Measuring the effectiveness of bilateral aid programs: the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Maternal and Neonatal Health

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The Australia Indonesia Partnership for Maternal and Neonatal Health (AIPMNH) is an Australian government funded program which aimed to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia. During the period 2009-2014, reported maternal deaths fell by 40% in AIPMNH supported districts (14 of the 21 districts), while reported neonatal deaths fell by 7%. We asked the opinions of government partners at District and Provincial level and AIPMNH technical advisers (all Indonesian nationals) to identify what contributed to the effectiveness of AIPMNH.

Our assessment is based on framework of criteria developed from the principles of aid effectiveness, as set out in the Paris Declaration and its derivatives; recent DFAT policy statements on aid performance; and the program design and monitoring and evaluation framework (MEF). A self-administered questionnaire asked respondents to rank achievement and contribution to effectiveness for 26 criteria grouped into three elements; partnership, management, and technical quality on a score of 1 to 5.

We received 92 responses from district level program managers, 18 from provincial level managers, and 31 from AIPMNH technical advisors. Overall, respondents ranked partnership and management as making a higher contribution to effectiveness than technical quality, and this difference was more marked for the Government of Indonesia managers than for the technical advisors. Average assessments of each of the effectiveness elements for respondents grouped by location and affiliation, were significantly correlated with assessments of achievement, with partnership more strongly correlated by program advisors, and technical quality more strongly correlated by district government partners.

Current approaches to development effectiveness either focus on the high-level principles (mainly related to partnership and management), or on the technical aspects through the monitoring and evaluation perspective. However, the effectiveness of the AIPMNH program was seen as related to each of the three effectiveness elements, suggesting the program's approach of local ownership, local solutions, adaptation and learning contributed to its effectiveness.