

## Supplementary response from the Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University to the Call for Submissions on Australia's new International Development Policy focused on the Performance Framework

FEBRUARY 2020

**The Institute for Human Security and Social Change is a research centre at La Trobe University engaged in research and practice with international development and domestic development with Indigenous communities and organisations.**

We work closely with the Australian aid program and international development initiatives in a number of ways:

- We are a partner with the University of Birmingham on the DFAT funded [Developmental Leadership Program](#), a research program exploring the role of individual and collective leadership in promoting development, as well as the links between gender and politics;
- We have provided monitoring, evaluation and research support to a range of DFAT funded programs in the Pacific including: [Governance](#) and Law and [Justice programs](#) in the Solomon Islands; the [Australian Pacific Training Coalition](#) (formerly known as the Australia Pacific Technical College); and the [PNG-Australia Governance partnership](#);
- We have undertaken research on the SDGs and International NGOs;
- We convene a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice involving development practitioners working on DFAT funded programs across the Pacific, Institute staff and monitoring and evaluation practitioners working in remote Indigenous Australia;
- We engage with, and undertake work for, a number of Australian International NGOs and [ACFID](#) their peak body, as well as the [RDI Network](#), with a particular emphasis on development effectiveness;
- Our Director is a member of the Intellectual Leadership team of the DFID funded [Centre for Excellence for Development Impact and Learning](#) (CEDIL).

**This submission builds on our more general response to this review which argued for the need to revise the performance framework for Australia's international development work so that it:**

**a) includes measures of the use of evidence and effectiveness of learning systems central to the framework.**

**b) has a greater emphasis on generating feedback on how effective Australia's relationships are in the region.**

**c) assists in building greater accountability between citizens and governments in the region.**

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As a research organisation with close links to a number of DFAT funded programs, and with long-term experience on supporting effective monitoring, evaluation and learning in international development programs we would like to make the following observations and recommendations:

## 1. ENCOURAGE USE OF EVIDENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING SYSTEMS

Our experience in seeking to work in ways which are consistent with the above reveals that there is often a tension between activity and output monitoring, and strategic monitoring, research and evaluation, with an inevitable emphasis on the former.

The emphasis on tangible, quantifiable, short term results is often at the expense of evidence informed understanding about what long-term change is happening and how the programs can adapt to further support positive sustainable development outcomes. A problem that is [widely recognised](#) in the sector. This is despite program designs paying lip-service to the importance of evidence informed decision-making and the emphasis on systemic change. As such there are a number of institutional issues which a revised performance framework should address:

- As others have suggested in reviewing questions of aid effectiveness<sup>[1]</sup> it is important that measures include data related to both evaluation systems and institutional learning systems. More specific suggestions on indicators in these areas can draw upon the DAC Peer Reviews and Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) reviews, for bilateral and multilateral agencies respectively;

- Recognise that evaluation and learning systems need to generate and use both [‘thin’ and ‘thick’ data](#) i.e. summary aggregated numbers, and richer analysis of programs, processes and relationships through shared face to face sense-making with partners and other stakeholders. In particular for policy purposes it is this mix of evidence which provides not just an understanding ‘what works’, but what works for who and where, as well why and how it worked.

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## 2. GENERATE AND ACT ON FEEDBACK

Australia seeks to build more effective, mature, long term relationships in the Asia-Pacific region. As such any performance framework needs to provide incentives to increase understanding of how those relationships are evolving, and promoting changes in policy and practices as a result.

As much of the private sector has shown, as well as some government departments around the world, seeking and acting on customer or citizen feedback to assess performance is common place, and an effective complement to more top-down Key Performance Indicators.

Therefore we believe more effort could be made to elicit data on Australia’s relations with the region at different levels:

1. Mckee, Blampied, Mitchell, Rogerson 2019. "Revisiting Aid Effectiveness: A New Framework and Set of Measures for Assessing Aid "Quality." CGD Working Paper 524. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/revisiting-aid-effectiveness-new-framework-and-set-measures-assessing-aid>

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- Regionally and nationally through surveys similar to some of the domains the [Lowy Institute Poll](#) looks at in Australia, or the [Pew Research Center](#) looks at globally. This could be done in ways that utilises the existing capacity of Pacific Islands institutions like the [Secretariat of the Pacific Community](#) and [Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisation](#) (PIANGO);
  - For particular programs there are examples such as the [RAMSI people's survey](#), and a range of citizen feedback initiatives which have been explored over the past decade, as well as [active listening](#) projects designed to systematically collect feedback over time;
  - These formal processes need to be complemented by less formal engagement. For a period the DFAT Solomon Islands Post ran a regular process of receiving confidential feedback from the Solomons Islands Government. Not only did this provide Australia with invaluable information about the process of its engagement in that country, it was also understood by the Solomon Islands Government to be a respectful and mature attempt to listen to their views.



FORMAL PROCESSES NEED TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY LESS FORMAL ENGAGEMENT.



### 3. BUILD GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENTS



BUILDING A CITIZEN INFORMED APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE... CAN FURTHER ENHANCE THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO THEIR CITIZENS.



There is a growing [body of evidence](#) which shows that under the right circumstances, strategic attempts at promoting 'social accountability' i.e. the ability of citizens to hold their government and aid agencies to account can be highly effective in producing better development outcomes, and in reshaping the relationship between citizen and state.

We would therefore argue that a strategic approach to performance would recognise that building a citizen informed approach to performance can not only produce important data which provides feedback to programs and donors on their performance, but can be designed in ways that further enhance the accountability of national government to their citizens. This would help enormously in addressing the challenges noted by [Dan Honig](#) and others about current accountability regimes in donor agencies.

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The experience of the [World Bank](#) in this area as well as [research on social accountability](#) suggests that this approach can be particularly relevant in contexts where governance is weak, but requires much more than simply the supply of information to citizens. Initiatives in this area might include:

- **Working with civil society organisation nationally and regionally (such as PIANGO) to explore opportunities to support initiatives of this type, and in particular processes suited to the context which are already being developed. At a national and regional level lessons might also be learnt from the [Afro-barometer](#) process which produces a pan-African series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, and society, which might also include some of the data needed to answer questions about how Australia's relationships with region compare with those of other countries. Equally data from a number of surveys covering what some call 'recipient preferences' might be usefully employed Mckee et al, p.46);**
- **Supporting a number of nascent networks of local monitoring and evaluation specialists and practitioners, including that being developed by SPC in the Pacific, who can tailor approaches to local contexts as well as provide more regular support to existing programs. Resourcing local teams to design and implement strategic monitoring and evaluation for complex development programs, with external support to build local capacity where needed, is liable to be much more cost-effective in the long run than the continued reliance on Australian and European based consultants.**

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