



ChildFund Australia
Independent Review Panel Feedback
Accountability Report 2023-24
Review Round February/March 2025



ChildFund Australia

Feedback from the Independent Review Panel

Review Round February/March 2025

April 8th 2025

Dear Margaret Sheehan,

Thank you for submitting your accountability report. We, the Independent Review Panel of Accountable Now, appreciate your efforts to strengthen accountability to communities, local partners, supporters, staff, donors, or other key constituencies. Our key focus is on accountability to those you serve. It is against this background that we critically discussed your report and actions, and came to the assessment below.

Throughout this report, ChildFund Australia demonstrates strong accountability through its commitment to transparency, responsible resource management, and locally led development. Notable strengths include impactful initiatives like the Partner Capacity Strengthening Project and the Swipe Safe online safety app, as well as collaborative approaches with partners in areas like GEDSI, MEL, and safeguarding. Moreover, the organisation shows a commitment to safe programming, demonstrated by its learning from reported incidents and grievances, and its work to strengthen safeguarding practices. Additionally, internal accountability is bolstered by the Reconciliation Plan and DEI Action Plan.

At the same time, the Panel were curious if learnings and outcomes from activities in one country were shared across regions and beyond, and therefore would welcome more clarification on this end. Another area where further information would have been appreciated is around how the organisation have communicated key strategic decisions to impacted stakeholders.

We look forward to discussing our feedback with you in a follow-up call, which the Secretariat will be in touch to schedule. This conversation will form the basis for your response letter, which will be made publicly available on the Accountable Now website along with your report and this feedback letter.

If you have any other feedback or comments on our work, please share them with us via the Accountable Now Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel





ChildFund Australia

Accountability Report 2023/24

Review Round Month February/March 2025

Opening Statement from the Head of Organisation

ChildFund Australia's CEO, Margaret Sheehan, highlights the organisation's commitment to transparency, responsible resource management, and positive systemic change for vulnerable children and young people. This year, efforts focused on locally led development, strengthening partner capacity, and implementing an updated Code of Conduct. Key achievements include the Partner Capacity Strengthening Project and the Swipe Safe online safety app.

She also highlighted the organization's challenges so far, especially in navigating socio-political complexities and maintaining program consistency. After 14 years in Laos, ChildFund Australia made the difficult decision to close its Country Office, though programs will continue through other structures. Looking ahead, the organization will develop a new Strategic Plan in consultation with stakeholders to ensure continued impact and accountability.

Core Responses (See [Guidelines and Grading](#))

1 What have been your most significant achievements and impacts this year and how has this been validated with your stakeholders?

The report shares data from evaluations of programs, noting that in 2023-24, ChildFund Australia's programs reached 864,829 individuals. While the organization's main stakeholders are children, it is also very positive to see that the organisation's impact also reaches parents, caregivers, and the wider community. Another positive impact is the effectiveness of ChildFund Australia's work to strengthen partners' capacity, which includes areas such as GEDSI, MEL, safeguarding and grant management. Positively, ChildFund Australia's efforts to embed co-creative partnership approaches have been acknowledged by their partners too.

The report mentioned that the evaluation for the Ready for Life Project (Laos) engaged stakeholders to validate its impact; is this a standalone practice, or do other project evaluations also take into account stakeholders' perspectives too?

In its flagship programs, ChildFund Australia's Swipe Safe App has received much recognition for its usability and effectiveness in educating children in



online and digital safety. ChildFund Australia's policy and advocacy work also saw positive achievement, with the Australian government committing to furthering its commitments on and offline safety and safeguarding measures for children and young people. It's great to see an impactful app that has been used, streamlined and taken up by young people in geographies.

PM

The response **partially met** the guideline, with **minor improvements** needed.

2

If applicable - How have your organisation's accountability processes been impacted by significant internal or external changes over the reporting period?

Internally, the organisation has been on a path of deepening its commitments to locally led development, shifting its collaborative approach alongside partners through a comprehensive review and co-design of mutual accountability tools. At the same time, ChildFund Australia also consolidated and strengthened its Child Safeguarding practice and merged its Codes of Conduct. The Panel would be interested in the key changes to these policies, and to learn more about how partners' feedback and influence have shaped the organisation's internal policy, if it has.

Externally, constraints on resources meant that ChildFund Australia had to make the difficult decision to close its Laos offices, although plans for a different modality of support in the country are said to still be in progress. On this end, we would be interested to learn more about how the organisation worked with its stakeholders to arrive at this decision and whether it provided staff and partners with clarity and support in its exit strategy.

The report furthermore outlines how socio-political contexts in various countries have impacted its work. In Papua New Guinea, rising costs of living and increased security risks resulted in delays to planned operations. Turmoil in Myanmar is said to continue to disrupt the organisation's work. Has there been developments in ways through which ChildFund Australia collaborated with other organisations or found ways to continue with operations in these countries? How has the organisation communicated or discussed delays to its stakeholders, partners, and the communities that it supports?

Moreover, in its [2023-2024 Accountability Core Report](#), ChildFund Australia mentioned that the organisation was at the beginning stages of transitioning out of the child-sponsorship model (with transitions already underway in Vietnam and Cambodia). As a follow-up, it would be good for ChildFund Australia to share whether it has fully transitioned, what were some of the learnings so far, and if plans have been modified.

PM

The response **partially met** the guideline, with **minor improvements** needed.



3

How has your organisation learned from reported incidents, complaints and grievances received in the past year? (These may include safeguarding, fraud, corruption, whistleblowing, integrity violations, etc.)

The response provides three examples of how the organisation has learned from incidents reported in the last year, which include reviews of risks and relocation of the office in Papua New Guinea, seeking legal support in handling employee terminations, and strengthening the child safeguarding approach and advocacy.

A table with a summary of the incidents recorded and their nature was also shared. Some questions or prompts that the IRP has for ChildFund Australia to internally reflect include: How was the retrenchment or termination process successfully concluded, and what were the outcomes and resolutions? How did feedback from stakeholders inform and shape the process? In challenging contexts such as Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste, what lessons have been learned regarding the receipt and handling of grievances and feedback?

FM

The response **fully met** the specific guideline.

4

Internally, how has your organisation practised a more dynamic approach to accountability?

The report highlights ChildFund Australia's [Reconciliation Plan](#), reflecting its commitment to self-examination, learning, and growth in the reconciliation process. The plan consists of 13 key actions alongside sub-deliverables that will enable the organisation to self-examine, reflect, and grow its understanding as well as actions relating to the on-going reconciliation process.

Alongside the Reconciliation Plan, a DEI Action Plan is also being implemented, with three sessions being delivered so far. From last year's [report](#), we understand that the Reconciliation Plan is a part of the DEI Plan, however in this report this is not too clear if the two have now been separated - further clarifications would be very helpful. Additionally, we understand that an email address has been set up since last year to receive feedback, we wonder if this has had any uptake, and if so, whether such feedback has shaped the way the DEI Committee works.

Beyond the two strands of work mentioned, were there any other feedback or inputs from staff and volunteers that the organisation received? How have they shaped, influenced, or transformed internal operations or change?

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to understand how staff in Country Offices (COs) are benefiting from or receiving similar support related to these initiatives. Additionally, what learning plans are in place at COs, and how are insights and



	lessons learned from COs informing approaches and decision-making at headquarters?
PM	The response partially met the guideline, with minor improvements needed.

5	How has your organisation worked towards being dynamically accountable to your external stakeholders (i.e. partners, communities, programme participants, etc)? It's great to see partners taking the lead in delivering quality programs across ChildFund Australia's focus countries. It would be valuable to explore how partner insights can influence the organization beyond programmatic collaboration—have any learnings from partners shaped operations at the headquarters level? The report references a Program Effectiveness Report—could this be shared for more transparency on progress? While positive developments are noted, additional details would provide greater clarity. For example, what have been the learnings from the "My Right to Education" project in Vietnam? From an accountability point of view, a rights-based approach to programme planning and implementation has great value. Hence, the IRP would be keen to know about ChildFund Australia's experience and gather more clarity through additional details. Examples from Papua New Guinea and Vietnam demonstrate responsiveness to feedback. Beyond this, are there instances where learnings from one country have informed program design or implementation in another? Additionally, does the organization have mechanisms in place to facilitate cross-country learning and adaptation?
PM	The response partially met the guideline, with minor improvements needed.

Key	Explanation
FM	The response fully met the specific guideline.
PM	The response partially met the guideline, with minor improvements needed.
PS	The response partially met the guideline and significant improvements are still needed.
NM	If the response has not met the specific guideline.