

Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration: Case Study of Australia

Executive Summary

January 2008

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Australia rates well in terms of its high-level commitment to the Paris Declaration principles ...

The policy framework for the aid programme, the creation of the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) and the performance assessment and evaluation policy demonstrate Australia's high-level commitment to the Paris Declaration principles and the broader "aid effectiveness" agenda. Key cross-cutting policies, such as the Anti-Corruption Policy and the Gender Policy, strongly support the Paris Declaration.

Country & Regional Strategies are being used to give emphasis to the Paris Declaration in country programmes ...

Of ten AusAID country and regional strategies considered by this evaluation, all touched on some or all of the principles of the Paris Declaration, although there was no discernible consistency in how this was done across the strategies. While all strategies were prepared in consultation with partner governments, two were specifically developed as "joint" strategies with the partner government, with one also being "joint" with another donor.

Australia's considerable involvement with fragile states brings extra challenges in a Paris context ...

Fragile states comprise a greater percentage of Australian aid than any other DAC member, and so Australia's commitment to, and implementation of the Paris Declaration, is very often in the context of working with a fragile partner. Australia has taken an active role in the development and trialling of the DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States.

Australian aid to fragile states places a particularly strong emphasis on working in a coherent, whole-of-government way.

For example, in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, Australia has deployed a range of public servants to work inside the governments of these two countries. While this approach is controversial because it runs the risk of undermining ownership, Australia places particular emphasis on high-quality capacity building, including developing twinning arrangements at the institutional level. In the long-term, the decision to build capacity through strengthening government systems from the ground up has the potential to be more Paris-compliant than the alternative of setting up parallel systems.

AusAID's recent management changes support implementation of the Paris Declaration ...

AusAID has recently devolved more staff, responsibility and decision-making authority to country offices. One of the drivers for these changes was the Paris Declaration and, while it is early days, the presence of more key staff and decision-makers in developing countries should help with the Paris principles of "ownership, alignment and harmonisation". Another recent management change, the establishment of the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) and the concurrent introduction of an Annual Review of Development Effectiveness (ARDE), has strengthened the Agency's capacity in relation to "managing for results" and, potentially, also in relation to "mutual accountability".

However, the depth and breadth of understanding about the Paris Declaration is mixed ...

Some staff have translated their broad commitment to the Paris principles into a thorough understanding of the Declaration's detail and its practical implications. For other staff, however, the Paris Declaration remains a vague idea around "working more closely with partner government systems". Overall, understanding of the first four pillars (ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results) is much stronger than for the fifth pillar (mutual accountability).

Operational guidance has been lacking, but is on its way ...

For the past two and a half years, there has been little guid-

ance about operating in a Paris-compliant environment, but the signs for the future are more positive. AusAID is discarding its old operational guidance, "Ausguide". This is sensible given that Ausguide was focused on the traditional project modality. Workshops on "Forms of Aid" have taken place recently and have given attention to options such as SWAps and working directly through partner government systems. New business processes are near completion, and will be released soon in the form of written guidance, to be complemented by training, in the near future. Guidance for Country and Regional Strategies, and for Peer Reviews, could be strengthened to help encourage early attention to the Paris Declaration principles.

Implementation needs to continue ...

Australia has made progress in moving to Paris-compliant ways of operating in its country programmes. Over the past two years there has been a significant shift in the Australian aid programme with increased emphasis on partnerships. For example, Australia has played a strong and active role in helping "localise" the Paris Declaration in Vietnam over the past few years (through the Hanoi Core Statement), and more recently in PNG. Australia has delegated authority to the New Zealand Government to implement Australia's aid in two small Pacific countries and has delegated a significant component of its aid programme to Nepal to the United Kingdom (DFID). Increasingly, a range of non-project aid modalities are being explored in various programmes, including sector-wide approaches (SWAps) and greater use of partner government systems, but there are still significant stand-alone projects with parallel management structures. There are also pockets of positive examples of joint analysis and missions, but these appear to be in the minority at this stage. The Agency also needs better systems to capture progress against the Paris Declaration – while management is rightly concerned about the difficulties in obtaining basic statistical information relating to the Paris Declaration (e.g. how many dollars are being delivered through partner government systems), a concerted management effort is needed to remedy this situation.

Overall, Australia has made a reasonable start in the two and a half years since the Paris Declaration was signed

While there is a long way to go for Australia's commitment to the Paris Declaration to be matched by its actions, it appears to be heading in the right direction. This evaluation puts forward a number of recommendations to encourage this forward direction.