

Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness Secretariat
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I am making this submission based on my experience as team leader of a “successful” AusAID project in Vietnam from 2002 to 2011 [North Vam Nao Water Control Project (NVN)] and from 2007 – 2009 as an adviser for the National Target Program for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in two provinces in Vietnam. [AusAID provided direct budget support for this program].

The scope of my submission is the basic aid program [not including disaster aid].

(a) Program Structure

Geographic focus Broadly focus on where the % poor households is highest working out from Australia to pacific countries, southeast Asia, south Asia, Africa and beyond as funds permit. The more poor families that can be helped the better.

Sectoral focus Broadly focus on institutional improvement, governance, better regulations in public and private sectors and education and on the job training in the new mechanisms. Sustainability only comes from institutionalizing improvements. AusAID scholarships, and related activity support including structured study tours are excellent. Key sectors which help the poor are rural related. [water, sanitation, education, agriculture, aquaculture] including marketing research and development of products, and linking into skills training for those that move from the countryside to the city as part of a country’s inevitable move to industrialization.

Poverty focus Based on % poverty, distance from Australia and so it doesn’t matter about low or middle income status of a country [middle income countries have sub-regions of low income]

Mode NGO is best for small projects at local / district level*, bilateral is best for piloting new mechanisms in a province and multilateral is best for scaling up piloted successes. AusAID direct budget support [with associated technical assistance] for National program , usually in cooperation with other donors also works well for piloting and scaling up.

*In general recipient governments have trouble involving NGOs at a program level, so, at provincial or national level, its best if NGO involvement is coordinated under, or as part of, a bigger government to government assistance project / program at the provincial or national program levels.

(b) Lessons learned

Decentralization AusAID is strong on decentralization aid projects to the provincial level and has demonstrated its a good mechanism for piloting improvements at the local level when combined with monitoring links put in place so the national level can be involved in monitoring the lessons learned.

Scaling up AusAID could be stronger on supporting scaling up of lessons learned in piloting new approaches, Support fo scaling up is essential for long term sustainability across the country at the national level [must recognize the National / Provincial legal framework]. AusAID shouldn't walk away and just leave it to others to scale up the positive results achieved in a project. AusAID should be proactive and positively get involved in supporting the scaling up process. Pilot projects are just the start of a long road to get the improvements into the whole country.

(c) AusAID approach

AusAID implement the basic aid program using local program officers as supervisors. There seems to have been an out-of-balance factor creeping in and AusAID Canberra seem to be not closely enough in contact with actual project results.

In 2002 NVN Project had a program officer in Canberra and we had a project officer in HCMC. I think we could have made better progress if, a program officer in Canberra had kept a reduced level of involvement after localization was introduced 2003-04. The team leader now gets little feedback from Canberra on; i)issues arising or ii) Canberra view on effectiveness of what the project is achieving. On the other hand decentralization has improved the communication between the direct beneficiaries and the team leader and between the project and the post.

I think their needs to a better balance because Canberra need to be assured of the effectiveness and efficiency of the aid dollar. There needs to be a better reporting / communication system from projects that gets the efficiency and effectiveness data into Canberra. AusAID tried once to develop such a system in 2005 -06 but it didn't work. I think with modern electronic systems it is possible to develop an approach where the team leader can keep in touch with both the program office in Canberra and the local staff at the post. A responsibility matrix can be easily worked out to avoid duplication of reporting / monitoring/ evaluating roles and responsibilities.

(d) Appropriate organization structure

Structure A matrix structure is best. AusAID staff should have geographic responsibilities as well a technical expertise

ODA Coordination in Australia Basically it should be aligned to public opinion which should be managed very pro-actively by AusAID. The aid program needs the continuous active support of the Australian people. The people should get a lot of feed back on the objectives of the aid program, what their aid dollar is spent on and how effective it is in helping reduce poverty sustainable [the biggest bang for the buck spent is what the public want to see achieved] and AusAID should take account of public feed

back. Much more transparency through the AusAID website, TV documentary, and face book etc. will be beneficial in a modern world.

ODA Coordination externally I think its fine the way it is

(e) Appropriateness of current arrangements

Evaluation As mentioned in (c) and (d) above, the AusAID effectiveness monitoring, evaluation and reporting needs to be improved and combined with better transparency through easier access by the public via the AusAID website, face book etc. At the same time AusAID needs to create better linkages to the actual project results being achieved for improving monitoring and evaluation during projects and evaluation of effectiveness after projects* . Additionally, more post project evaluation and reporting via the AusAID website is needed to enable the general public to gain access to evaluation reports. I feel AusAID is currently very weak on the evaluation and transparency.

* Fundamentally. AusAID have to wait some years after a project is finished to measure / evaluate if it was effective or not.

Governance AusAID should push for donor and national government coordination to unify, prioritise and implement actions to improve in-country anti-fraud and anti corruption efforts.

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