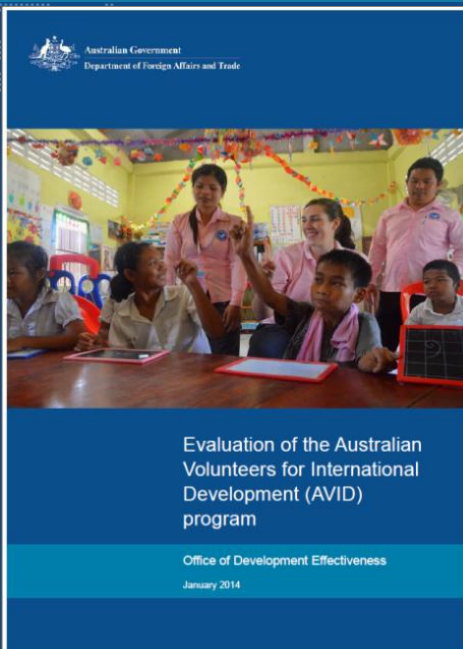**Australian Government**

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Office of Development Effectiveness

Evaluation of Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID)

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Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program

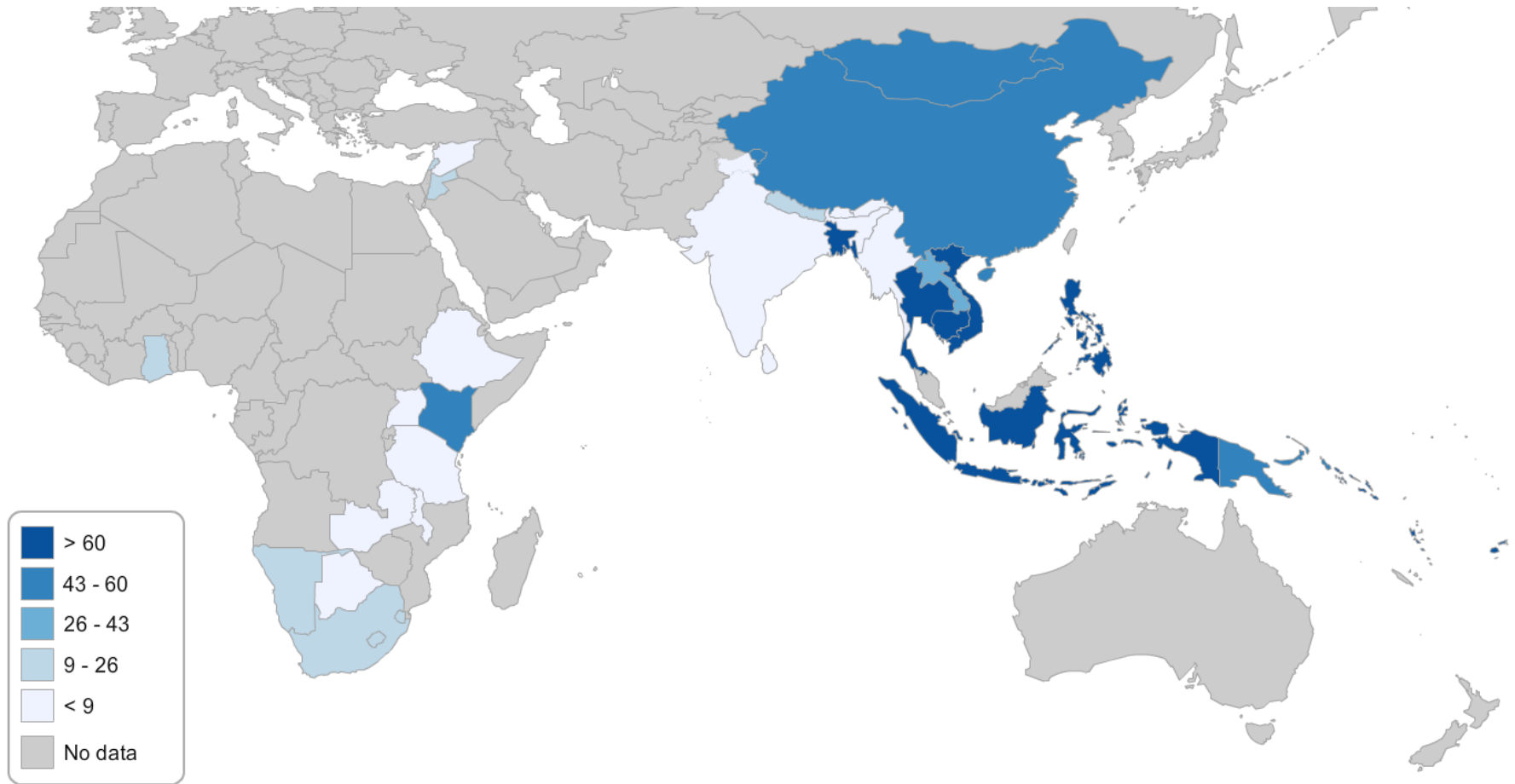Office of Development Effectiveness

January 2014

Background

- AVID launched May 2011

- About 1% of the Australian aid budget

- About 1,000 skilled Australian volunteers to 42 countries every year

- Global program Managed by DFAT Volunteers Section

- Delivered by
  - Austraining International (AI)
  - Australian Volunteers International (AVI)
  - Australian Red Cross (ARC)

Volunteer locations 2011/12

Legend:
- > 60
- 43 - 60
- 26 - 43
- 9 - 26
- < 9
- No data

Purpose of the evaluation

- To enhance the effectiveness of the AVID program and the contribution that volunteers make to development efforts

- Four lines of enquiry

  – alignment with aid program

  – policy and administration

  – performance management

  – impact

Program Logic (for the evaluation)

Long term outcomes

AVID outcomes progressively achieved

- **Development outcomes strengthened (Development effectiveness)**

- **Australia's international profile improved (Public diplomacy)**

- **Increased domestic support for aid program (Public diplomacy**

Host organisations make improved contributions to country's development

Volunteers contribute to advocacy for aid program in Australia (public diplomacy)

Intermediate outcomes

Host country impacts

- Host organisations have improved, sustainable capacity

- Positive attitudes towards Australia (Public diplomacy)

Volunteer impacts

- Personal and professional development

Immediate outcomes

Volunteer placements are effective

Appropriate volunteer placements and assignments established

Appropriate host organisations identified and prepared

Suitable volunteers recruited and prepared

AVID has suitable policy settings, partnership arrangements and administrative systems

Methods

- Literature review (54 references)

- Fieldwork in three key countries—Cambodia, Vietnam, Solomon Islands

  - 123 interviews with volunteers, host organisations, and other key stakeholders

  - 192 host organisations surveyed, response rate 49%

- Survey of returned volunteers 2006-11 (ORIMA research)

  - 3,565 volunteers surveyed, 38% response rate

- Media analysis

- Recruitment data analysis

- Consultation with Core Partners, DFAT Canberra and Posts

Findings – program design, policies and administration

- Substantial progress made towards governance arrangements (Shared Standards)

- No fully integrated single-program vision

- No single statement of program objectives and program logic

- Two brands (AVID and AYAD) creates confusion and does not support single-program, single-brand approach

Findings – alignment with aid program

- Around 63% of volunteer assignments aligned with DFAT country strategies

- Posts rarely involved in size and scope of volunteer operations

- Posts should be more involved in discussing volunteer numbers appropriate to their country strategies and integrate with other capacity development initiatives

Findings - profile of Australian volunteers

- Most commonly female (65%) aged 26–35 (58%) almost one in five (18%) aged 56 or over, only 7% aged 25 or under

- Returned volunteers satisfied (85%) thought it had a positive impact on their life (89%) and would recommend AVID to their family and friends

- Volunteers generally very satisfied with recruitment, pre-departure training and in-country orientation.

- Fewer satisfied with in-country support or their host organisation

  - Volunteers were least satisfied when placed in unprepared, inefficient or unmotivated host organisations

  - Volunteers were critical about lack of networking and access to development expertise

Findings – profile of Australian volunteers - host organisations view of volunteers

- More professional and greater expertise than volunteers from other countries

  flexible, adaptable, patient, proactive, open and enthusiastic

- Grass-roots capacity development

- Volunteers may *overestimate* their importance, but *underestimate* their impact on their host organisation

- Volunteer assignments rarely matched the work expected by host organisations

The volunteer counterpart model

- Can be effective but rare in practice (10% of assignments) and substantial risks

  - the volunteer's intended counterpart left

  - the host organisation did not recruit the intended counterpart

  - the counterpart benefited, but then left the organisation in pursuit of a better job

  - the counterpart was unmotivated once the 'more experienced' volunteer arrived

  - the counterpart was very busy and had limited time to work with the volunteer, leaving the volunteer under-utilised

- Assignment drift + uncertain counterpart = give the volunteer an assignment AND a role

Findings - for host organisations and communities

- Most (88%) host organisations were satisfied with their volunteer; two-thirds (65%) very satisfied

- Dissatisfaction related to the length of time it took for a volunteer to arrive, inability to nominate candidate and, lack of any long-term commitment to providing volunteers.

- Statistical analysis suggests satisfaction linked to

  - skilled volunteers who contribute immediate capacity and enhance the organisation's profile.

  - ability of the volunteer to complete tasks by working as part of a team to deliver programs and meet goals, while transferring skills to local staff and raising the profile of the organisation.

Findings - host organisation capacity development

- Delivering capacity? YES

- Delivery capacity that is sustained? PROBABLY

- Working to help host organisations develop their own capacity? OCCASIONALLY

- No evidence Core Partners were implementing three-year *Capacity Development Plans* as identified in the AVID Monitoring and Evaluation Shared Standard.

Findings - for public diplomacy

- Foreign public diplomacy requires volunteers are appreciated by host communities

- Transfer of knowledge and skills to individuals appears strong and is likely to have widespread benefits in host communities.

- A media analysis found no negative coverage of the AVID program in the Australian newsprint media since its launch.

- The AVID brand is not well recognised overseas

Australian Volunteers for International Development

Findings - for monitoring and evaluation

- There is no active performance monitoring system for AVID at either the program or implementation level

    - Monitoring activity is focused on volunteer welfare

    - Core Partners use different formats for reports varying levels of completeness and quality

- Evaluation at the program level has occurred regularly—2009 review AGVP, 2012 AYAD review, 2012 returned volunteers survey, this evaluation

- Evaluation at the implementation level focused on informing decisions about sending more volunteers to a host organisation—no evidence of evaluation for learning, only accountability

Conclusion

- Volunteers are making an effective contribution to Australian and partner government development objectives.

- AVID is an effective public diplomacy mechanism.

- Volunteers benefit from their experience and bring expertise and professionalism that is highly valued.

- Volunteers contribute to capacity development of host organisations, develop people-to-people links and generate goodwill.

Recommendations

1. DFAT should fully consolidate AVID into a single program

2. DFAT should explore options for greater administrative efficiencies in the program

3. DFAT Posts should become more involved with the volunteer program

4. DFAT and core partners should implement formal support networks for both volunteers and host organisations

5. DFAT should refocus the AVID program on developing the long-term capacity of host organisations

6. DFAT and core partners should seek expert advice and work together to market and promote the single AVID program

7. DFAT and core partners should develop and implement a simplified and effective performance-monitoring system for AVID