAP, 2008

Introduction

This evaluation of how effectively AusAID works with civil society in developing countries had three main drivers.

First—to foster better understanding among aid program practitioners of the role of civil society in development and the role of the bilateral donor in supporting civil society.

Second—to help AusAID staff apply the principles of aid effectiveness identified in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (High Level Forum 2005) in their work with civil society. Internationally, these principles have been applied in only a limited way to donors' work with partner governments, and in donors' work with civil society the principles are open to misinterpretation.

Third—to establish whether the level of funding the Australian Government is investing in developing and strengthening relationships with civil society is providing good returns. A significant proportion of the aid program is spent on activities involving civil society organisations. The Australian Government is planning to increase this assistance. Recently, \$50 million to 2016 was allocated to the ongoing Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea; since 2002, AusAID has partnered with BRAC, a large Bangladeshi development NGO, with annual funding currently around \$30 million per year. Increasing assistance to civil society organisations and strengthening civil society are among the commitments made in the Government's response to the 2011 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness (AusAID 2011a). Such a significant commitment warrants investigation into the way that AusAID engages with civil society in developing countries.

An evaluation to stimulate the aid program's thinking about civil society

The Government's response to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness in 2011 includes an intention to develop a civil society engagement framework for the aid program (AusAID 2011a, p. 55). Early consultations with the Australian NGO community on the civil society engagement framework began in 2009 at the same time the evaluation was initiated. This provided an opportunity for the evaluation to generate evidence to directly inform the aid program's approach to working with civil society. The evaluation provides practical recommendations to maximise good practice in working with civil society in developing countries.

The ODE evaluation team undertook a year-long iterative process, which first mapped basic information about the extent and nature of AusAID's engagement with civil society. It then investigated what good donor practice for working with civil society looks like internationally. The team subsequently investigated how well AusAID works with civil society within a range of contexts, focusing on its work in Vanuatu, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, but also drawing on secondary evidence from other countries and from the work of Australian NGOs (see Annex 1 for more detail on the methodology).

This report summarises the main findings and conclusions of this process and puts forward seven recommendations. Details of the evidence gathered during the evaluation are contained in the associated reports in the companion volume to this report (see 'Other references' in Annex 2). Key reports in the companion volume are the review of good practice donor engagement with civil society (Hall & Howell 2010) and the analysis of five cases of engagement with civil society in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines (Howell 2011).

Defining civil society for this evaluation

Civil society is a contested concept. The concept has been and continues to be appropriated by a range of actors for different ideological and political purposes so it is important to remain alert to its different usages in diverse political settings. Nevertheless, the concept continues to have considerable resonance in contemporary political, public and media discourses.

For the purposes of this evaluation (AusAID does not have a standard definition), civil society was defined as *the arena where people organise around and deliberate on shared collective purposes*. As an ideal, it is distinct from government, market and family, but in practice the boundaries between these spheres are blurred, contested and negotiated, and interwoven to varying degrees through complex social relations. Civil society is often populated by organisations that vary in their degree of formality and typically includes associational forms such as trade unions, social movements, developmental non-government organisations, virtual networks, campaigns, coalitions, faith groups, think tanks, research institutions, direct action groups, peace groups, human rights organisations and, in some cases, clan groups.

This evaluation recognised that civil society is not bounded by the state. Transnational civil society plays a role in development by extending networks between institutions beyond borders, linking domestic civil society with global civil society (Keane 2003). Within countries, international NGOs and other global civil society organisations play a role within the fabric of domestic civil society, which can include opening (and sometimes closing) space for domestic civil society (Hughes 2007). The boundaries between local and international civil society are blurred; for example, some international organisations employ hundreds of national staff. Nonetheless, the focus of this evaluation was on the way AusAID engages with domestic civil society in partner countries. AusAID's engagement with global civil society and Australian NGOs was beyond the scope of this evaluation and is a topic, potentially, for further study.

Risks of working with civil society in developing countries

This evaluation also recognised the risks to donors of working with civil society. Ultimately, donors are held to account by their parliaments and constituents for the actions of the independent civil society organisations they fund. The risk to donors is that civil society organisations may not make appropriate, effective and efficient use of tax payer funds. Specific risk factors include:

- » weak management, probity, transparency and accountability of some civil society organisations
- » difficulties for civil society organisations in taking small and successful activities to scale
- » issues involving the legitimacy of advocacy and campaigning groups
- » issues involving sustainability and succession of civil society organisations
- » the duplication of activities (numerous organisations providing similar services) and 'multiple funding' (several donors funding an organisation for the same activity)
- » the high transaction costs for donors of dealing with a myriad of small organisations
- » the possibility of some civil society groups working against the interests of development, for example financing terrorism (Hall & Howell 2010, pp. 5–6).

How working with civil society achieves development results

Notwithstanding the risks to donors, the central premise that underlies the findings and recommendations of this evaluation is that civil society has an important role in development alongside state and market actors. Donors, therefore, need to recognise civil society as one of the drivers of development and support civil society as well as the state. Because the roles of civil society are interconnected with those of the state, strengthening civil society can also contribute to strengthening the state. In essence, working with the government alone is not enough to build more effective states. This is recognised in the Australian Government’s response to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness in which strengthening civil society is seen as a core element of the aid program’s approach to improving governance (AusAID 2011a).

Working with civil society is about strengthening institutions

‘Development ... is at its root an effort to build or strengthen institutions (public, private profit-making, and nonprofit civil society) in poor and fragile states, with the ultimate goal of developing a capable state, market economy, and civil society that can manage public services, design good policies, create jobs, and protect human rights and the rule of law on a reliable, sustainable basis after the aid program is over and funding ends. All construction or service delivery projects should be subordinate to the larger institution-building task. The counter-bureaucracy [layers and layers of bureaucracy], with its elaborate control mechanisms, misunderstands this central development doctrine and thus misapplies a domestic management lens to aid programs by turning the means into an end.’

Source: Natsios 2010, p. 6.

Donors support civil society in developing countries by providing funding for activities, providing technical support, building institutional capacity, and supporting connections between civil society organisations. Donors can also work with partner governments, private sector actors and other donors to recognise the value of civil society in development and to build an environment that facilitates civil society’s development and contributions. This support enables civil society organisations to contribute to positive and sustainable development outcomes in their countries along various ‘pathways’. This evaluation identified six development pathways³ towards:

- » delivering better services
- » reducing conflict
- » building more connected communities
- » enhancing social inclusion
- » fostering informed and active citizens
- » making governments more effective, accountable and transparent.

3 The pathways were identified in a ‘theory of change’ of how AusAID can support civil society to contribute to positive and sustainable development, developed by AusAID staff and representatives of Australian non-government organisations with the ODE evaluation team (See Dart, Hall & Rudland 2010). This theory drew on the experience of AusAID program staff and their civil society partners in five aid activities in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu. It describes the link between what AusAID does (for example provide funds), the immediate results it expects—often in terms of a strengthened civil society—and how these results help civil society contribute to development outcomes.

The findings and recommendations of this evaluation suggest ways of managing the risks while optimising AusAID's engagement with civil society to achieve development results. They are arranged around three key activities. The first activity involves finding strategic approaches for engaging with civil society. AusAID's experience demonstrates the value of developing a sound understanding of the role and actors in civil society and to engage strategically and progressively as this understanding deepens. Some risks can be mitigated through careful selection of civil society partners, assisted by strengthened analysis of the role of civil society at country level. The second activity involves working with local systems and partners. Choosing appropriate intermediaries can help donors manage high transaction costs, sustainability issues and taking small activities to scale. The last activity concerns applying good practice in the design of individual programs. Through building trusted relationships in their engagement with civil society, AusAID can develop long-term partnerships and core funding with some organisations.

Building on innovation: towards a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society

The evaluation found examples of innovative and strategic models for engaging with civil society. These included work with diverse and relevant groups with reach and authority, such as the chiefs in Vanuatu, the churches in Papua New Guinea and Parent–Community–Teacher associations in the Philippines. The Vanuatu program included civil society in country-level analysis and selected civil society groups as strategic partners. However, innovations like these have occurred in pockets only and have not been driven by an overarching aid program strategy. Analysis of the type done in Vanuatu can contribute to the development of a more strategic approach to the work of aid programs with civil society across all country strategies. A strategic approach focuses the work of aid programs, helping them to achieve greater developmental impact and manage reputational risk without the distraction of having to focus on numerous small activities.

Pockets of innovation and strategic thinking

The three country studies and five case studies of engagement with civil society revealed that AusAID’s country programs in the Philippines, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea work with diverse civil society organisations across a range of sectors and at different levels. In Papua New Guinea, for example, AusAID engages with civil society in preventing the spread of HIV, in promoting democratic governance, basic education, anti-corruption activities, and law and justice, and in supporting volunteers and a research program. Considerable work through the Democratic Governance Program aims to support government and civil society to work together on developing and implementing policy, resolving public issues and allocating resources. Strands of work with civil society on educating voters, reducing corruption and using the media for development all point to genuine efforts to work with a variety of civil society groups to promote better governance, as do the plans to extend work with civil society through the program *Strongim Pipol, Strongim Nesen* (empower people: strengthen the nation).

In Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu, AusAID has looked beyond the more ‘recognisable’ types of civil society groups (such as service-delivery or governance-related NGOs) to include less familiar groups. Programs in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea have formed partnerships with churches through the intermediaries of development arms of churches in Australia. In PNG, especially, the churches are significant providers of health and education services, particularly in remote areas. At times churches have played an important role in bringing about peace in tribal conflicts. They are also relatively enduring institutions that command significant authority and legitimacy in society compared with more recently established NGOs. Although there are issues around church roles in promoting gender equality and HIV prevention, particularly the promotion of condoms, AusAID has, nevertheless, sought to increase the capacities of churches, both to provide services and to promote interdenominational dialogue on development policy issues. At the same time, AusAID has supported the Vanuatu Women’s Crisis Centre to strengthen gender-specific work and exhibit alternative gender perspectives to the churches and state.

As well as forming partnerships with selected churches in Vanuatu, AusAID developed a *kastom* governance partnership with the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs and the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. This partnership has sought to strengthen links between the National Council and civil society actors and organisations to improve understanding of the *kastom* governance (incorporating customary law, traditions and norms) system, especially in relation to conflict resolution. The *kastom* governance partnership also supported communities to take specific actions to strengthen *kastom* governance. Participants in facilitated workshops included chiefs, community leaders, police, provincial government officials, women and youth. This is a highly innovative partnership, both in its target group and the methods adopted for communities to explore issues of governance.

In the Philippines, in its support to a school-based procurement monitoring project, AusAID worked with a governance NGO with experience of monitoring government projects, and also with Parent–Community–Teacher associations and civil society organisations that have widespread presence across the country. This reflects a general pattern of multisectoral engagement in other AusAID country programs.⁴

Silos of civil society innovation

However, the evaluation found a tendency to confine strategic engagement with civil society within a ‘civil society sector’. In this scenario, the lessons learned and benefits obtained do not extend across the broader aid program. Links are not being made between work with civil society and major sector programs in health, education, law and justice, or other areas. The impact of innovative ways of working with civil society on broader development goals, such as better governance, better delivery of and access to services, and more peaceful societies, therefore, remains limited.

For example, the considerable work done with civil society in the HIV and AIDS program in Papua New Guinea and with the churches is not linked to AusAID’s work in the broader health sector. In the health sector AusAID focuses on engaging with and funding the government using a sector-wide approach that neglects the role of civil society (Foster et al, p. 43).

Similarly in Vanuatu, although the Vanuatu Kastom Governance Partnership is located under the portfolio of the aid program’s law and justice sector, there is little engagement with civil society in the aid program’s Law and Justice Program, in spite of the significant role of the chiefs in local peacekeeping. Moreover, in other sectoral programs there is little deliberate engagement with the *kastom* governance system.

The containment of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), which provides co-funding to Australian NGOs that usually work with civil society in developing countries, from country programs is another example of missed opportunity. The mapping of AusAID’s engagement with civil society conducted as part of this evaluation showed that AusAID’s co-funding for ANCP across the Philippines, PNG and Vanuatu in 2007–08, at \$4.7 million, was not insignificant. Total funding for ANCP in that year was \$36.9 million, increased to \$70 million in 2010–11 and is set to double again by 2014–15. But ANCP is managed in isolation from country programs, often with no linkages or learning shared between ANCP and the bilateral aid program. As funding for ANCP increases the aid program will benefit from developing linkages between ANCP and country programs.

This containment of innovative practice is partly a result of a perception that the way civil society contributes change processes is functional or additional rather than integral. Recognising that

⁴ A review of 25 additional evaluation reports of AusAID’s work with civil society illustrated that it occurred across a range of sectors and at different levels, and involved a diversity of organisations in 15 countries.

civil society is an agent of development alongside the state and the market is an important step in the shift to a more developmental and strategic approach to engaging with civil society.

Maximise the benefits through a strategic and developmental approach

There are a number of ways the aid program can promote a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society in developing countries. This section discusses developing a civil society engagement framework, undertaking better analysis at country level, incorporating specific civil society strategies within country delivery strategies, and the need for civil society expertise and networks within the aid program.

The Australian Government plans to develop a civil society engagement framework in consultation with the Australian Council for International Development (AusAID 2011a p. 55). This will be an important step in the aid program developing a strategic approach to engaging civil society that could extend across country programs. The framework would recognise that civil society in developing countries is an integral agent of development alongside the state and the market. It can explain the rationale for working with civil society in developing countries, consider the specific contributions that the aid program can make and provide examples of effective engagement. A strategic approach would provide a basis for country office analysis of the role of civil society in driving change and for working through how to integrate civil society more effectively into country-level strategies.

The civil society engagement framework would also need to cover the activities of Australian NGOs funded through ANCP (and other arrangements) as well as support other global civil society organisations. As AusAID moves towards strengthening its partnerships with Australian NGOs, it is important to ensure that country programs can learn the lessons that emerge from the work funded by AusAID and in turn the NGOs can understand and contribute to the aid program's strategy. This might be achieved by, for example, country programs regularly consulting Australian NGOs when analysing, developing and reviewing their country strategies and through an annual forum.

It is crucial to develop country specific strategies for engaging with civil society that take into account the organisational landscape, the historical relationship between the state and civil society, the role of donors, the funding base for civil society, and the regulatory and legislative environment for civil society, as all these factors vary considerably across countries. Without such strategies, bilateral donors risk using a blueprint approach to the support of civil society in developing countries. In the absence of strategies, donors typically seek out organisations with which they are familiar, such as service-delivery NGOs and, where these are not visible, create such organisations. While this may well be an appropriate strategy for some purposes and some contexts, it can also reflect donors' lack of awareness of the array of existing non-government actors in a country.

A first step in developing an aid strategy for a country is to undertake a gendered analysis of the key agents of change in the country. Such analysis would identify the key legitimate actors in civil society and their contribution to development. It would seek to understand their relationship with the government and identify if and how donor support to civil society can serve to progress development. Wherever possible, international actors would work jointly with national reformers in government and civil society to analyse challenges and priorities.

Analysis should lead to contextually relevant strategic approaches to working with civil society

Analysing the nature of civil society in any particular context would answer questions such as:

- » Who are the key actors in civil society?
- » What are their social bases of support?
- » What visions of development do they promote?
- » How and around what issues do they mobilise their support?
- » How, when and about what do they engage with government, if at all?
- » How does the government view civil society actors and what steps has it taken to bring civil society actors into discussions of development policy?
- » In what ways can donor support to civil society serve the interests of poor and marginalised groups?
- » What difference can an external donor make to the direction, solidity and sustainability of civil society?

Source: Hall & Howell 2010, p. 8.

AusAID's Vanuatu program illustrates well the use of a contextually relevant strategic approach to working with civil society. With the Government of Vanuatu AusAID used a 'drivers of change' methodology in 2007 to identify the key actors in civil society relevant to the aid program's goals in Vanuatu. By using the 'drivers of change' methodology, the Vanuatu program identified two categories of non-government actors—the churches and chiefs—that had reach and authority across the islands and were potentially important partners for the aid program. The analysis also drew attention to gender issues in relation to the churches' and chiefly systems, but more broadly, reflected on the lack of representation of women in Vanuatu's political system. This underlines the importance, in any strategic approach to working with civil society, of ensuring a gendered analysis of civil society, a minimum level of engagement with women's groups, investing in women leaders in civil society organisations and integrating gender issues into broader dialogue with civil society. As a result of this analysis, the Vanuatu program was able to cease its resource intensive small grants program and focus its civil society support on four strategic partnerships: Wan Smolbag (a theatre group carrying out public awareness work); the Vanuatu Women's Centre; the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs; and a selection of churches.

Embarking on a civil society engagement framework and country specific strategies for working with civil society would need to be supported by available advice on working with civil society, as well as knowledge about good practice. The lack of a dedicated person or centre in country programs or in Canberra that focuses on engaging strategically with civil society means there is nowhere for country program staff in major programs like Papua New Guinea to turn to for advice. Moreover, there is little thinking or reflection overall about how the various types of work with civil society across the aid program add up in terms of their contribution to development processes and outcomes. This also reflects the lack of any influential structures in AusAID for reflecting on how best to work with civil society to achieve development results. Though there is a civil society network in AusAID, its discussions have yet to translate into changes in the aid program's approach to working with civil society.

What is the 'drivers of change' approach?

Developed by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), 'drivers of change' is a political analysis of the aid-recipient country, looking not only at the matrix of reformers within government but also in civil society and the private sector. DFID country offices have been encouraged to ask themselves a structured set of questions about the dynamics of pro-poor change, loosely grouped into six levels:

- » basic country analysis—covering the social, political, economic and institutional factors affecting the dynamics and possibilities for change
- » medium-term dynamics of change—covering policy processes, in particular the incentives and capacities of agents operating within institutions
- » role of external forces—including the intentional and unintentional actions of donors
- » link between change and poverty reduction—covering how change is expected to affect poverty and on what time scale
- » operational implications—covering how to translate our understanding into strategies and actions
- » how we work—covering DFID's organisational incentives, including those promoting or impeding the retention of country knowledge.

Source: DFID 2004.

Recommendations

1. Develop a civil society engagement framework that recognises civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process.

The Australian aid program plans to develop a civil society engagement framework within its policy for development assistance, in consultation with the Australian Council for International Development. An effective framework would recognise civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process.

2. Integrate country-specific civil society strategies into country aid strategies; include analysis of civil society in country situation analyses.

At country program level, existing processes for aid delivery strategies should consider civil society. In particular, country situation analyses should specifically include gendered analysis of civil society, from which each country program can develop a strategic approach to working with civil society. This approach would then be integrated into the delivery strategies and implementation plans for each country program.

3. Invest in appointing a civil society adviser in Canberra and major country programs, and in activating networks for sharing lessons related to engaging with civil society.

There is a need for establishing a greater knowledge base and technical expertise in AusAID to advise country program staff on working with civil society. Large programs, such as Papua New Guinea, would also benefit from having their own civil society adviser. Reactivating AusAID's civil society network would provide a means of sharing lessons and experiences of working with civil society across different country contexts.



The team from NGO Susu Mamas treat patients in Geraka village, Central Province, PNG. Photo credit: Anna Awasa, 2010

Partnering with civil society: towards more sustainable systems of service delivery and governance

In practical terms, strengthening local institutions and building sustainable systems of service delivery and governance, effectively, means programming in a way that acknowledges civil society organisations as integral development actors and part of the country's operating system. The good practice work with civil society then becomes part of the mainstream of the aid program's work rather than remaining isolated. This section presents lessons on selecting intermediary organisations, including civil society in program-based approaches, and understanding civil society and state relationships for service delivery. A role for donors in strengthening the enabling environment for civil society is also suggested.

Choose intermediaries to promote sustainable rather than parallel structures

Of the development actors through which AusAID engages with civil society, this evaluation looked at intermediaries most closely. Intermediaries typically include international NGOs, Australian NGOs, multilateral organisations and private consulting companies.

The mapping of AusAID's engagement with civil society in three countries in 2007–08 showed that AusAID provided most of its support to local civil society organisations via intermediaries (92%) rather than directly (8%). Intermediaries can play a number of roles for AusAID such as delivering services, advocating on social issues, acting as mentors to local civil society actors and serving as catalysts for change. They can administer grants as managing contractors helping AusAID manage high transaction costs and bring small activities to scale. Apart from their involvement in activities funded by AusAID, intermediaries may be engaged in work funded by other donors and some will have their own developmental priorities and agendas.

It is important that AusAID support provided through intermediaries does not displace the emergence or development of local civil society organisations. In particular, support for and through intermediaries should aim to foster sustainable (and scalable) rather than parallel systems of service delivery and governance. This was one of the criticisms made of the otherwise successful work of the private managing contractor used as an intermediary in the Philippines–Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP). Specifically, the intermediary organisation created a parallel system of governance by setting up its own local-level committees involving government and civil society groups. This bypassed the existing local government committees (albeit not without their own problems) that by law required the participation of a certain number of civil society organisations. As a result the services delivered through PACAP took on a life of their own that ran parallel with (and despite) government structures. This has implications for how such an approach can be sustained and brought to scale and have greater impact across the Philippines (Howell 2011, p. 20).

The way in which intermediaries work within and help to sustain existing or emerging systems and institutions should be a primary factor in selecting intermediaries and designing arrangements with them. The potential for increasing the scale and reach of support will be met if local

institutions are built into implementation. For example, the Vietnam–Australia NGO Cooperation Program shows evidence of positive progress in contributing to increased access to clean water and sanitation, improved community livelihoods and reduced vulnerability of poor communities to the impacts of floods and storms. These achievements have been made possible by the Program’s integration with the Government of Vietnam budget and planning systems at the sub-national level, and its linking of local-level practice at provincial level to national government policy efforts (AusAID 2009b, p. 20).

Clarifying the role of intermediaries in relation to local civil society and government is important. When supporting civil society via intermediaries, the aid program might consider requiring the intermediary to explain how they will relate to local civil society organisations and to local government structures to promote sustainable rather than parallel systems. This could cover whether the intermediary will partner local civil society groups and how, what the nature of the relationship will be, how it will support the growth of those groups and contribute to ensuring an enabling environment for civil society actors, and how it will exit from a particular context leaving behind sustainable systems of governance and service delivery.

Leaving behind a sustainable system requires much more than ‘handing over’ a program, structure or system to the local government or civil society group. Rather, the process of developing sustainability should be built into the country strategy and the design of the program from the start. This might include making provisions for staff in a program such as PACAP to be embedded within or associated with the relevant organisation (be that an umbrella NGO or government department) which would eventually take on the roles that the program was fulfilling.

When an intermediary performs the role of a managing contractor (effectively a risk manager) AusAID will need to consider the implications of the arrangement on its goals of adopting a strategic approach to working with civil society. Although the managing contractor arrangement reduces the administrative burden for AusAID and distributes the risks, it can also result in the aid program losing touch with civil society actors who are aware of social change processes. This makes it harder for the aid program to enhance its understanding of working with civil society.

There is also the risk that milestone payment arrangements can have a detrimental effect. They can encourage the managing contractor to focus on spending, achieving outputs and accounting for funds but neglect working towards establishing simpler procedures for engaging with civil society and achieving developmental results. As described in the 2009 *Commonwealth Grant Guidelines* ‘Poorly formulated reporting and accountability frameworks which focus rigidly on outputs rather than outcomes can potentially stifle innovation and the introduction of best practice by grant recipients, such as not-for-profit organisations in receipt of government funding’ (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2009, p. 20).

When a civil society group is invited to perform a managing contractor role, its time and resources can be taken up administering AusAID grants, making it less able to focus on its core business. This happened with the Media Council in Papua New Guinea, which, after several years of administering AusAID grants, realised it was unable to fulfil its core role and declined to take up further managing contractor roles for AusAID.

International and Australian NGOs warrant special consideration as they are, themselves, civil society organisations. International NGOs can play various roles. They can meet immediate needs, especially where those needs are not recognised by government or taken up by local civil society groups. They can also create and protect the spaces for the development of embryonic civil society organisations, as has occurred in Laos, China and Vietnam. For example, in China where the environment for NGOs is relatively restrictive, foundations and international NGOs have stimulated and supported embryonic civil society groups such as the Yunnan Participatory Research Network, the Maple Leaf Counselling Centre and various HIV and AIDS groups. In Laos, an

international NGO working group on civil society development is seeking funds to build on recent Laos legislation to help strengthen the capacities of newly permitted non-profit associations by providing in-house support for organisational development, coaching, mentoring and internships (CARE, Concern, SNV 2009).

The evaluation concluded that when supporting civil society via international or Australian NGO intermediaries, it should be clear how they will relate to local civil society organisations and to local government structures in a way that promotes sustainable rather than parallel systems. Australia is continuing its move towards establishing a partnership framework for working with international NGOs, particularly accredited Australian NGOs. The framework would make clear the specific roles expected of the partner NGO, such as strengthening state institutions and/or civil society organisations. In drawing up partnerships, the aid program should consider how the benefits of its contributions can be sustained once a tranche of aid has been spent and how small activities, if successful, can potentially be brought to scale.

Include civil society in program approaches

The evaluation considered what it would mean to expand the aid effectiveness principle of working in partner systems to include the systems of civil society, advocated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The aid program's move to program-based approaches should—depending on the context—include civil society in both policy dialogue as well as programming, for example, by supporting projects that are clearly positioned as part of a larger program (Hall & Howell, pp. 11–13).

Policy dialogue with civil society within a program-based approach allows multiple voices and perspectives to be heard and ownership to be spread beyond the state alone, leading to better development outcomes. For example, an evaluation of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund recommended the inclusion of civil society groups, such as think tanks and research institutions, in policy dialogue to enable better monitoring of the government's use of resources and policy implementation (Scanteam, p. 80).

Policy dialogue would entail the aid program viewing civil society as a collaborating partner and genuine interlocutor and providing space for the voice of civil society to be heard at all stages of the development process: from planning to negotiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This often requires building the capacity of both civil society and government partners to promote genuine inclusion and popular participation. Such processes need to be tailored according to the context and require analysis of government and civil society relations. This is particularly important in contexts where governments are suspicious of civil society and of external support to civil society. External support to civil society around governance issues, such as transparency and accountability, needs to be carefully handled so that governments do not become suspicious about external donor intentions or about civil society groups supported by donors, as has happened in Cambodia (Hughes 2007) and several ex-Soviet republics.

Discrete projects with civil society tend to have limited developmental impact (Howell 2011, p. 17). The aid program's choice of modality and approach should be appropriate for the context and purpose of the engagement. In the Philippines for example, PACAP supported civil society organisations to work in partnership with local government and helped to build the capacity of local governments to engage with communities (Howell 2011, p. 16). Also in the Philippines, within its broader sectoral program of education support, AusAID works with Procurement Watch, a small NGO, which is mobilising Parent–Community–Teacher associations to monitor the quality and quantity of chairs—a good example of locating a project within a broader program approach. The project aligns with government legislation on procurement and the past work of civil society

organisations and the Department of Education on public procurement monitoring. The potential to take such an approach to scale exists because groups like Procurement Watch can mobilise volunteers right across the Philippines.

Promoting more effective, accountable and transparent government

We [went] to manufacturing sites to inspect the specification. One we went to we rejected 600 chairs... we noticed there were nails [sticking out], so we rejected them [Focus Group Discussion].

In 2008, the Philippines Commission on Audit reported that PHP 33.8 million (\$750,000) worth of school furniture delivered to public schools was of substandard quality. As part of its support to the education sector in the Philippines, AusAID funded a pilot program with local NGO Procurement Watch to monitor the quality and quantity of furniture provided to schools. During the pilot phase, more than 600 volunteers were mobilised and trained to monitor the actual cost, quality and delivery of chairs and tables in 39 schools across six regions. Following the first phase, an additional 96 schools in one region alone asked to join the program.

Delivery was then given to our school for 200 chairs, and for tables and teachers' tables. And I was so grateful because all equipment delivered was in good condition. I am so happy because it responded to the needs of our school, because this year we have a tremendous increase in our enrolment. More than 300 students [Strategic informant].

Another example of support to civil society as part of a sector approach is the inclusion of civil society groups in Papua New Guinea for the prevention of HIV, which sits within the government's strategic framework. The work of the partner civil society organisations contributes to and is coordinated through Papua New Guinea's National Strategic Plan.

Harness the capacities of both state and non-state providers

In many countries, Australia included, civil society organisations provide services to the population, particularly in health and education and often under direct contract to government. In fact in Australia there has been a marked expansion over the last ten years of not-for-profits being funded to deliver services on behalf of the government (Productivity Commission 2010, p. 300).

To improve services in Vanuatu, AusAID supported village health workers through Save the Children Fund for several years. The Ministry of Health is now managing the contract with Save the Children Fund to support these workers. AusAID's funding of a partnership arrangement between the Ministry of Health and Save the Children Fund has increased the reach of government health services to 753 villages across Vanuatu, treating more than 60,000 people. As a result, provincial governments are now directing increased government resources to support the village health workers as they are considered part of the health system (Howell & Hall 2010, pp. 14, 24).

This example shows how AusAID support for service contracting arrangements between state and non-state providers allows the state to retain the functions of stewardship and oversight by setting policies and regulating the provision of services, but leaves the delivery of services (health, in this example) to non-state providers. This type of contracting model harnesses the capacities of both state and non-state providers for service delivery, particularly relevant in countries like Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu where capacity is limited.

Strengthen the enabling environment for civil society

A bilateral donor such as AusAID can play a key role in brokering relations between government, civil society and the private sector. This becomes particularly salient in authoritarian contexts where relations between government and civil society may be tense and laden with suspicion. In such contexts care needs to be taken to ensure that external support for civil society actors does not endanger particular groups or leaders that the government might see as threatening.

In some countries, donors can provide assistance that strengthens the enabling environment for civil society. For example, donors can help civil society organisations develop local accreditation and self regulating processes or help governments develop the legal framework for civil society organisations' operations. A strengthened enabling environment can also benefit donors in managing their concerns over weak management, and the probity and legitimacy of some civil society organisations.

Traditionally this has not been a focus for AusAID but there are examples of Australian NGOs providing this enabling support. In Laos for example, the international NGO working group on civil society development is seeking funds to create an enabling and supporting environment for civil society through capacity development within the government and private sector and to support dialogue and cooperation between government, private sector and not-for-profit organisations (CARE, Concern, SNV 2009). The aid program can explicitly consider strengthening the enabling environment for civil society as part of its strategic efforts to strengthen civil society generally.

Recommendations

4. Develop a rationale for choosing aid program intermediaries on the basis of their ability to help develop sustainable local civil society as well as to deliver results.

Moving to sustainable systems will involve articulating a rationale for working with different intermediaries, how this can best be done, and how it can contribute to developing sustainable local civil society organisations. Such a move will involve clarifying the role of the intermediary international NGO, Australian NGO, multilateral organisation or private company. It should be clear how the intermediary will work within local systems of government and civil society to bring to scale small and successful activities and leave an enduring legacy.

The civil society engagement framework will need to outline the goals of working through intermediaries, justify the reasons for using intermediaries, explain the processes for identifying intermediaries and identify the benefits and drawbacks of working through them.

5. Include civil society in policy dialogue and implementation when designing sector-wide approaches with partner governments.

Better integrating its civil society work across sector programs will increase the aid program's effectiveness in working with civil society. This could include positioning projects as part of a wider program approach, including civil society in policy dialogue or strengthening government relations with civil society for service delivery.

6. Support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society as part of strengthening civil society, where the context is appropriate.

In some countries the aid program can help civil society develop local accreditation and self regulating processes or help governments develop a legal framework for civil society organisation operations.



The Philippines NGO Procurement Watch works with parents, teachers and the community to monitor the quality of furniture in schools. AusAID partners with Procurement Watch as part of its support to the education sector in the Philippines. Photo credit: AusAID, 2009

Being fit for purpose: towards more enabling ways of working with civil society

This final chapter explores applying good practice in the design of individual programs with civil society in more detail. It focuses on practical ways that effectiveness can be improved by moving to longer term partnerships, broadening selection process options, and improving mutual accountability and donor harmonisation. The common theme is matching the purpose to the design of the intervention.

Move from short-term project grants to longer term partnerships and core funding

AusAID's expenditure on working with civil society in developing countries is significant. The results of mapping AusAID's engagement with civil society in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Philippines indicate that an average of one-third of AusAID's expenditure in those countries is directed to activities where AusAID or its intermediaries such as international NGOs, private development contractors or partner governments are working with civil society.⁵ This suggests that the scale of AusAID's work with civil society is likely to be significant across the aid program.

It is common practice among many donors to fund civil society organisations through short term projects. Short-term funding arrangements constrain the potential contribution that civil society organisations can make because their focus is on securing multiple projects in order to have sufficient funds to recruit and retain qualified people to provide basic administrative support. Even then they are left to cover the costs of program development, representation and office expenses. Short-term funded civil society organisations, therefore, operate in a climate of perpetual uncertainty about their future existence. These pressures are particularly acute for newly formed civil society groups.

Mapping of AusAID's engagement with civil society in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Philippines showed that project funding is the norm for AusAID, but the evaluation uncovered AusAID examples of a whole spectrum of funding arrangements. Funding ranges from short-term project funding (the PACAP grants, for example), longer term project funding that is contracted annually (the Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea and the AusAID NGO Cooperation Program) to slightly longer term partnership arrangements (Wan Smolbag and Vanuatu Kastom Governance Partnership) and core funding (Vanuatu Women's Centre and Fiji Women's Crisis Centre).

Projects may last one or two years or occasionally longer. Civil society organisations often end up with a series of projects of varying duration, which affects organisational stability and predictability. Furthermore, one-off grants for 12 months or less achieve little in terms of development outcomes, as was found for the small grants component of PACAP in the Philippines.

⁵ Total AusAID expenditure on country programs in 2007–08 was \$1,738.4 million, 27 per cent of which the three target country programs of this evaluation accounted for. Expenditure on initiatives with major civil society engagement accounted for 19 per cent of the Vanuatu program, 26 per cent of the Papua New Guinea program and 42 per cent of the Philippines program, an average of 29 per cent.

Indeed, the same might be argued about grants for 24 months. The annual planning and reporting cycle used by ANCP and the Church Partnership Program increased the workload of the NGOs and AusAID, and shortened the development horizon of projects.

If AusAID and a particular civil society organisation have worked together for several years, then requiring that organisation to complete the same processes for each year of funding or for each project application creates unnecessary work for both the organisation and AusAID. The Philippines cluster evaluation found, for example:

All four NGO partnerships noted significant inefficiencies associated with the annual planning and reporting cycle imposed by the ANCP. This cycle increased the workload of both the NGOs and AusAID, but it also shortened the ‘development horizon’ of the projects (AusAID 2008, p. 5).

A more efficient alternative would be to form a partnership with proven organisations. When selecting organisations as long-term partners, donors would need to consider their track record, mandate, probity and legitimacy, to ensure that they are supporting the most appropriate groups. Where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance over a number of years the aid program could move towards a long-term partnership arrangement with trusted civil society organisations.

The evaluation concluded that the aid program should move towards a more enabling type of support and specifically move from short-term to long-term funding where appropriate and strategic. The new Australian NGO Program in Africa is a good example of where such change is being made through five-year partnership arrangements between AusAID and Australian NGOs (AusAID 2009a, p. 14). The move to multi-year funding in the AusAID NGO Cooperation Program is also a good example.

Core funding describes an arrangement where funds are paid to civil society organisations (local, national and international) for use at their discretion. These funds contribute to programs and activities that civil society organisations develop and implement on their own authority and for which they are directly responsible. An example is AusAID’s core support since 1989 for the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, which provides counselling, advocacy and support for survivors of violence. AusAID also provides core funding to the Vanuatu Women’s Centre.

Addressing gender inequality

AusAID’s long-term core funding for the Vanuatu Women’s Centre since 1999 has yielded significant results. After 10 years of lobbying, the centre was crucial in the gazettal of the *Family Protection Act* in 2009, which, for example, extended the definition of rape so that rape in marriage is not precluded. The Vanuatu Women’s Centre now provides advice and advocacy to the Vanuatu Police Force in applying the Act.

Providing core funding, however, runs the risk of benefiting only a limited number of high-capacity civil society organisations, with the possibility of favouring larger, urban-based NGOs. This could create (or further) divisions within civil society as well as an impression of donor favouritism. Providing core funding also runs the risk of committing donors to organisations and activities that no longer align with core priorities. From the point of view of civil society organisations, core funding could also accentuate their tendency to depend on a small number of donors (Hall & Howell 2010).

Nonetheless core funding for strategic and appropriate civil society groups is relevant to ensuring that partnerships between government, donors and civil society organisations are effective. If civil society groups are devoting considerable time to raising funds, they will have less time to focus on the work of the partnership. Organisational uncertainty about the immediate future is also less conducive to fostering long-term relations with government.

Consider funding for financial sustainability

As well as structuring aid so that it fosters sustainable development outcomes, it is important to fund local civil society organisations in a way that promotes their sustainability. Bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations and international NGOs are often major sources of funding for civil society organisations in developing countries. In some contexts national and local governments are important channels of funding.

Civil society organisations also have their own methods of raising funds, but these tend to be limited. For example, Transparency International PNG organises an annual Walk Against Corruption, for which participants pay a minimal fee. Churches raise money through their congregations, receive funds from ‘sister-churches’ in other countries and, as in Papua New Guinea, receive money through tithing arrangements. In Vanuatu tribal chiefs receive payments in kind for their work with communities.

Nonetheless it is well known that some groups would collapse without continued donor support. AusAID should, therefore, consider ways of ensuring the sustainability of organisations which are carrying out long-term work that aims to change behaviour and attitudes, are addressing a challenge such as HIV and AIDS, or are entering into partnerships with AusAID. In addition to providing core funding for or entering partnership arrangements with strategic and trusted organisations, this might be achieved by designating that a small percentage of the funds go into a trust fund or by making a separate endowment into a reserve fund.

Ford Foundation endowment grants

The Ford Foundation’s philanthropic philosophy includes not only the provision of external funds, but also the ability for a community to invest in itself. Among its mechanisms of support for civil society organisations (for example, project grants and core support), the Ford Foundation has an endowment category that seeks to support permanent financial assets of the recipient organisation. Ford has experimented with multiple variations of institutional endowment grants since the 1950s. The Kenya Community Development Foundation received an endowment challenge grant from the Ford Foundation in 2006 requiring a match from the Kenyan Foundation. The Kenyan Foundation now has assets of around US\$4 million and is supporting endowment funds in 20 communities in Kenya.

Source: Hall & Howell 2010, p. 23.

The aid program could explore the possibility of trialling such an approach with one or more of its long term civil society partners. This would involve the partner establishing a trust under local law with a separate board of trustees, which AusAID could approve. The trust deed would establish the limitations of what the trust can do and what investments would be acceptable, such as those with triple A rating. AusAID could periodically invest a grant into the trust fund to supplement its core funding of the organisation. The funds held in trust would no longer belong to AusAID but it would

still hold the reputational risk of what happens to those funds. AusAID would mitigate against this risk by building in fraud procedures, for example into the trust deed. Maintaining the value of the fund would mean that only a proportion of the income could be used each year.

While not without risk, this would be a highly innovative pilot for the aid program. It could be an effective marketing tool for the civil society organisation to raise funds from other donors to put into the trust and to ensure their longer term sustainability. This might help break the cycle of donor dependence that has become the norm with local civil society organisations. The cost effectiveness of this approach would need further investigation before embarking on a trial.

Fit selection processes to purpose

Using a competitive process to select civil society organisations for funding can lead to negative outcomes. For example, it can foster the emergence of ‘mushroom’ or ‘popcorn’ NGOs that are created in response to donor calls for funding proposals, as happened in Papua New Guinea when AusAID’s Community Development Scheme and the HIV and AIDS program called for proposals. At the same time the process of applying for competitive funding can be too complicated for newly started civil society organisations with limited staff capacity. Large organisations with experience in applying for funds and successful track records of doing so are more likely to produce winning bids. As a result civil society groups that ought to apply, do not and donors may not select from the most appropriate actors.

It should not be assumed that competitive funding allocations promote institution building (Balisacan & Hill 2009, p. 9). Besides competitive funding rounds, a number of other options are available for choosing how to select organisations for grant funding. These may be more appropriate to selecting civil society partners more likely to be accountable to their constituencies and potentially self-sustaining. The options include:

- » targeted or restricted competitive funding rounds open to a small number of potential funding recipients based on the specialised requirements of the program or project under consideration
- » a non-competitive, open process through which applications may be submitted at any time over the life of the program and are assessed individually against the selection criteria set down for the program, with funding decisions in relation to each application being determined without reference to the comparative merits of other applications
- » a demand-driven process through which applications that satisfy stated eligibility criteria receive funding up to the limit of available appropriations and subject to revision, suspension or abolition of the program (Australian National Audit Office 2010).

In selecting an appropriate process, AusAID guidelines require consideration of the seven principles described in the *Commonwealth Grant Guidelines* (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2009) in particular a focus on outcomes, proportionality and value for money. As with all aspects of the aid program, fraud and mismanagement cannot be tolerated.

Commonwealth Grant Guidelines

In selecting the most appropriate process, regard should be had to the seven key principles established in the 2009 *Commonwealth Grant Guidelines*.

- » **Robust planning and design** which underpins efficient, effective and ethical grants administration, including through the establishment of effective risk management processes.
- » **An outcomes orientation** in which grants administration focuses on maximising the achievement of intended government outcomes from the available funding.
- » **Proportionality** in which key program design features and related administrative processes are commensurate with the scale, nature, complexity and risks involved in the granting activity.
- » **Collaboration and partnership** in which effective consultation and a constructive and cooperative relationship between the administering agency, grant recipients and other relevant stakeholders contribute to achieving more efficient, effective and equitable grants administration.
- » **Governance and accountability** in which a robust governance framework is established that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all relevant parties; establishes the policies, procedures and guidelines necessary for defensible funding recipient selection and administration processes that comply with all relevant legal and policy requirements; and supports public accountability for decision-making, grant administration and performance monitoring.
- » **Probity and transparency** in which program administration reflects ethical behaviour, in line with public sector values and duties; incorporates appropriate internal and fraud control measures; ensures that decisions relating to granting activity are impartial, appropriately documented and publicly defensible; and complies with public reporting requirements.
- » **Achieving value with public money** which should be a prime consideration in all aspects of grant administration and involve the careful consideration of costs, benefits, options and risks.

Source: AusAID 2011b.

The guidelines make a case for donors to be more proactive, adopting a more targeted, open or demand driven approach to selecting organisations rather than calling for competitive bids. In this way grant programs can be more carefully designed around achieving results and value for money. A good example of proactively seeking out organisations comes from Indonesia, where AusAID support for the Smeru Research Institute in Jakarta enabled it to quickly become the pre-eminent institution of its kind in Indonesia, and perhaps in South-East Asia. What was distinctive about this support was that it was based on a longer term view of developing strategic partnerships. In this instance a competitive tendering approach would not have produced the desired outcomes. An open approach has also been considered for support to the University of the Philippines School of Economics and the Philippines Institute of Development Studies (Balisacan & Hill 2009).

Promote mutual and multiple accountabilities through greater transparency

More transparency and mutual accountability is promoted by the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) because it can improve effectiveness and the achievement of results. Mutual and multiple accountabilities means donors should be accountable to recipients for delivering and guiding funds; and recipient civil society organisations should be accountable to donors for the use of those funds, which in the case of bilateral aid, stem from taxpayers' money. Furthermore, civil society organisations should be accountable to beneficiaries.

However, what happens in practice is that accountability processes tend to be uni-directional and top-down; that is, aid recipients are accountable to AusAID but not to aid beneficiaries. AusAID demands accountability from civil society groups, but does not reciprocate by accounting for its own performance. There were numerous examples of this in the field research. For example, the implementation of the Vanuatu Kastom Governance Partnership fell behind schedule because of delays by AusAID in approving the third phase of the program. There was no system in place for AusAID to account for this.

Addressing these accountability issues is not difficult. The aid program could require civil society groups that it supports to demonstrate how they have formally accounted to their beneficiaries. Recent research by the Australian Council for International Development points to numerous innovative examples by Australian NGOs of bottom-up accountability (Roche 2009). In adopting this approach AusAID and Australian NGOs could set up a simple system to provide accountability to aid recipients, such as an annual mutual accountability meeting between donor and recipient. Both the aid program and the civil society organisations they fund could be more transparent about their funding, performance and results. An important step in this process will be to implement the new Transparency Charter for the Australian aid program to publish documents and data in a way that is comprehensive, accessible and timely (AusAID 2011a, p. 24). Accountability and transparency systems that are top-down, bottom-up and multi-directional rather than uni-directional need also to be applied to intermediary agencies such as managing contractors.

Ensure benefits will accrue from donor harmonisation

The aid effectiveness principle of donor harmonisation is an essential feature of good donor practice (High Level Forum 2005, paragraphs 32–42). Donor harmonisation refers to efforts by donors to coordinate their official development assistance in a systematic manner. With civil society organisations, donors can strategically harmonise their activities and funding around an agreed set of goals including pooled funding. Administrative harmonisation, where donors agree to harmonise their reporting and accounting systems, might include an agreement to receive one narrative report and set of accounts from a jointly funded civil society organisation, or an agreement that one donor takes responsibility for the administration of a joint program.

Donor harmonisation has the advantage of reducing the administrative, reporting and accounting burden on recipient civil society organisations. From a donor's perspective it also can lead to more effective and efficient use of aid funds. However, when donors agree to harmonise their support, it often remains an agreement in theory alone unless there is concerted effort to revise existing structures, processes and procedures in a way that makes civil society engagement with multiple donors less burdensome for all involved.

The evaluation team encountered several examples of donor harmonisation. In Papua New Guinea there were quarterly donor meetings on civil society issues. In Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand both support the theatre group Wan Smolbag and agreed to receive a single report to lighten the reporting load of the theatre group.

However, efforts to harmonise donor support bring challenges for both donors and aid recipients. One of the laments of AusAID staff was that as it is the main donor in many Pacific island countries, the contribution of other donors would be so minimal that coordination would make little difference to policy choices or focus, or to the distribution of funds. One option to consider in such circumstances would be delegated cooperation, where donors agree to delegate responsibility for a pooled fund to one donor. The other donors remain strategically engaged, share responsibility for processes and outcomes and claim visibility for their support.

Harmonised multi-donor funding for civil society runs the risk of limiting the avenues through which civil society actors can access donor funding. This might be in terms of the types of organisation eligible and able to apply for funding, or in terms of the range of uses for which civil society organisations can access donor funding. Furthermore, harmonisation risks creating distance in the relationship between civil society actors and particular donors. Donors may have less frequent contact with civil society groups and so be less aware of new ideas, practices and innovations coming out of civil society work.

Another challenge of harmonisation for donors is investing sufficient time in the process of harmonisation to make it work. For example, in Vanuatu, even though Australia and New Zealand had agreed to require Wan Smolbag to produce only one narrative report, in practice the theatre group had to produce individual reports and accounts for each donor for activities they conducted separately. Perversely, Wan Smolbag's administrative work increased as a result of harmonisation. Donors, too, have found that harmonisation created more work. In several countries AusAID has reported that administering and managing harmonised funds has added to a program's workload.

Greater effort is needed to establish systems that reduce the burden on recipient civil society organisations. Donors need to examine the requirements of their procedures and make flexible adjustments wherever possible, for example, ensuring that reporting and accounting times correspond with local financial year cycles.

Recommendations

7. Design individual programs with civil society as follows:

- Move from short-term to longer-term funding where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance and consider providing core funding to trusted and effective civil society organisations.
- Develop a clear basis for selecting individual civil society organisations. Choose partners through targeted rather than competitive approaches, where appropriate.
- Promote mutual accountabilities through greater transparency of both civil society organisations and the aid program.
- Harmonise more efficiently with other donors so that the benefits accrue to both recipients and donors.



Some young members from the Wan Smolbag Literacy Class in Vanuatu (and a tiny visitor) show off their creations after a craft session using material that would usually be thrown away. Photo credit: Josie Orr, 2008

Further investigation

A number of areas for further investigation arose from this evaluation or were beyond its scope. The first is to investigate the effectiveness of AusAID's engagement with global civil society, including Australian NGOs. This area of investigation should focus on the roles global civil society organisations play in the fabric of civil society in developing countries and transnationally. The investigation should also look at global civil society's effectiveness and the most effective means of donor support.

This evaluation was confined to AusAID's engagement with civil society in developing countries. Its findings should be shared with other Australian government departments delivering overseas development assistance. Investigation into how effectively other government departments engage with civil society in developing countries may be warranted.

Efficiency and value for money of working with civil society organisations were not assessed in this evaluation and more research is needed in this area. More investigation of effective donor practice with civil society in difficult or post conflict situations is also needed to help guide staff in contexts like Afghanistan or Zimbabwe.

Finally, the evaluation raised the idea that the aid program could support the financial sustainability of civil society organisations by, for example, designating a small percentage of funds or a separate endowment to go into a trust fund for the civil society organisation. The aid program could investigate the cost effectiveness of trialling a trust fund arrangement to build financial sustainability for local civil society organisations.

Summary of recommendations

1. Develop a civil society engagement framework that recognises civil society in developing countries as integral to the development process.
2. Integrate country-specific civil society strategies into country aid strategies; include analysis of civil society in country situation analyses.
3. Invest in appointing a civil society adviser in Canberra and major country programs, and in activating networks for sharing lessons on engaging with civil society.
4. Develop a rationale for choosing aid program intermediaries on the basis of their ability to help develop sustainable local civil society as well as to deliver results.
5. Include civil society in policy dialogue and implementation when designing sector wide approaches with partner governments.
6. Support initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society as part of strengthening civil society, where the context is appropriate.
7. Design individual programs with civil society as follows:
 - Move from short-term to longer-term funding where there has been demonstrated capacity and performance and consider providing core funding to trusted and effective civil society organisations.
 - Develop a clear basis for selecting individual civil society organisations. Choose partners through targeted rather than competitive approaches, where appropriate.
 - Promote mutual accountabilities through greater transparency of both civil society organisations and the aid program.
 - Harmonise more efficiently with other donors so the benefits accrue to both recipients and donors.

Annex 1: Evaluation methods

The guiding question for this evaluation was ‘to what extent and how has AusAID helped civil society to contribute to government and other development actors achieving positive and sustainable development outcomes’.

This evaluation question was broken down into three key questions. Table 1 presents these questions and summarises the main methods by which they were addressed. In some cases one method addressed several questions and, conversely, each key question was addressed through several lines of inquiry.

Three AusAID country programs were selected as case studies for this evaluation: Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu. These programs were selected to illustrate different contexts, ways of working and means of engaging with civil society.

The evaluation process began with a literature review of ‘good practice’ in how donors engage with civil society, developed a ‘theory of change’ that highlighted the contribution of civil society along six development pathways, and mapped engagement with civil society in the three target country programs.

Table 1: Relationship between evaluation questions and key methods

Key evaluation questions	Key methods
<p>1. What have been the intended or unintended results of AusAID’s engagement with civil society?</p>	<p>Desktop mapping of AusAID’s aid activities with civil society in three countries. This contributed to answering Question 1 by mapping activities in which AusAID engaged with civil society in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu. It also informed the country case studies.</p> <p>International good practice review. This provided a set of criteria with which to address Question 3.</p>
<p>2. To what extent is AusAID’s engagement with civil society relevant to the development context?</p>	<p>Iterative development of a theory-of-change model for how AusAID engages with civil society. This model was used as a thinking tool to guide the evaluation, especially in how to conceptualise the expected results of AusAID’s engagement.</p>
<p>3. To what extent does AusAID’s engagement with civil society in partner countries reflect other aspects of good donor practice?</p>	<p>Studies of five aid activities in three countries. These included document analysis, mapping the theory of change for each activity, observation of aid activities, and semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and key informants. The studies addressed Questions 1 and 2 for specific activities and fed into the cross-analysis of the activities, which contributed to answering Question 3. The studies also contributed to the respective country-level studies.</p> <p>Cross-analysis of five aid activities. This placed an emphasis on understanding the extent to which AusAID’s engagement with civil society reflects good practice. This analysis helped to address Question 3 by applying the good practice criteria to the five aid activities.</p> <p>Advisory group comprising key stakeholders and experts. The advisory group deliberated on the findings and tested their validity for different contexts by participating in peer reviews and in theory-of-change and other workshops. Its work was supplemented by an expert evaluation review that contested the quality of evaluation products.</p> <p>Synthesis of 25 evaluation reports on aid activities with civil society. This synthesis examined some of AusAID’s and Australian non-government organisations’ engagements with civil society for a broader range of activities and countries than were covered by the activity and country case studies. This helped to address Question 3 by applying the good practice criteria to a further set of aid activities across a broader sample of contexts.</p> <p>Country case studies. These studies included document analysis and strategic informant interviews in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. This method helped to answer all three questions at a strategic level by considering the relevance and effectiveness of AusAID’s engagement with civil society within the development context of each partner country. In lieu of a country case study for the Philippines, the preliminary findings of the evaluation were tested through analysis of a new approach to civil society engagement in the Philippines country program.</p>

Within those three country programs the evaluation process looked in depth at five case-studies of aid activities that involved civil society: the Philippines–Australia Community Assistance Program, the school-based Procurement Watch (Bantay Eskuwela) program in the Philippines, the Vanuatu Kastom Governance Partnership, the Papua New Guinea – Australia Church Partnerships Program, and the Papua New Guinea – Australia HIV and AIDS Program. On the basis of the reports on each activity, a cross-analysis was conducted to draw out some of the common achievements, lessons, challenges and factors promoting and hindering success on the six development pathways.

Two broad country studies were carried out in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu to understand the more general issues related to engaging with civil society across country programs, and preliminary evaluation findings were tested on a major program in the Philippines.

The degree to which the findings from each phase of the evaluation could be generalised across the aid program was tested through a synthesis of aid activity evaluations from a wider range of contexts that AusAID works in, and through the evaluation advisory group.

Every effort was made to minimise bias in this evaluation, but there are always limitations. The evaluation methods were primarily qualitative, and there were some gaps in data triangulation. Due to logistical issues in the fieldwork not all relevant views were captured— particularly those of government representatives. The sample of activities and countries were diverse and covered very different contexts but were not representative of the whole aid program. Efforts to generalise findings were limited by the availability of high quality evaluations from other countries and the experience of the evaluation advisory group and evaluation team. Efficiency was not investigated as had been originally planned, as evidence collected proved to be insufficient and incomplete, and the decision was made to cut this criterion from the scope. Finally, a selective approach was taken to synthesise large amounts of information and multiple reports in the companion volume to produce a digestible and actionable final report, such that not all findings are fully represented in the final report.

Key reports were independently reviewed to examine the quality of the methodology and use of evidence in determining findings, conclusions and recommendations. This final report and the Analysis of five cases of engagement with civil society in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines (Howell 2011) were rated very highly when reviewed by an independent Australian evaluation expert (Professor Patricia Rogers). All reports were also peer reviewed by the evaluation advisory group.

For more information on the evaluation methodology, see the evaluation plan (Dart, Hall & Rudland 2010).

Annex 2: References

Companion volume contents

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