

# ChildFund Australia Development Effectiveness Framework

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## **An External Review**

Prepared by {EXTERNAL EVALUATOR}, November 2012

## **Introduction**

Over the past two years, ChildFund Australia has designed and pilot tested an organizational Development Effectiveness Framework (DEF) to deepen its capacity to measure the immediate results and longer term impact of its development programs.

As the DEF has been piloted over the last two years, ChildFund Australia has commissioned an external review of the DEF with a view of assessing whether it meets its intended purpose, whether any gaps remain, and how it could be improved or made more useful. The outcome of this review will help inform the formal adoption of the DEF in the four country programs directly managed by ChildFund Australia (Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam).

## Methodology

The external consultant was briefed with two objectives:

1. To provide an external opinion as to whether ChildFund's new DEF is fit for its purpose, what gaps may remain and how it could be improved or made more useful.
2. To locate ChildFund's DEF in the range of MEL systems and practice followed by other Australian international development agencies and in relation to the expectations of ACFID and AusAID about development effectiveness and accountability.

In undertaking the review, the consultant reviewed a range of ChildFund Australia Strategic Plan documents, Chapters 1 and 3 of the ChildFund Australia Program Handbook, papers for the ChildFund Australia M&E Summit Meeting - Bangkok, October 2011, and other ChildFund Australia MEL documentation such as Outcome Indicator baseline survey reports and analyses and Case Studies.

Interviews were also held with ChildFund staff and Board members who had experience of the new system and practices introduced over the last 18 months. These included:

AUSTRALIA		VIETNAM	
Nigel Spence	CEO	Deb Leaver	Country Director
James Sheffield	Board Chair	Nguyen Ba Lieu (Leo)	Program Team Leader
Judy Mitchell	Board Member	Mai Thy Thuy Hao	Prog. Manager, Health
Mark McPeak	International Program Director	Tran T Kieu Hanh	PM, Watsan
Maria Attard	Int. Prog. Coordinator	Nguyen Van Dung (Zung)	PM, Livelihoods and FS
Terina Stibbard	Int. Prog. Coordinator	Yen Nguyen Thi	DEF Manager
Ouen Gettigan	Int. Prog. Coordinator	LAOS	
Larissa Tuohy	Communications	Chris Mastaglio	Country Director
Jacqui Ooie	Communications	Keoamphone Souvannaphoum	Program Manager
John Fenech	Grants Business Devt Coordinator	Marieke Charlet-Phommachanh	DEF Manager
Jackie Robertson	Policy and Research Coordinator	CAMBODIA	
Richard Geeves	DEF Coordinator	Carol Mortensen	Country Director

<b>PAPUA NEW GUINEA</b>	
Andrew Ikupu	Country Director
Manish Joshi	Program Manager
Joe Pasen	DEF Manager

Suon Sopheap	Program Manager
Min Sor	Provincial Coordinator (Svay Rieng Province)
Sim Sokleang	Provincial Coordinator (Kratie Province)
Chan Solin	DEF Manager

## **Executive Summary**

The report outlines commentary and analysis against each component of the DEF framework in some detail. This preliminary section, however, provides an overview of the strengths and limitations that have been identified in the course of this review.

The development of the DEF places ChildFund Australia in a sound position within the sector in the area of development effectiveness. Most agencies of a similar size to that of ChildFund have developed or are in the process of developing an effectiveness framework. These fall broadly into two styles – those that undertake meta-evaluations or program reflections which identify key organisational achievements and learning against a program strategy, and those that have identified indicators against which the organisation seeks to collect information. The ChildFund Australia framework falls into this second category. The particular strength of ChildFund Australia's framework is that it binds the whole organisation to a set of common indicators and outputs. This provides a basis for focussing the organisation's efforts and ensuring that programming is strategically aligned to common objectives. The other particular strength that ChildFund Australia's framework offers is that it provides a basis for aggregating its achievements across programs, thereby strengthening the organisation's overall claims of effectiveness.

Within ChildFund Australia, there is strong support for the DEF and broad agreement among key DEF stakeholders and users that the DEF unites the agency on a performance agenda. This is in large part due to dedicated resources having been invested and the development of a data collection system has been integrated into the project management system (budgeting and planning, and reporting), thereby making DEF a living and breathing function throughout the organisation. Importantly, the definition of outcomes and outputs indicators provides clarity of expectations across ChildFund Australia.

There are four key functions of the DEF that have been recognised within ChildFund Australia: improved program planning and management; accountability; learning; and decision making.

### **Program management**

The DEF has strong potential to provide a compass for broad program planning and management. Through the collection of baseline data and related community engagement events, it provides ChildFund Australia with indications of needs and community identified priorities. The full benefits of this aspect of the DEF, however, are yet to be realised, as the process is relatively new and it is taking time for in-country teams to develop a clear understanding of its role alongside program management activities. There were hopes among program teams that the baseline survey and community events could be directly used for program planning and monitoring, whereas the function of these mechanisms have been deliberately designed to be indicative at a broader level than individual projects or programs. In other words, they are a tool to support program planning but do not replace the need for programs to undertake their own project level community consultations and

baseline surveys. There is further work to be done within ChildFund Australia to assist program teams nuance their understanding of the purpose of these DEF tools.

The identification of a common set of outputs indicators has integrated one aspect of the DEF very closely with program management. This requires all projects to nominate those indicators that are relevant to particular projects and track progress towards those indicators on a quarterly basis. This has assisted program teams to sharpen a common focus across the ChildFund Australia program portfolio and clearly define indicators so that their application across countries and teams is consistent. There is, however, some uncertainty among program teams of the usefulness of collecting outputs information. In particular, program teams are not clear on the linkages between outputs and outcome indicators and how the data is intended to be used, particularly to benefit programming.

### **Accountability**

ChildFund Australia stakeholders are particularly motivated by the accountability aspects of the DEF. At an organisational level, there is strong appetite for the DEF to equip ChildFund Australia with the capacity to report on achievements – both in terms of the outputs of its work, but also on the outcomes and achievements of its work. Similarly, at a country and project level, there is a strong desire to report to in-country stakeholders, including communities, on the change that has been recorded over time.

One of the primary benefits of the DEF is that it equips ChildFund Australia with an increased quantity and quality of evidence-based information for communications with key stakeholders including the Board and a public audience. In particular, there is consolidated output data that can be easily accessed by the communications team; there is now a bank of high quality case studies that can be drawn on for communication and reflection; and there are now dedicated resources in-country who have been trained and are required to generate information that has potential for communications purposes. The increase in quantity and quality of information equips ChildFund Australia to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders.

One of the strengths of the DEF recognised by in-country staff particularly is that the DEF provides a basis for stakeholders to share their perspectives. Stakeholders are involved in identifying benefits and their perspectives are heard through case studies. This has already provided a rich source of information that has prompted reflection by in-country teams, the Sydney based programs team and the ChildFund Australia Board.

The use of baseline data and three yearly surveys on common indicators is another mechanism that seeks measure whether ChildFund is achieving what it sets out to do. In the pilot stage of the DEF, however, there have been a number of concerns expressed within ChildFund Australia and particularly by in-country teams about the reliability of the data, whether indicators are broad enough, and the complex issues of attribution and contribution. There were several senior staff in-country who raised concern that the voices of those closest to the intent of the project are not given prominence in the baseline studies – for example, the voices of children, and those who are excluded and most vulnerable. There were also concerns among several

country directors that outcome indicators are too limited for the work of CF. Change in areas such as the strengthening of civil society, disaster preparedness, and power, exclusion, and vulnerability are not naturally captured by the current outcome indicators.

Some of these concerns are in part a product of the DEF being in its early days of implementation, and prompt the need for continued support to country offices that are still in the process of piloting baseline studies. The concerns also emphasise the need for DEF stakeholders to understand that the use of outcome indicators is only one tool within the DEF and that qualitative tools such as case studies, program evaluation and thematic research will also contribute to ChildFund Australia's own understanding of change over time and this will in turn influence the way that information about effectiveness is communicated with external stakeholders. However, other concerns such as those related to gaps that may exist in the current set of indicators and methodology should continue to be explored as ChildFund Australia develops and refines the DEF over time.

Significantly, the DEF signals a focus on effectiveness to donors and the sector. One of the benefits already felt by ChildFund Australia is that it is able to refer to its effectiveness framework in funding submissions and in communication with its major donors who have an increasing interest on performance information.

### **Learning**

The first phase of the DEF has focused on developing and trialling methodology to capture information about the level of activity and the outcomes of those activities across the ChildFund Australia program. A key part of this first phase has been to collect baseline information against which change can be measured. It has also focussed on integrating methodology into the program management and monitoring that systematically capture quantitative and qualitative information.

This focus on building tools, systems and the overall capacity of the organisation places ChildFund Australia in a strong position to tackle a second phase of the DEF which looks at how the organisation will use performance information for learning and development. It has already started on this journey, with various parts of the organisation using case studies for reflection. ChildFund Australia has already undertaken an exercise of coding the bank of case studies to assist further analysis and learning. There is lots of scope for next steps with this bank of case studies, including thematic reflections. Again, the benefits of this aspect have not been realised yet as the first stages of the DEF roll-out have been focused on data collection and embedding the system in CF practices.

Discussion with stakeholders across ChildFund Australia identified a hunger for more opportunities for learning. There was an interest particularly on how program evaluation and research might intersect with the DEF. There was also desire for structured opportunities to be built into the DEF which facilitates meta reflections and analysis and the sharing of learning within ChildFund Australia internally.

### **Decision Making**

One of the strengths of the DEF recognised among those with strategic oversight (such as the Board, the CEO, and the DEF Manager) is that in addition to tracking results for accountability and learning purposes, the DEF also provides a basis for future decision making. ChildFund Australia is able to monitor the costs of activities and has built a system that provides scope for analysing costs and achievements. This provides scope for comparing the cost of different strategies to achieve similar outcomes and for assessing the cost of programs against the value that communities place on the results of these programs – ie the test of accountability. In these ways, the information collected has potential to be used as a basis for future decisions on resource allocations which are linked to performance data.

There is recognition within ChildFund Australia, however, that caution will need to be used if/when the costs of outputs are linked with achievements as it is likely that a variety of inputs from different actors will collectively contribute to any achievement. If ChildFund Australia begins to use this data for value for money assessments, this issue will need to be taken into account. There is also some concern that donors may rely on ‘value for money’ data without taking account of the context of a particular program or country and other qualitative information that relates to any cost ratio.

### **In Summary**

Overall, the review found that the pilot of the DEF has been implemented well, with lots of consultation and engagement with country offices, and lots of opportunity for refinement. Its features are strong, enabling ChildFund to both measure how much it is doing, and the changes that are experienced by communities over time. The first phase of the DEF has focused on integrating effectiveness measurement mechanisms within program management and broader work practices, while the second phase of the DEF will look at the analysis, reflection and learning aspects of effectiveness. This second phase is likely to assist various stakeholders involved in collecting effectiveness information better understand and appreciate the linkages between their work and broader organisational learning and development. This is an important second phase and will require ongoing investment to maximise the potential of the DEF. It place ChildFund Australia in a strong position within the Australian NGO sector to engage in the discourse around development effectiveness and demonstrate its achievements.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are extracted from the analysis within the body of this report:

1. To develop a graphical representation of the DEF which shows the linkages between outputs and outcomes and the linkages of the DEF to the broader organisational framework.
2. To undertake further discussion internally on the extent to which the DEF indicators satisfactorily assesses:
  - key protection risks children face
  - issues of exclusion and vulnerability
  - disability
  - advocacy
3. To undertake further discussion on whether some outcome indicators may be more suited to other types of data collection methodology to enhance the reliability of data.
4. To further promote the option for 'additional' country specific outputs and indicators to be set at the Country Office level to meet local priorities.
5. To strengthen the overview of the DEF to recognise the attribution and causality limitations of outcome indicators, and supplement this with reference to other aspects of the DEF that will assist CF to demonstrate its influence.
6. To undertake further training and discussion on the unique role of the LQAS baseline methodology vis a vis the role of project-based baseline surveys so that the value of each is more greatly appreciated.
7. To continue discussion with in-country staff on their concerns regarding the LQAS baseline survey and ideas about alternative methodologies.
8. To further promote and 'socialise' the planned annual discussion and review of organisational outputs among in-country staff.
9. To explore options for making the 'bank' of DEF Case Studies accessible to all country programs.
10. To develop practice notes based on the analysis of thematic groups of case studies.
11. To design a learning event that targets program staff and draws on components of the DEF.
12. While there are learning opportunities that already exist within program cycle management and program management, the systems for consolidating learning have yet to be developed. One way that this could be improved is in developing

clear linkages between learning opportunities and aspects of the DEF. It would also be useful to make explicit linkages between the work of the Policy and Research Coordinator and the DEF.

13. To develop more structured opportunities for DEF Managers to engage with their fellow DEF colleagues between regional meetings, such as through an on-line meeting space which is facilitated by the DEF Coordinator.
14. To explore methodologies for strengthening accountability to stakeholders, including how to best share outputs data and case studies with communities.
15. To further consider how DEF information can be utilised effectively for donor communication purposes.
16. To consider articulating a 'Phase 2' of the DEF that outlines the mechanisms that will exist within the DEF for learning and development.

## Key Findings

The balance of this report reflects the discussions that were held with various ChildFund Australia stakeholders on their experiences interfacing with the DEF and makes some analysis of those discussions. It also draws on broader practice within the Australian NGO sector and provides commentary on ChildFund Australia's work on effectiveness within that context.

### 1. Outcome Indicators

ChildFund Australia has 16 Outcome Indicators which are statements about maternal and child health, education, WATSAN, HIV and AIDS, voice, protection and power. After an initial survey to establish a baseline in each program area in which ChildFund Australia works, follow-up surveys will be conducted at three yearly intervals over the life of the program (usually 10-12 years) to chart progress. This has generated high levels of enthusiasm across the organisation, as it seen to be the first time that ChildFund Australia will be able to demonstrate its achievements and better understand its impact. It has been particularly well received by parts of the organisation that need to communicate with external stakeholders such as bilateral donors and the Australian public. It has also generated enthusiasm among program staff working alongside communities as it will provide them with concrete data to show communities that progress has been achieved.

The Outcome Indicators (OI) were selected because of their direct relationship to the agency's vision and mission, their alignment with the Millennium Development Goals and consistency with indicators used by other ChildFund Alliance members. They are organized into four Themes - Access to assets, Voice, Power and Protection. This is in accordance with ChildFund Australia's theory of change as described in its Program Handbook. However, these linkages are not immediately obvious to all DEF users and it would be helpful to show these linkages more clearly and consistently. In general, ChildFund Australia staff were very positive about the development of outcome indicators, but there were a number of comments from in-country program staff particularly, which indicated that they were not clear of the linkages between (and within) the DEF and the organisation's overall mandate.

Although the logic may be sound, it would be helpful to graphically present the linkages between the outcome indicators and the broader organisational framework and use this regularly with DEF users so that they develop a deeper appreciation of the linkages over time.

When Outcome Indicators are shown in this way, there is scope for further analysis in each thematic area. One of the comments that was raised several times at the Country Director and DEF Manager level, for example, was the extent to which the framework places enough emphasis on protection. It was felt that the understanding of 'protection' was varied across the organisation and that 'disaster preparedness' represented only one aspect of protection. There is a sense that further analysis needs to be undertaken on the key protection risks children face in their

environments and that indicators should be developed to assess ChildFund's progress in addressing these risks.

The other area raised in discussion was that the current Outcome Indicators do not capture ChildFund Australia's work in the area of advocacy. Again, it was observed that the concept of advocacy does not have a consistent meaning within the organisation, but that ChildFund's work and achievements in advocating for the rights of children are central to its theory of change and should be captured within the DEF. ChildFund Australia has described a development approach that is implemented in a manner which is consistent with the definition of a rights-based approach. This means that programs are increasingly expected to engage strategically with civil society and government organisations to strength their role in protecting and promoting rights. This is a fundamental element of achieving long term and systemic change. If this forms a part of ChildFund Australia's theory of change, then it should ideally be reflected in the way that ChildFund measures its success – ie the extent to which duty bearers are fulfilling and protecting rights.

It could be argued that the result of duty bearers fulfilling their duties is realised in outcomes that relate to "building human, capital, natural and social assets around the child", but there would also be outcomes realised in "protecting children and youth from risks in their environments". It was acknowledged that outcome indicators in this area may not be able to be expressed in the same terms or through using the same data collection methodology as is being used for the current Outcome Indicators. If the area of 'advocacy' is an important component of ChildFund's work, then more thought may need to be given to how ChildFund can reasonably track its achievements in this area. Further analysis and discussion in this area would be useful.

Currently, all Outcome Indicators are expressed in percentage terms and are measured in each program area every three years by conducting a survey. Comparing the difference in levels from survey to survey is intended to show evidence of change over time. The Outcome Indicators are a first attempt at identifying the areas in which ChildFund Australia may influence and are recognised across the organisation as an important step in collecting baseline data. There are however, a number of suggestions from in-country staff on improvements to outcome indicators in the future. These are captured below:

- The current baseline indicators do not address the issues of exclusion and vulnerability that are expected to feature in ChildFund Australia's programming.
- The current baseline indicators do not disaggregate disability
- There are some outcome indicators which may be more suited to other types of data collection methodology.
- Some of the outcome indicators are seen to be highly subjective and therefore the reliability of data is a concern.

Several Country Offices also noted that the Outcome Indicators do not necessarily capture the priority issues facing a Country Office. This has one of two results – either the Country Office limits its programs to those which are likely to achieve results against the established outcome indicators, or the outcome indicators fail to capture the outcomes that a broader country program is achieving. For example, the work of the Laos Country Office in the area of building civil society is not easily captured within the current Outcome Indicators.

ChildFund Australia has indicated that additional indicators can be set at the Country Office level to meet local priorities. An example of where this has happened is in PNG, where two indicators were developed to match the priorities of the PNG Government. This flexibility provides scope for Country Offices to add national level interests, but perhaps more importantly provides an opportunity for Country Offices to take ownership of the DEF. Through discussion with Country Office staff more generally, however, there is a mixed level of appreciation and confidence in the overall process. Further work in this area would help deepen ownership and buy-in of the DEF at the Country Office level.

The final issue of concern raised by various staff is the issue of attribution. While outcome indicators may show change over time, there is a recognition that there may be many factors that contribute to this outcome and ChildFund may only play a small role in these – or in some cases, no role at all. For example, a ChildFund intervention may be focused on disabled children in a particular community and while outcome indicators for these children may improve significantly over time, the overall change in outcome indicator for the general population of children at the program area level may only be minor. Alternatively, an outcome indicator in water and sanitation may improve over time despite ChildFund Australia not working in water and sanitation in a particular program area. In these ways, there is a concern that the data alone will overstate or understate the contribution of ChildFund Australia and that this is neither representative of ChildFund Australia's work or useful in assisting the organisation and its stakeholders understand the multidimensional factors involved in achieving change. The issue of attribution is not addressed within the DEF. Further thought or discussion may need to accompany outcome indicators to address this issue of demonstrating causality.

## **2. Baseline Survey**

In 2011 and 2012 ChildFund Australia conducted pilot baseline surveys in selected program areas in Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam and Laos to collect data on the 16 Outcome Indicators established under the DEF. After this initial survey to establish a baseline in each program area, follow surveys are planned to be conducted at three yearly intervals over the life of the program (usually 10-12 years) to chart progress. ChildFund Australia also plans to extend the process to all other program areas managed by the organisation over time.

Baseline surveys have been conducted using the 'lot quality assurance sampling' (LQAS) methodology, a sampling technique which involves interviewing a small random sample of people from each program area. It is important to note that

the baseline data generated from the LQAS methodology is intended to be only *indicative* of the local situation. The LQAS results are considered sufficient at an indicative level, but do not reveal the causes of or linkages between issues at a community level. Further and deeper analysis is required for program and project planning.

This is an area that has caused confusion and frustration for program staff at the Country Office level. In a number of cases, program staff have assisted with the LQAS baseline survey and then undertaken their own baseline surveys in the same communities to inform their project planning. Many have seen this as a waste of time and resources and see the two processes as duplication. Program staff in each country have asked for more work to be undertaken on how the data collection processes used for Outcome Indicators can be streamlined with processes used for program planning. Given the different intentions of the LQAS survey and program planning tools, there is probably little streamlining that is possible. Perhaps what would be more useful is the clear distinction between the two processes and their outcomes and the way these intersect in the broader roadmap of effectiveness. Again, there may be ways to graphically present this to assist understanding within the organisation. Alternatively, a new methodology could be considered that is able to meet the needs of both baseline data for outcome indicators and program planning.

The impact of the two processes is probably significant at this point in time, as it is the first time that the same baseline data has been collected across multiple program areas – ie the load on Country Offices has been significant. As this process is rolled out, however, the OI survey will only need to be conducted once every three years. This will probably still intersect with program planning needs that occur within a program cycle, but the brunt of this work load will not be as significant over time.

In general, staff found that the baseline survey is easy to prepare and to implement. DEF staff noted that the manual provides a good background to assist the planning and organising of the survey. Country office staff noted, however, that the exercise was expensive to conduct as it has required dedicated resources to collect and consolidate the data. The Country Office in PNG have suggested that a team of community volunteers could be trained in the methodology to assist with data collection in future.

The implementation of the baseline study revealed mixed experiences of the reliability of data collected. In the case of Vietnam and Cambodia, the survey results were found to mostly correlate well to the Country Office's own understanding of community issues and needs. Both Country Office's noted, however, that much of the information collected through the baseline survey was already available from reliable government sources and the investment in ChildFund Australia collecting this same data was unnecessary. Both Country Offices have suggested that alternative approaches to collecting outcome indicator information should be considered.

In PNG and Laos, there are particular concerns about the reliability of survey data. In Laos, where the first baseline surveys have only just been undertaken, the Country Office has major questions on outcome measures. It has found that only 7 of the 16

indicators have produced reliable information and that the information collected is contradicting its own knowledge of issues in those program areas.

Overall, there is support from all Country Offices for ChildFund to consider and accommodate alternative approaches to collecting baseline data other than the LQAS methodology. Confidence of the reliability of the data is low across all Country Offices and this raises concerns for the expectations of data collected in 3 years time. Alternative approaches may simply be an adaptation of the LQAS methodology to better suit particular population sizes (as already undertaken in PNG) or alternative sampling methods. ChildFund Australia appears open to the adaptation of the methodology, while still retaining general confidence in the LQAS methodology. Given the concern of the sample size in the LQAS methodology from all Country Offices, however, more analysis may need to be made on the statistical reliability of the data already generated.

Some Country Office staff also noted concerns around particular indicators and their reliability. For example, indicators 12 and 13 seek to identify whether children and youth report having opportunities to voice their opinions in decisions that concern them and whether they have a sense of belonging and a positive outlook for their future. It was observed by one Country Director that these indicators may not be reliable if they are not cross referenced with other data such as the extent to which others in the community believe children have a voice.

It was also observed by in-country staff in Laos and Cambodia that due to the nature of the survey methodology, it is unlikely that those children and youth who are most marginalised and excluded would have their views canvassed and that on this basis, the results may not be representative of community members who are 'deprived, excluded and vulnerable'. The issue of disability was also raised several times as one aspect which should be addressed in collecting output data and also in collecting information for outcomes indicators.

### **3. Community Engagement Events**

The results of the initial LQAS baseline survey are presented at a meeting of representatives from communities in the new program area. Participants at the meeting include representatives of women, children, youth and village leaders. Community members are asked to make an informal assessment of the validity of the survey results by weighing the findings against their own experiences and perceptions. There was broad agreement from those interviewed during the DEF Review that this was an important aspect of the methodology for two key reasons – the first being that it provides a basis for ChildFund to validate or challenge the baseline survey results; and the second being that it promotes accountability practices with local communities.

The second aspect of the community engagement event is that the survey data is used as a starting point for communities to introduce their own their own ideas to make broad recommendations about directions and priorities for an initial three year set of community development activities. This aspect was found by ChildFund to be

more challenging, only in that this process often took place in parallel to other community consultations that program staff were engaged in to determine program and project priorities and planning. Some felt that communities did not appreciate the difference and found the process confusing. Program teams felt frustrated that they were not able to use the community engagement events as a lead into program planning.

In theory, ChildFund staff and project implementation partners would go on to design and plan specific projects which address the priorities agreed upon at the community meeting. In practice, however, programs have often already been agreed with communities and are in various stages of program planning. As part of these project level design and planning processes, program teams are undertaking more detailed needs assessments and baseline studies. This process would probably happen in a more linear fashion where ChildFund is embarking in a new program area, and in this way, the indicative needs identified by the baseline survey would assist ChildFund to determine priorities in partnership with communities.

Three years after the baseline survey in the program area a follow up survey is planned to be undertaken to assess the results of the initial group of projects. Again, data from the survey will be presented at a meeting of community representatives, an evaluation of the initial group of projects made and directions and priorities set for the next three years. This is a useful mechanism to further demonstrate accountability to local communities and is key in assisting ChildFund Australia meet its accountability commitments.

## **4. Outputs**

ChildFund Australia has developed a set of 41 coded organisational outputs, all with standardised definitions, across its projects in the four ChildFund Australia managed countries. Outputs are defined as tangible, countable products resulting from the input of resources and the accomplishment of specific activities which it uses to code all project activities.

The strength of output data collection is that it has been integrated into the project management cycle, thereby mainstreaming a component of the DEF in everyday work. Program staff in Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam have incorporated the organisational outputs into all new project planning and all quarterly reporting on current projects. Outputs are coded and tracked through the financial reporting system, which enables information to be directly input from the Country Office. The use of the financial reporting systems allows information to be generated on the frequency and expenditure on individual Outputs or on combinations of Outputs (for example, by sector, country or specific, cross-cutting theme).

The initial set of organisational Outputs was drafted by representatives from the four ChildFund Australia managed countries and Sydney staff during a meeting in Sydney in March 2010. One of the purposes of the DEF pilot was to test the draft set of organisational outputs in different countries to establish how practicable they are.

Initially, different countries interpreted and counted outputs in different ways so it was not possible to aggregate outputs across countries. During 2011, however, CF Australia facilitated a number of forums where M&E Managers and program staff had ongoing discussions about how to interpret and count outputs and this has led to agreed definitions for the outputs. All program staff acknowledged that there had been confusion on how to count outputs initially, but with practice and refined definitions, this has improved considerably. ChildFund Australia staff have also noted improved consistency in the data being generated at the Country Office level. In some countries, further capacity development among staff is required to translate the outputs framework into consistent practice.

While staff were generally comfortable with the set of organisational outputs, there is still some disagreement about particular definitions at the Country Office level and the choice of organisational outputs. In recognition that adjustments to the outputs framework may need to be made, ChildFund Australia has planned to undertake an annual discussion and review of organisational outputs during which time proposals for amendments can be made. It would be helpful for this mechanism to be promoted more explicitly so that program staff have confidence that there is an opportunity to influence and contribute to the development of the DEF. Also, although the Manual provides scope for country programs to identify additional country specific outputs against which data will also be collected, this has not been uniformly embraced or understood across all Country Offices. There is concern among program staff in Cambodia, for example, that programs should be designed within the outputs framework and program development can be constrained by this perceived requirement. There may need to be more explicit discussion and attention to country specific outputs and indicators to create a stronger culture of flexibility.

Further to specific comments about individual indicators, there was also commentary among Country Office staff that the linkages between outputs and outcomes within the DEF is unclear. This is important from a program perspective as staff link all of their activities to outputs, but are not sure that these outputs will necessarily lead to changes in the outcome indicators identified for the organisation. While the linkages may exist, they are not clear to program staff.

To this end, it is recommended that ChildFund Australia design an overview of the DEF which shows the linkages between outputs and outcomes – this should easily flow from the organisation's theory of change. Given the broad group of people who interface with the DEF, it may be useful to develop a diagrammatic representation of the elements of the DEF and their linkages. This follows on from the suggestion earlier in this report that it would be useful to graphically show the linkages between the Outcome Indicators and the four themes identified in ChildFund Australia's theory of change. Similarly, the linkages between outputs and outcomes should be clear. Given the interface between 'themes' and 'sectors' it is likely that any diagram would need to be multidimensional.

The collection of output data has a mixed level of appreciation among staff. The quarterly collection of output data against targets theoretically assists both in-country program staff and Sydney staff to track project progress and expenditure. To date, it has not been used in this way, as the reliability of data has been considered

weak and definitions were being used inconsistently. Program staff in-country indicate that collecting this data does not assist their project monitoring.

At a country program level, and certainly at an organisational level, the data has a range of potential uses. Firstly, it enables the organisation to provide consolidated and disaggregated data on its activities. This is useful from an accountability perspective for donors, the Australian public, and beneficiary communities. The Board has indicated its interest in accessing this information and it is of high value to the Communications Team. Secondly, it equips the organisation with information that can help inform decision making. Because the data is tracked through the financial reporting system, it is theoretically possible to report the unit cost of an output or a collection of outputs and over time, potentially draw linkages between the cost of outputs and the realisation of outcomes. This may prove to be very useful in a donor environment focussed on agencies demonstrating value for money. This is very appealing from a value-for-money perspective, although draws caution on how information may be used comparatively between programs, countries, and organisations.

## **5. Case Studies**

MEL Managers in each of the four ChildFund Australia managed countries work with program and other staff to prepare case studies which describe the direct impact of programs as experienced by individuals or groups of people in program areas. The DEF case studies are presented as narratives, with photos, and seek to capture the experiences, opinions and ideas of the people concerned in their own words, without commentary or steering towards agency self-promotion.

At the country office level, there are differing experiences on the extent to which case studies have prompted critical reflection on program practice. It is clear that the process has garnered discussion informally, as staff discuss how case studies should be selected and discuss the general findings from case studies. In most Country Offices, case studies have provided a new formal opportunity for country program staff to reflect on their work and this has been used as a really constructive process. The Laos Country Office is currently in the process of translating case studies so that they can be used to prompt discussion and learning at the country level. In PNG, the team is also interested in using the case studies as a communication tool with local communities to demonstrate some of the achievements of ChildFund Australia programs.

In some cases, program staff have found case studies confronting when they have highlighted program challenges or weaknesses. The culture of critical reflection may take time to embed in some country offices and may be facilitated by cross-country reflection opportunities. Currently, however, Country Office staff do not know how to access case studies from other country programs. ChildFund Australia is exploring how the 'bank' of DEF Case Studies would be most accessible and useful to country office personnel.

One of the uses of case studies has been as a prompt for discussion and reflection by the programs team in Sydney and by the Board. Case studies have been seen as a

really useful way to provide an insight into a program, practice and ChildFund Australia achievements.

At an organisational level, an indexing and cross-referencing system has been implemented which enables case studies to be searched by country and by theme. The system is yet to be introduced to MEL and Program users, but has potential to be a very useful bank of qualitative data for reflection and learning. It also provides a bank of data from which to undertake thematic reflections across and between countries. One idea for consideration is that ChildFund draw on groups of case studies to develop practice notes.

In general case studies are considered to be the most 'successful' part of the DEF by those involved in collecting information.

## **6. Project Cycle Management**

Project cycle management is referred to as a foundation of the Development Effectiveness Framework. This includes local level consultations and formal needs assessment studies as part of the process of developing project proposals, routine project monitoring by program staff, quarterly project narrative and financial reporting, and end of project reports. Larger projects will also continue to be evaluated by project-specific, external evaluations at mid-term and at their conclusion. The only aspect of project cycle management that is captured at the organisational level, however, is output data that is included in quarterly reports. All other aspects of project cycle management are maintained at the project level.

There were consistent comments from overseas staff about their uncertainty of the interface between DEF and programming. While they collect information on outputs, at the project level they see this as a contribution to organisational data collection, and not useful to the project. Similarly, the baseline survey process is intended to generate indicative information that is also not directly related to projects and programs. It would be fair to say that there is a high level of frustration among program staff that they cannot see linkages between their projects and the DEF.

One Program Manager suggested that it "may be good if the roadmap of implementation was shown to the whole country office - what is the whole picture and how do we translate the framework into practice". One response to this may be that it will simply take time for the organisation to understand how the DEF is useful to program management. Given the high level of frustration among in-country program staff, however, it may be useful to look at more immediate ways to bridge the gap. One idea may be to present the framework in a simple overview format, similar to the diagram in the first part of Chapter 3. Another more convincing idea may be to design a learning event that targets program staff and draws on components of the DEF.

## **7. Learning**

A primary aim of monitoring and evaluation is to improve practice. Within the DEF, there are a number of opportunities that have been highlighted for learning and improving practice. These include regular project cycle management; field visits by Sydney staff; case studies; and specific and regular review and reflection events and are important windows for organisational learning.

While there are learning opportunities that already exist within program cycle management and program management, the systems for consolidating learning have yet to be developed. One way that this could be improved is in developing clear linkages between learning opportunities and aspects of the DEF. It would also be useful to make explicit linkages between the work of the Policy and Research Coordinator and the DEF.

In some cases, it may be useful to draw linkages between learning and reflection mechanisms and the four thematic areas defined in ChildFund Australia's theory of change, or the 16 Outcome Indicators identified as areas by which ChildFund Australia believes it can demonstrate its achievements. For example, Chapter 1 of the Program Handbook states that each ChildFund Australia Country Office will carry out one comprehensive learning-and-utilization-focused reflection exercise per year, choosing one of the 16 Outcome Indicators as the subject of the investigation. It states a degree of commonality of these evaluations across ChildFund Australia's offices will be sought each year. These direct linkages between learning opportunities and the DEF would probably assist ChildFund Australia structure its approach to learning and reflection.

## **8. MEL Team**

MEL Managers were appointed in all ChildFund Australia-managed countries in 2010. They led the pilot testing of DEF components in their respective countries during 2010 and 2011 and then, as a team, drew on their experiences to make recommendations for future practice. At a meeting in Bangkok in October 2011 ChildFund staff from Sydney, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam reviewed experience to-date, and endorsed recommendations of the MEL team on the general approach and the principal components of the pilot, along with refinements prompted by pilot experiences.

DEF Managers met on three occasions throughout 2011:

- ChildFund Australia M&E Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, 7-11<sup>th</sup> February 2011, Meeting papers
- ChildFund Australia M&E Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 18-22<sup>nd</sup> July 2011, Meeting papers
- ChildFund Australia DEF Summit Meeting, Bangkok, 6-7<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Meeting papers

In addition, they are in direct and regular contact with the DEF Coordinator in Sydney. DEF Managers highlighted the value in meeting but indicated that they can feel isolated in their roles at a country level. There would be benefit to these managers in having more structured opportunities to engage with their fellow DEF colleagues between regional meetings. This could be easily facilitated through an on-line meeting space which is facilitated by the DEF Coordinator. It could be a place of sharing and learning and support.

Across all country programs, staff highlighted the need for more clarity in the role of the in-country DEF resource person. They argue that the role should be more than collecting information for the DEF, and should provide more general support for capacity building in monitoring and evaluation and facilitating opportunities for monitoring information to be used and applied in the program cycle. It was felt in some cases that the role of the DEF managers were limited to collecting information for the DEF and did not add value to in-country monitoring and learning. This should be tempered with a tendency for program staff within some countries to expect the DEF Manager to act as an M&E Unit, taking responsibility for all monitoring and evaluation activities. This indicates that perhaps the role of the DEF Manager needs to be more clearly defined and communicated to program staff.

While the allocation of specific resources to the DEF is one of the key successes of the roll-out of the DEF, there are two downsides to this allocation that need to be monitored and managed carefully. The first of these is that the buy-in and commitment by program staff to the DEF is critical to its success. To ensure that program staff are engaged and committed, DEF development processes need to be consultative and responsive to their concerns. To a large extent, this role has rested on the shoulders of individual DEF Managers at a Country Office level and they have fulfilled this role to differing degrees. Where DEF Managers have consulted program staff, those staff tend to be more receptive to and satisfied with the DEF. At an organisational level, the ChildFund Australia DEF Summit Meeting in Bangkok, in October 2011 was a good example of bringing program and DEF staff together to reflect on experiences and make some forward resolutions. Despite the efforts to engage program staff, the reality is that adopting the DEF is an organisational cultural change and will take time to win long term friends. In the meantime, ChildFund Australia needs to continue to be adaptive and consultative so that the DEF has broad ownership within the organisation. The most obvious need on an interim basis is a clearer description of the linkages within the DEF and to program cycle management. The second downside to dedicated M&E resources is that there is a tendency to assume that the DEF is the sole responsibility of the DEF Manager and as a result there are some program staff who do not set aside time to help with the collection of case studies or baseline data.

## **9. Sector Practice**

The development of the DEF places ChildFund Australia in a sound position within the sector in the area of development effectiveness. Most agencies of a similar size to that of ChildFund have developed or are in the process of developing an effectiveness framework. These fall broadly into two styles – those that undertake

meta-evaluations or program reflections which identify key organisational achievements and learnings against a program strategy, and those that have identified indicators against which the organisation seeks to collect information. The ChildFund Australia framework falls into this second category.

There are strengths to both styles of effectiveness frameworks. The particular strength of ChildFund Australia's framework is that it binds the whole organisation to a set of common indicators and outputs. This provides a basis for focussing the organisation's efforts and ensuring that programming is strategically aligned to common objectives. The other particular strength that ChildFund Australia's framework offers is that it provides a basis for aggregating its achievements across programs, thereby strengthening the organisation's claims of effectiveness.

Effectiveness frameworks also differ in the extent to which they focus on outcome and impact, and the extent to which they focus on process and approach. The main features of the ChildFund Australia framework have a strong focus on outcomes and a much more limited focus on approach. It is important that M&E systems lead to effective feedback and action for an organisation, so the assessment of development approach should also feature in an effectiveness framework. Given that the key pieces of architecture have been established for the tracking of outputs and outcomes, there is now more scope for ChildFund Australia to strengthen the learning features of its effectiveness framework.

In line with good quality monitoring and evaluation practice, effectiveness frameworks should balance multiple user interests with particular attention to accountability and learning to stakeholders and beneficiaries. The focus on accountability to primary stakeholders has been highlighted in the revised ACFID Code of Conduct. ChildFund Australia has incorporated good accountability mechanisms within its framework – specifically the community engagement events which follow the conduct of baseline surveys to test the validity of data and indicate community priorities; and the involvement of stakeholders in identifying benefits and sharing their perspectives through case studies.

There is also scope to strengthen accountability to stakeholders, including through identifying opportunities for community based program reflections and evaluations. Country Offices have also expressed interest in finding ways to share outputs data and case studies with communities. Tracking outputs and their cost will also provides scope for comparing the cost of programs to the value that communities place on the results of these programs.

## **10. Donors**

One of the interests within CF is in equipping CF to generate information that satisfies donor's increasing appetite for results based information. The development of the DEF assists ChildFund Australia to build its reputation among donors – both public and private – to generate this sort of information.

Institutional donors have become increasingly interested in M&E as a means of demonstrating value for money for their investments. ChildFund Australia has

positioned itself well in this respect as it is able to monitor the costs of activities and has built a system that provides scope for analysing costs and achievements. It also provides scope for potentially comparing the cost of different strategies to achieve similar outcomes. In these ways, the information collected has potential to be used as a basis for future decisions on resource allocations which are linked to performance data. ChildFund Australia would be aware, however, that there are limitations in the use of this data, including the extent to which it will be able to claim its contribution towards outcomes. If ChildFund is serious about making value for money claims, it may consider undertaking research and investment in social return methodology.

In general, however, the DEF places ChildFund Australia in a good position to provide better information to donors. For example, AusAID has recently developed a 'monitoring evaluation and learning framework' (MELF) for the ANCP. The MELF has been primarily designed as a tool to ensure satisfactory and consistent monitoring and reporting by Australian NGOs funded under ANCP. Under the new MELF, each ANCP NGO will be asked to produce an annual performance report that will provide a summary of the work funded through ANCP for the previous twelve months. This new reporting template requires agencies to assign sector classifications using DAC codes; disaggregate the number of beneficiaries by gender, age, disability, and urban/rural location; assign a self-assessment rating, and include 2 -3 case studies illustrating major challenges or achievements, and describe the purpose of evaluations undertaken the key findings and how findings have been used.

The DEF places ChildFund Australia in a strong position to be able to report under the new MELF. With the establishment of standardised outputs to all projects and programs, ChildFund Australia will be able to easily accommodate the data requirements. It will need to adapt its current requirements slightly to be able to disaggregate data by disability and urban/rural location. The collection of case studies as part of the DEF will also provide ChildFund with a bank of case studies from which to select for its annual ANCP report.

The Grants Business Development Coordinator also reports that the establishment of the DEF acts as a strength for the organisation when it is applying for funding opportunities. The DEF allows ChildFund Australia to present itself as a robust organisation with a system in place that assesses effectiveness. Being able to annex the list of outputs and indicators to a funding submission demonstrates that ChildFund Australia has a system already in place.

## **11. Communications**

The Communications team highlighted the need to generate an increasing volume of information to populate a variety of communication outlets – newsletters, website and social media. The team is very interested in any information that the DEF can generate to help equip them with information that can be used for communications purposes.

The DEF is useful in generating case study information – there is a good level of detail. The Communications team have commented that case study collection is a

good exercise to be undertaken in-country because there are now dedicated resources to collecting case studies – ie the in-country M&E/DEF manager. The position is trained in collecting case studies, and is required to regularly generate case studies. This has already led to a higher volume of quality information that the Communications team is able to use for communications purposes. The team recognises, however, that the primary purpose of case studies is for programmatic learning – not as a source of raw material for communications or fund-raising messaging. This means that case studies may include content about disappointments, misunderstandings, frustration and failure, when they occur, as well as simple success stories. They may, by design, contain frank comments about ChildFund’s operations and on the policies and practices of government and non-government partners which are not intended for a general audience.

Where case studies do include information that can be used for publicity purposes, the Communications team noted that it has taken a long time to get permission to use material from the case studies collected. The issues of consent is an important one, but ChildFund Australia may be able to look at streamlining its processes so that Communications are clear about what material they are able to use, without needing to seek additional permission/confirmation from country offices.