

EVALUATING THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT AREA IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Australian Volunteers

Introduction

The Global Program Strategy for the Australian Volunteers Program identifies human rights as one of its three thematic impact areas. This study evaluated how the program supports partner organisations to progress their development objectives, through the lens of human rights.

This evaluation is the second of three deep dives which explore thematic impact areas for the program. The evaluation focused on three countries in southern Africa (South Africa, Lesotho and eSwatini). Southern Africa was identified in the formative evaluation of this series as having a high proportion of partner organisations with a human rights focus.

Methodology

The evaluation used Contribution Analysis to identify causal links between the Australian Volunteers Program and outcomes achieved in human rights. Evidence from multiple sources about specific partner organisations and volunteer assignments were triangulated, drawing on interview responses from partner organisations, their beneficiaries and volunteers connected to the partner organisations.

Five data collection methods were used with different levels of engagement across the three countries including:

- an online quantitative and qualitative survey and Social Network Analysis completed by all partner organisations focusing on human rights, with a systems mapping of human rights in South Africa only
- key informant interviews with a sample of partner organisations, their beneficiaries and volunteers, and
- a document review on human rights in South Africa.

Data was sourced from five stakeholder groups (numbers of individuals in brackets):

1. Partner organisations from South Africa (19)
2. Beneficiaries of partner organisations (6)
3. Volunteers (8)
4. Australian Volunteer Program staff based in South Africa and regional offices (3)
5. DFAT South Africa Post (1)

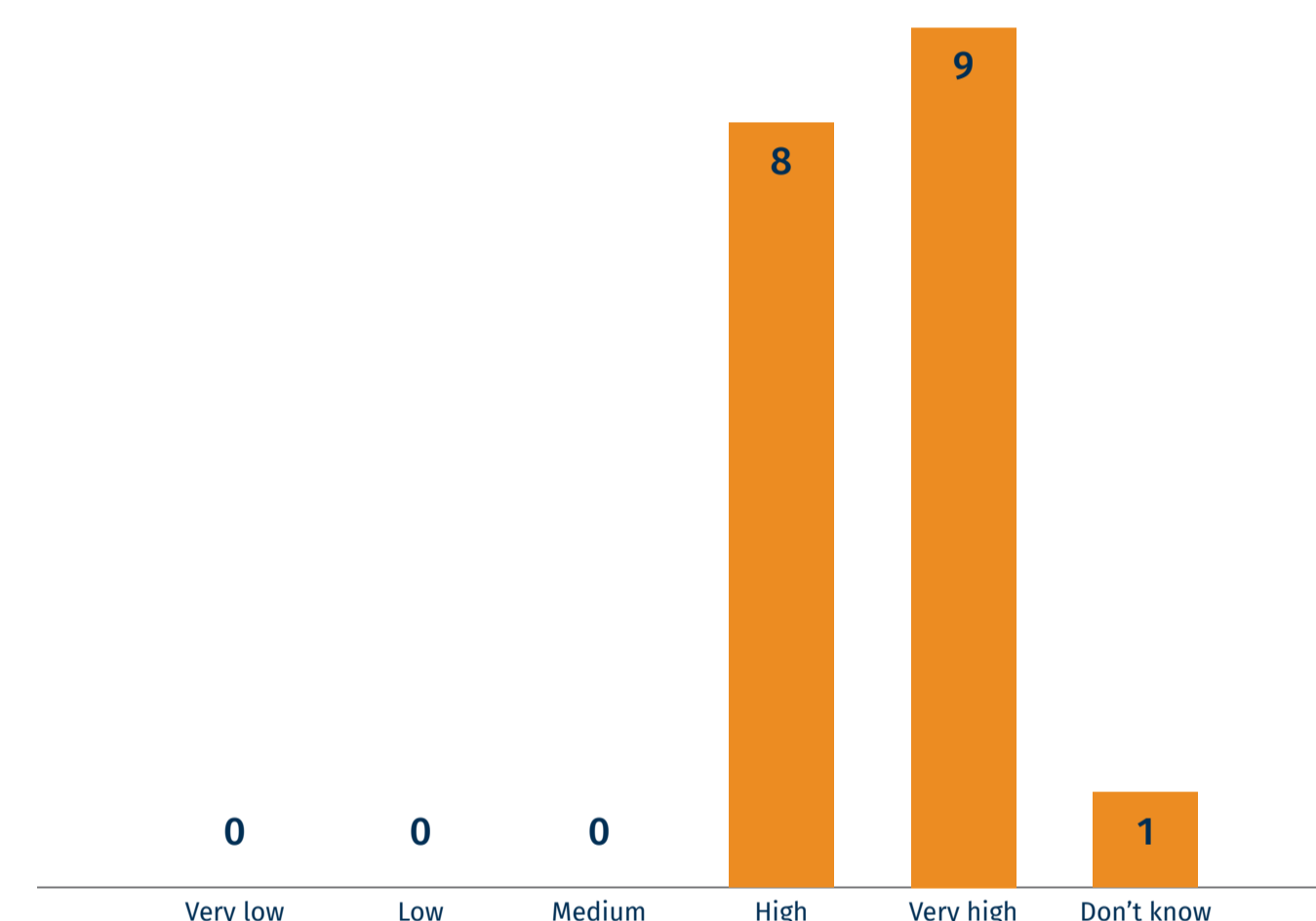
Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, data was collected online or by phone.

Key Findings

The evaluation found strong evidence that partner organisations in southern Africa progressed their development objectives in human rights. Two main pathways were taken. Partner organisations most commonly sought to progress realisation of human rights by increasing access to services for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. They also advocated on behalf of disadvantaged groups and influenced broader community attitudes towards advancing human rights.

With one exception, partner organisations agreed that the Australian Volunteers Program has made a strong contribution to progress achieved in human rights in southern Africa.

Partner organisations' assessment of the program's support



Partner organisations valued the personal attributes of volunteers. Many had strong personal relationships with past volunteers, some of which continue despite COVID-19 restrictions. Partner organisations valued volunteers who could fit in, did not have a superior attitude, and were passionate about change.

They don't come with this superior mentality, no. They are always down to earth and we do things together.

- Partner organisation representative

Partner organisations also valued the professional competency and work experience of the volunteers.

Yeah definitely we've done volunteering in different capacities. This is the first time we've had one where it's really a professional in a specific industry or with specific knowledge. And it's like I said it's just way more productive knowing that this person can juggle quite a lot of activities because they've got the experience.

- Partner organisation representative

Interviews identified cases of volunteers working with beneficiaries of partner organisations who demonstrated frontline skills to colleagues as well as cases where volunteers supported broader organisational change.

The evaluation found strong evidence of impacts in human rights for beneficiaries of partner organisations. Impacts were often described as life changing. Examples included cases where, with support from volunteers, partner organisations have improved care for children living with a disability by supporting parents. For example, a partner organisation supporting parents of children with cerebral palsy:

I didn't know what was wrong with my child. I didn't know how to position her, how to feed her, I only had problems with this. When [the partner organisation] took me in and taught me everything I now know. I know what to do. I know how to position my child. I know how to care for her, feed her.

- Beneficiary of a partner organisation

The evaluation found the program had a high level of efficiency, due in part to care taken to ensure volunteers have the right combination of personality, skill set and experience to fit with the focus on human rights. This also resulted in long lead times in recruitment which partner organisations found frustrating. Strong links with the Australian High Commission's Direct Aid Program have also contributed to program efficiency.

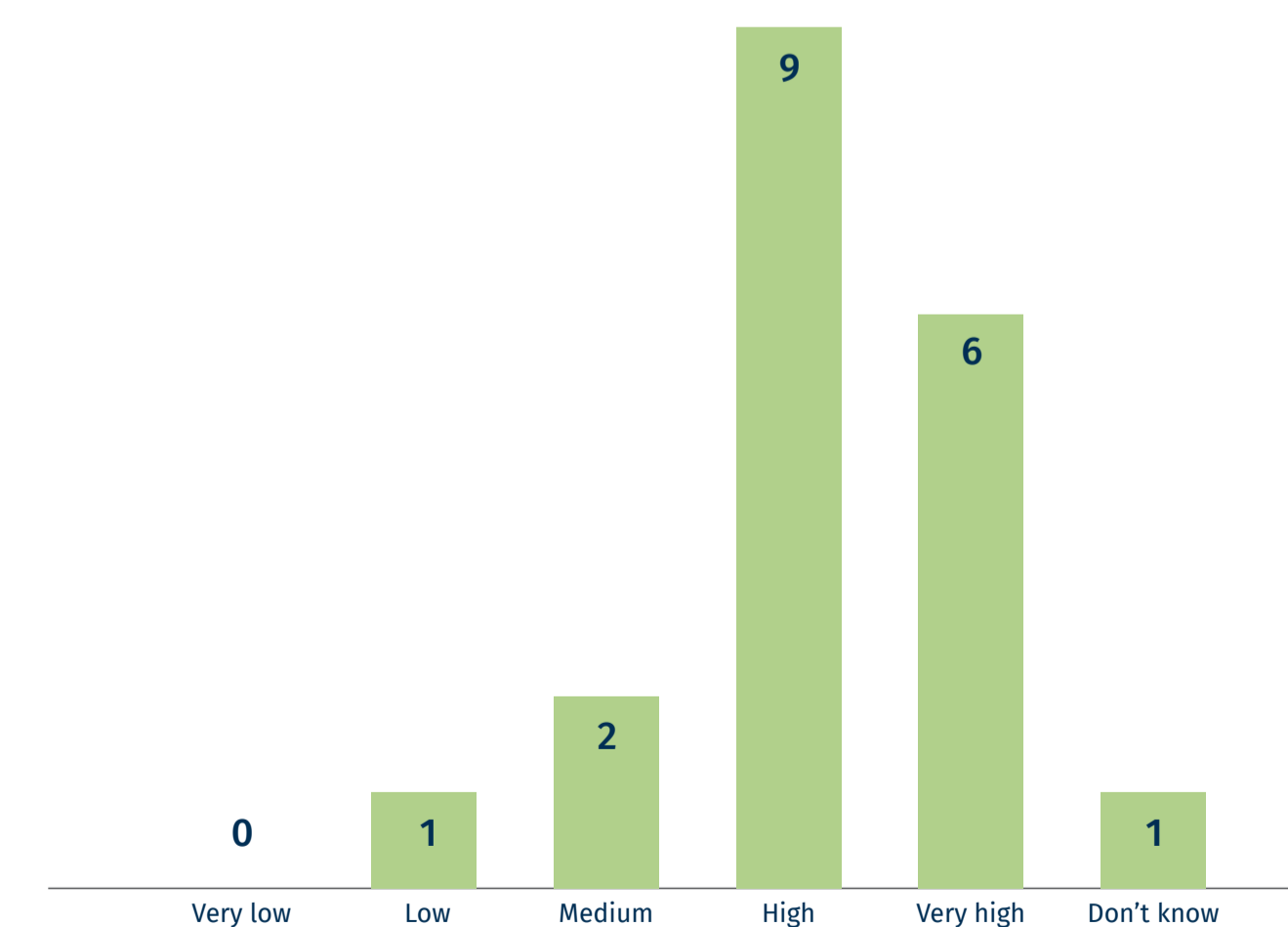
The strong support for volunteers from the local team also improved the efficiency of the program:

I think it's been outstanding and I would say that the local team...have been beyond co-operative, beyond helpful and I'm not just saying that because I'm hoping that [volunteer] gets another contract. I mean, I genuinely sincerely mean this.

- Partner organisation representative

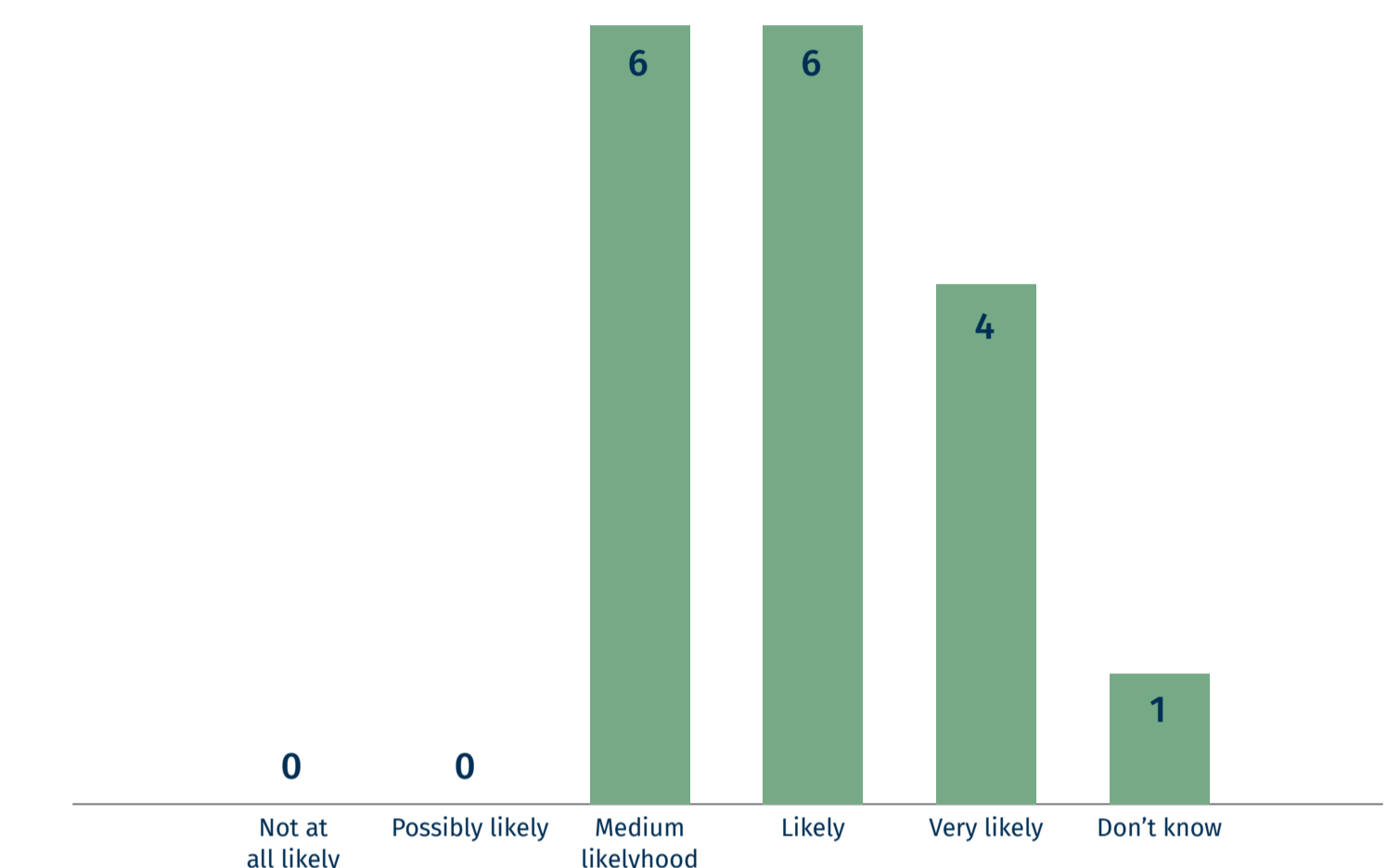
Most partner organisations felt that the Australian Volunteers Program helped strengthen their capacity to progress their development objectives.

Partner organisations' assessment of the program's suitability



To a large extent, the study indicated ongoing benefits in human rights attributable to the work of partner organisations and support from the Australian Volunteers Program. However, there are a few contextual factors which may compromise this.

Partner organisations' assessment of how likely it is changes will be sustained over time



Examples include the difficulty of sourcing the specific skills provided by volunteers since partner organisations do not have sufficient resources to employ skilled staff, and high staff turnover.

The difference in skill and capacity level, particularly in the fields of design, marketing and accounting [means that the skills possessed by volunteers] are quite difficult to source locally and we literally do not have the means to remunerate people of this calibre sufficiently.

- Partner organisation representative

Acknowledgements

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